

Allegorical Assemblages

by Lori Zimmer

Kris Kuksi

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Joshua Liner Gallery

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The latest collection of Kris Kuksi's epic mixed-media assemblages have opened at Chelsea's Joshua Liner Gallery. Fusing his signature style of Neo-Baroque with space-age futurism, the pieces in Triumph challenge ideologies of religion, mythology, extravagance and worship. For this exhibition, Kuksi has moved beyond his fantastical and elaborate sculptures, bringing photo-realistic painting and large-scale installation into his kingdom.



Kris Kuksi, Hercules vs. Diana, 2011, Mixed media assemblage, 28 x 26 x 10 in.; Courtesy of the artist & Joshua Liner Gallery

Ranging from concisely small to overwhelmingly larger-than-life, each piece in Triumph could occupy the viewer for virtually hours. From top to tip, a mass of intricate figures, animals, architectural elements and fantastical creatures conjure narrative atop narrative that could keep the mind busy endlessly. Colored in neutral beiges and grays, the sculptures take on an historical feel, bringing Kuksi's pieces into the realm of the rich tradition of marble sculpture, relating back to the works depicting gods and goddesses in ancient Greece or Rome.

Like the Romans and Greeks, Kuksi's figures are cast in allegorical scenes. Triumph herself stands proudly on the arched back of a crocodile with staff in hand. Around and below her gartered legs stand an army of skeletons, heroes and saints of all proportions, twisting and turning within and around each other, as if scrambling to stand tall alongside the giant figure of Triumph.

Mythical characters continue in Capricorn Rising, with the astrological ram mounted across a plane that is part zodiac wheel, part Death Star. Encircled with warriors, orbs, flags, weaponry and guarded by a skull, the piece visually fuses the notions of astronomy and astrology, placing the ram in the Greek circle of animals, but also on a seemingly futuristic space station.

The weighty allegorical feel of each of Kuksi's pieces is surprisingly comprised from the extremely mundane. The components of each sculpture, which appear to be made from pristine materials, are actually simply kitsch. Kuksi trolls Ebay and vintage sales buying up pre-fabricated plastic figurines, toy guns, medical models, mannequins and the like. The intense and meticulous tableaux that become each singular piece are not designed in a computer, but rather in the artist's own mind. Once the massive undertaking of collecting the tiny pieces is completed, they are arranged and secured into place, making up heavenly and hellish Boschian scenes -- then painted in continuous neutrals. The irony of Kuksi's usage of mass-produced materials to make such striking and complicated sculptures only helps the artist convey mystique and narrative with each detail.

The lone painting in the show, a portrait of fellow artist Ewelina Ferruso, continues Kuksi's obsession with detail and pattern, but is warmed with soft color and tone. Scrolls of Renaissance and Byzantine line bleed through carefully shaded cheeks,



Kris Kuksi, Capricorn Rising, Mixed media assemblage, 80 x 72 x 22;
Courtesy of the artist

calling to mind ancient mosaic, or tarnished pressed tin.

Completing the installation is Kuksi's tenth installment of his Churchtank series. Occupying the entire length of Liner's second antechamber of the gallery space, the rising steeple almost brushes the ceiling. The cathedral of Churchtank Type 11 sits atop a six-wheeled military tank. The tank's barrel barges through the church's two front doors, confronting the viewer square in the eye (and forcing them to look down the barrel of a church). A blatant confrontation of the power of organized religion versus military imperialism, the installation is also replicated in a smaller bronze casting, which comes in an edition of ten.

Once again, Kris Kuksi wows and delights by transforming plastic tchotchkes into richly detailed sculptures that not only evoke mythical narrative, but also betray the paltry origins of their materials.

—Lori Zimmer

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