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ART REVIEW: Romance, humor forecast for cloudscape

By Josef Woodard, NEWS-PRESS CORRESPONDENT

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Nothing much happens in "Overcast," Emilie Halpern's dreamy little slip of a show at Contemporary Arts Forum. Or so it seems, on first impression.

In one corner, clouds appear, and change ever so slowly, gradually. Lightning imagery falls from above and makes a frozen zapping gesture, and a punning pendant in a video piece blows a soft kitschy wind into the interlocking parts of the exhibition.

Of course, contemporary art watchers by now know to beware of deceptive simplicity and be prepared to connect dots when it comes to modern conceptual art, especially when minimalism is being given a make-over, as it is here. Halpern is up to something grander than the sum of the lean parts, involving the powers of suggestion, of natural awe, and also of romantic iconography.

Halpern is a Silverlake-based artist chosen for the current entry in CAF's "Bloom Projects" series, focusing on emerging artists with fresh ideas and a promising future. In her case, Halpern's fresh approach begins with the oddity of her materials, at once funky and techno - the better to poeticize.

"Overcast," the title piece of the show, involves two large sky blue panels, consuming most of two walls in the gallery's corner space, and its material list sounds like a science project: thermochromic paper on sintra panels, electric blanket parts and timer. Catch the piece at the right time, once every half hour, and the wispy cloud formation will move and morph, triggered by the wave of energy beneath the surface.

But this art is not about techno-geek tactics. Halpern hides the gizmo factor beneath a



Silverlake-based artist Emilie Halpern's art stays rooted in minimalist ideas in the small show "Overcast," now showing at the Contemporary Arts Forum.

lovely, lyrical surface.

Meanwhile, "Lightning" (thermoplastic and aluminum wire) is suspended, a tad dauntingly, from the ceiling by the gallery's front door. Two gangly lightning bolts, like wintry tree limbs, descend toward those entering the space, and veer toward each other, as if energized by an electrical field and magnetic attraction. Once again, the romantic subplot slips into the art's story.

In case we didn't get the romantic underpinning in the art, Halpern's video piece "OVYU," in the glassbox space outside brings it all home, with a wink. Dry humor meets minimalism meets sentimental kitsch in the piece, a close-up long take of a woman twirling a pendant which, when in motion, turns seemingly random letters into the immortal phrase "I LOVE YOU." It's a blithe companion piece to her nature-tapping, breezily symbolic ventures inside the gallery.

Halpern's art gets to a quality of sweet nothingness, the lazy drifting aesthetics of which can be all the more appreciated in contrast to the loud and fast nature of much contemporary culture. This art takes its time and happily keeps its head in the clouds.

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EMILIE HALPERN, "OVERCAST"

When: through April 15

Where: Contemporary Arts Forum, 630 Paseo Nuevo

Hours: 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday; noon to 5 p.m. Sunday

Information: 966-5373

JOSEF WOODARD PHOTO