

Art in America

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SEATTLE

Lauren Grossman at Esther Claypool

Lauren Grossman's earliest works were figurative sculptures in glazed and enameled ceramic. During her gradual reconfiguration of Old and New Testament iconography over a decade, the artist has created tall statues of the Virgin Mary, Eve, St. Elizabeth, Mary Magdalene and others. In this recent exhibition, Grossman presented religious subject matter in full-length bodies, torsos and other parts, along with the introduction of cast iron, cast glass and rubber. The references to Christian legends and mythology are still present, but knowledge of specific tales is not necessary to appreciate these materially compelling works.

Among the experimental-looking works are two using propane-gas flames, *Scapegoat Variations* (2002) and *The Pentecost* (2001). The latter physically represents the tongues of flame connected with the Pentecost (the appearance of the Holy Spirit 30 days after Christ's crucifixion). Grossman embeds 10 small gas jets in cool green glass cast in a tongue shape. The effect is a weird



Lauren Grossman: *Acts: Prosthetic*, 2002, rubber, iron, 10 by 14 by 19 inches; at Esther Claypool.

blend of 19th-century science and late-20th-century craft.

The "Acts" series, drawing upon verses in the Bible's Book of Acts, uses the tongue image even more successfully; here the form is made of cast iron overlaid by a see-through pattern of letters. *Acts: Verso* and *Acts: Fragment* (both 2002) jut from the wall; the rusty tongues, which incorporate scriptural passages, operate as a symbol of both human and divine speech.

The ancient look of the rusty metal is complemented in *Acts: Prosthetic* (2002) by pink cast rubber that uncannily resembles a real tongue. Physically expressed speech is explicitly implied in this work. The "Acts" series consists of powerfully realized sculptures that refer both to the constructed nature of Judeo-Christian myth and to its enduring impact.

—Matthew Kangas