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What to see in L.A. galleries: John Altoon, Maria Lassnig, a funky fairy tale and stenciled magic



Film still from Marnie Weber's "The Day of Forevermore." (Gavlak)

The centerpiece of Marnie Weber's mixed media installation at Gavlak in Los Angeles is a feature film written by, directed by and starring Weber, who also built the sets, designed the costumes, did the makeup and gave birth to the heroine of the funky fairy tale. Weber's teenage daughter, Colette Weber Shaw, plays Crimson Luna, a teenage witch who yearns to escape the suffocating grip of her overbearing mother, Baba Muthra, played by Weber.

Both are fantastic, each in her own way. And so is “The Day of Forevermore,” whose haunting tone, drifting pace and dreamy atmosphere combine elements of “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” “The Wizard of Oz,” “Donnie Darko,” “Little Red Riding Hood” and “The Nightmare Before Christmas.”

Into the felicitous mix of influences, Weber stirs Mardi Gras, the Brothers Grimm, Maurice Sendak and Ken Kesey. Her eye for endearing weirdness whips such diverse sources into a coming-of-age tale that ricochets between mother and daughter, comedy and tragedy, fantasy and reality. Plan to spend 90 minutes at the exhibition. The seats are comfortable, and Weber’s film builds with each minute, no matter when you start watching.

Her wonderfully original work is a bittersweet love poem to the pains of growing up and leaving home. It’s also a metaphor for letting go and moving on. It bears compelling witness to the quiet suffering that accompanies the powerlessness of adulthood — especially when things don’t go as planned, regret rears its ugly head and fate’s twists and turns involve children.

A sense of impending doom suffuses each scene. But it’s tempered by the kindness of strange creatures — comical monsters that neither speak nor reveal their identities or purposes. Weber is an expert storyteller. Her *métier* is suggestiveness. She lets colors, textures, space and time weave a spell of poetic power.

Before you get to the darkened gallery in which the film plays, you walk through an enchanted forest of an exhibition. Titled “Chapel of the Moon,” it includes Halloween-style totem poles, gigantic wind chimes, a tumbling waterfall, a couple of realistic but impossible to believe mannequins and a series of collages, some huge, others intimate.

Weber’s collages steal this part of the show. Like her film, they take a step back from reality to give riveting form to its psychological undercurrents.