

KATHRYN
MARKEL

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Marilla Palmer

Kathryn Markel Fine Arts

Decked out in glitter and shiny synthetic fabrics, nature's drab detritus boasted some delicate disguises in Marilla Palmer's endearing exhibition "Nature Burlesque." Her sculptures and works on paper sparkled literally and figuratively, setting up sympathetic echoes between ephemeral materials and the objects they represent.

In the show's largest piece, also called *Nature Burlesque* (2011), a matching pair of hybrid branches is drawn on several glued-together sheets of wrinkled white paper. One branch is painted with gray and brown watercolor and out-



Marilla Palmer, *Fern and Velvet*, 2011,
mixed media on paper, 22" x 18". Kathryn Markel Fine Arts.

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lined in black ink, while its twin features pink and orange coloring embellished with glitter. Dead autumn leaves are collaged over a fan-shaped area on one side, mirrored by tinted transparent-plastic disks on the other. More delicate branches below culminate in carefully embroidered thread twigs.

Similar materials adorned the more substantial chunks of dead wood incorporated into several amusing small sculptures. *Wormhole Couture* (2011), for example, is a brown branch encased in synthetic silver fabric. Strategically placed holes allow its true appearance to shine through its incongruous attire. Festooned with a mobile of little plastic disks suspended from very thin wire, the branch in *Dress for Success* (2011) is more scantily clad, in a scrap of pink-and-orange cloth wrapped around its base like panties. And *Sheath* (2012), a thin piece of birch dressed in transparent white fabric covered with more plastic disks, appears ready to dance in a '60s discotheque.

Palmer's once vibrant leaves and branches are now pressed, preserved, and dead. By attempting to revive them with artificiality and miniature masquerade, she sets up a dichotomy between bare nature and finicky decoration that is both charming and pathos-filled.

—*Elisabeth Kley*