

HOME | ART IN AMERICA | REVIEWS

## The Enfolding: Michelle Segre at 56 Henry

By *Louis Bury*

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Michelle Segre: *The Enfolding*, 2022, yarn, wire, acrylic polymer, acrylic inks, and cheesecloth, approx. 11 by 11 by 4 feet; at 56 Henry. Thomas Mueller/Courtesy 56 Henry And Derek Eller Gallery, New York

Michelle Segre's offbeat sculptures made from yarn and wire borrow from a range of artistic and cultural forms that coalesce in singular works. The eponymous centerpiece of her recent exhibition, "The Enfolding," is a large ovoid textile knit from black and blue yarns and finished with a lion's mane of fringe (all works 2022). In its center hangs an abstract painting done on cheesecloth, with a soiled yellow background and splotches of red and blue. The entirety is suspended via four loosely knit appendagelike forms pinioned to the gallery's walls and ceiling. Spanning more than 10 feet in height and length, the sculpture, in its materials and construction, conjures a plethora of associations—from dreamcatchers to psychedelia, black holes to starfish, Senga Nengudi to Isamu Noguchi—without resembling any one in too literal a fashion.

The show's title alludes to science fiction writer Octavia Butler's 2005 novel *Amnesty*, in which "Communities" of plantlike alien organisms "enfold" living human bodies in their midst: "Being enveloped by a Community," explains the book's narrator, "is like being held in a sort of ... comfortable strait jacket, if you can imagine such a thing." The passage suggests how viewers might experience *The Enfolding* and, especially, the caught-in-a-spider's-web tangles of the exhibition's two small freestanding sculptures, *Social Space* and another untitled. The former features a paper wasp nest hanging amid a cat's cradle constellation of midnight-blue yarn, while the latter contains snarls of metal, wire, and thread, as well as natural and synthetic objects (beeswax, a reishi mushroom, clothespins), dangling within the hollow of an arched support.

Yet the composition of *The Enfolding* doesn't convey as strong a sense of envelopment as the smaller sculptures. The tautness of its stretched appendages may evoke the straitjacketed sensation *Amnesty's* narrator describes, but the colorful painting at its center suggests a cosmic portal more than the lumpy, cocooned forms suspended within the others. Far from a shortcoming, this minor disconnect between artwork and idea typifies Segre's loosey-goosey approach to conceptualization across her oeuvre. The idea of enfolding functions here as a jumping-off point for artistic creation rather than a schematic for audience interpretation. This open-ended quality of Segre's practice bestows a titillating sense of permissiveness to the viewer's experience. Meaning feels up for grabs, ambiguous, a surprise that's almost, but not quite, within reach.



Michelle Segre: *Conductor*, 2022, metal, wires, yarn, concrete, beeswax, thread, acrylic, polymer, reishi mushroom, 35 by 28 by 9 inches.

Thomas Mueller/Courtesy 56 Henry And Derek Eller Gallery, New York

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One such surprise awaits in the adjoining back gallery space, which contains a sepia photograph of an owl, *Boswell* (1969), taken by 19th-century businessman Morgan Bulkeley III, along with a hallucinatory 15-minute video, *The Owl*. The video features long takes of an owl perched on a tree branch, as well as spiraling drone footage of two people holding one of Segre's yarn sculptures in a forest clearing, tilting it toward the sky as though performing an occult ritual. Throughout, the bright, impressionistic color schemes shift and change as though a restless teenager were fiddling with her phone's camera filters. The work's

materialist sensibility—with visual effects akin to those of Stan Brakhage’s colorist film experiments—shows Segre applying her eccentric formalism to the medium in ways both familiar and novel. The beguiling result makes plain the joy of sitting back and letting the artist’s poetic flights take you wherever they’re going.



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