

David Barnett: Sacred Creatures

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By [Melissa Stern](#)

Viewing the deliciously obsessive art of David Barnett, one is drawn into his world of twisted Victoriana and mechanical madness. The exhibition at Denise Bibro Gallery is a combination of collage, found objects and extraordinary mechanisms fabricated by the artist. It is a complex show, and not everything works, but the pieces that do are knockouts.



"Sacred Creatures," by David Barnett.

Barnett has titled his exhibition Sacred Creatures after pieces early in the series that combine religious iconography with the imagery of flying insects. The exhibition quickly veers into other territory exploring family, history, flying machines and mechanical toys.

Exquisitely crafted, the sculptures are a delight. Tiny gears and minutely crafted mechanical apparatus turn the piece "Alb 09" into a marvel of engineering and design. An elongated mechanical flying machine, a sort of primitive helicopter, is constructed of delicate struts made of copper and brass. The front, like the prow of a ship, is a huge Victorian baby head collaged in old newspaper.

All of the sculptures are robust in design and execution. "Tin Man," "Sir Oswald" and "Family Tree" are simply marvelous. Some of the pieces actually work via small motors that drive the Ferris wheel of "Family Tree" around in an awkward motion. Others imply the notion of work but are in fact static.

The collage pieces, of which there are many, are a bit problematic. Though elegant and perfectly executed, some of them lack the emotional punch of the three-dimensional works. The artist is so agile with the collage format that one can see how it is easy to slip into some more obvious visual solutions. Bugs, watch faces and angels, the stock imagery of Victoriana get a little overexposed. Nonetheless, some of the collages transcend the cloak of Victoriana and marry this nostalgic sensibility with the more contemporary. "Oscar," a portrait in collage of the artist's dog, is both tender and funny. It takes the craft of collage to a new and interesting place.

Through June 5. [Denise Bibro Gallery](#), 529 W. 20th St., Ste. 4W, 212-647-7030.