

"Signifying Form"

THE LANDING 5118 W Jefferson Blvd April 1–
June 3

Any cursory interpretations of the deeply sophisticated sculptures in this exhibition (curated by Jill Moniz—formerly of the California African American Museum), which hail from as far back as the 1930s and were made by black women from and/or working in Los Angeles, would be an egregious error. The show addresses race and feminism in America by correcting the repression of the former by the latter, and stakes a claim for recognition of these artists in the art-historical canon. Many of these works have never been formally shown in LA; only one of the artists, [Beulah Woodard](#), has ever had a solo exhibition at a major institution in the city.



View of "Signifying Form," 2017.

[Alison Saar](#)'s *Cakewalk*, 1997, is a life-size marionette, body parts carved from solid oak with old door hinges for joints, hanging from the ceiling by her hair. Visitors are encouraged to pull her strings. In contrast, one must crouch to see [Betye Saar](#)'s cages, including *Cage (In the Beginning)*, 2006, wherein captives, such as one in a grass skirt and chains, idle inside a precarious structure of twigs stacked like Lincoln logs. In a red Victorian birdcage, *Crimson Captive*, 2011, a woman's dress form draped in chains evokes [Maya Angelou](#)'s *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), even before one notices the crow perched on its neck stump.

Cotton spills out of the mouth of a blue-black ceramic head turned askew in

[Alison Saar](#)'s *Cotton Eater (head)*, 2013, and a massive wooden X has "MALCOLM" spelled upon it for [Brenna Youngblood](#)'s sculpture *X*, 2011. Nailed to the wall just beside it is [Senga Nengudi](#)'s *RSVP*, 1978, and *RSVP Reverie Pink*, 2011, which feature, respectively, female and male reproductive organs made of knotted, sand-filled pantyhose—red for the fallopian tubes, pink for the scrotum—both fighting gravity under extreme tension.

— [Natasha Young](#)