

AROUND THE GALLERIES

Aldrich is such a natural at fakery

By LEAH OLLMANN
Special to *The Times*

The humor in Lynn Aldrich's new work is real. All else is fake — or, at least, not what it pretends to be. Plastic tubing mimics the spray of water. Fabric swatches conjure animal pelts. And in the most magnificent, playful, tragicomic work in her deeply amusing show at Carl Berg, kitchen sponges and scrubbers of all sorts stand in for the teeming aquatic life of a coral reef.

Aldrich calls the exhibition "All Nature Sings," borrowing a snippet from a Protestant hymn celebrating creation: "This is my Father's world, and to my listening ears all nature sings, and round me rings the music of the spheres." As in the hymn, Aldrich praises the bounty and ingenuity of creation but she couches her earnestness in clever parody. Real concerns masquerade as synthetic follies.

How to sustain a relationship with the authentic — how, for starters, to even recognize it — from within a culture that favors artifice, idealized strength and beauty, external appearances over inner truths?

Aldrich tickles rather than tackles this question in her work, a consumerist spin on



Carl Berg Gallery

LYNN ALDRICH: Cleaning ware is fashioned into a reef in "Starting Over: Neo-Atlantis."

plungers) as the raw materials of her art. It's canny work, eliciting immediate smiles and lasting, poignant sighs.

For "Starting Over: Neo-Atlantis," the remarkable coral reef piece, Aldrich constructs an aquatic wonderland, nearly 8 feet across, out of cleaning supplies. Brightly colored plastic handles protrude perkily from a surface barnacled in musty green and gleaming blue scouring pads. The mint green fingers of rubber gloves poke upward and the floppy green strands of a mop droop downward like the tendrils of sea anemones. Fat rectangular scrubbers are joined together to form a sea star. Two-toned

brushes, sponges and scrubbers rivals the brilliancy of underwater life. Credit Aldrich with assigning an alternate use for cleaning tools whose sprightly colors (lime, silver, copper, hot pink, lavender, magenta, lemon and more) defy the drudgery with which they're usually associated.

The artifice is overwhelming, verging on garish, yet the whole is perversely beautiful, a resourceful, synthetic substitute for the real thing. But what about the real thing? We've paved paradise, and Aldrich's surrogate offers an outrageous, satiric, hyperbolic reminder of what our physical and psychic landscapes have come to as a

in and as her work for several years. She's been especially prolific with the common garden hose. "Drench," her hose construction here, is delightfully concise yet rich in association. "Drench" hangs on the wall like a painting, specifically an abstract stripe painting, only the vertical ribbons of color are not pigment on canvas but densely aligned 2-foot lengths of hose in an array of blues and greens.

Some of the hoses are capped in copper, some have webbed reinforcement beneath their luminous skins, and some are tinted plastic tubes slimmer than the garden variety. Their literal identity remains

they carry, as well as accepting them as pure color and line.

The only work that doesn't succeed in extracting this kind of fertile multiplicity from ordinary objects is "Designer's Choice: The Naming of the Animals." Created over the last 10 years, "Designer's Choice" spreads across the gallery floor like a mosaic rug. Each foam square bears a fabric swatch imitating an animal pelt or amphibian skin, sometimes in shimmery metallic or wildly synthetic colors. The work gives a nod to Carl Andre's floor pieces (just as "Drench" pays witty homage to Minimalist painting), but it lies flat and conceptually stays flat.

toon-like *pow*. They resonate powerfully — and whimsically — with both natural and unnatural worlds, the domestic sphere and global trauma. Literally and figuratively, they clean up.

Carl Berg Gallery, 6018 Wilshire Blvd., L.A., (323) 931-6060, through Feb. 2. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.carlberggallery.com