

Armature, Cathedrals, and Controlled Chaos

by Allison Geller



Revival

Kris Kuksi

Joshua Liner Gallery

540 West 28th Street, New York, NY 10001

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If military and religious history came together and exploded in fanciful pieces of art, Kris Kuksi's sculptures could well be the result. In *Revival* his latest solo show at Joshua Liner Gallery, nine sculptures from this year come to life.

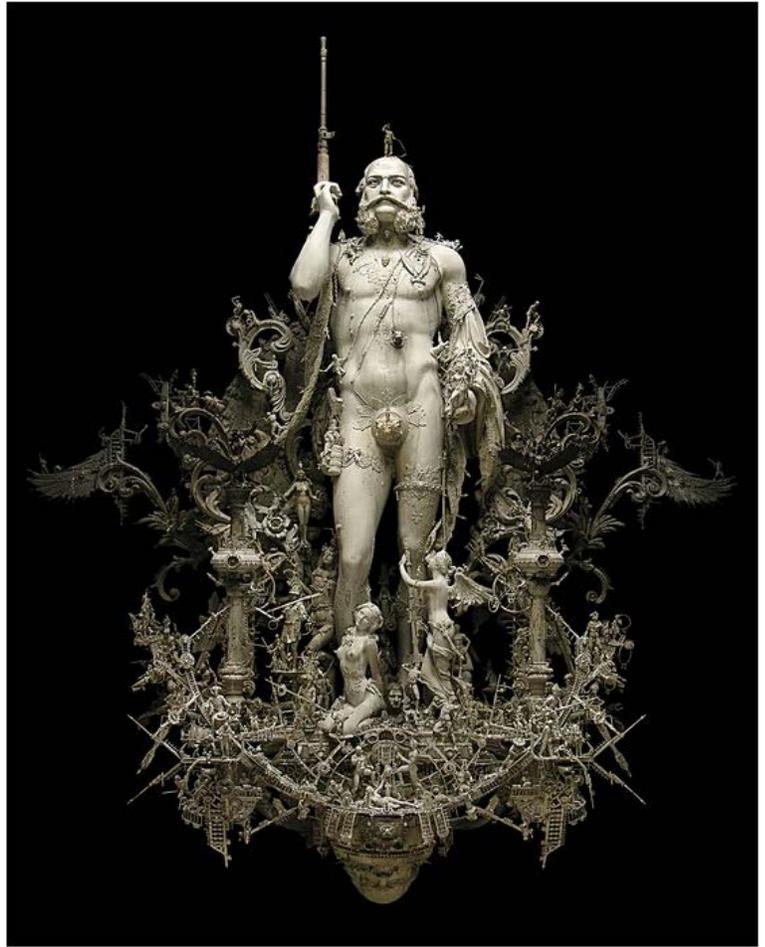
While Kuksi also works in pain, charcoal, and graphite, it's his surreal sculptures that have made his name. Kuksi has been creating mixed-media assemblages in the *Revival* vein since 2006, using toys, pieces from modeling kits, and other found objects. One central figure, usually a deity, dominates the scene. Cherubs, skulls, Western and Eastern deities, benevolent kings, knights, mohawked natives, birds, cows, dogs, pigs, and horses surround it, all extras on the set of Kuksi's controlled chaos.

Pictures do not do these works justice. To really experience them in their multi-dimensionality, you have to see them. The works are bold, physical, and incredibly intricate. The layering of details is obsessive, and impactful. In one small corner of *Compromising Enlightenment* (2013) a figure in ice skates preens on top of a column with a skull in the middle of it. Before her a ballerina in pointe shoes swoops down with a knife in one hand and a saber in the other, while a suited, smiling man stands on her shoulders holding a staff, and a still tinier man, with an upside-down cross instead of a face, leans oratorically down from his crown. Casting chandelier-like shadows onto the walls, Kuksi's sculptures come across as spiky baroque centerpieces from a few feet away, the scaffolding of ship prows delicate as lace. On closer inspection, the action is overwhelming.

Kuksi's sculptures begin as scrupulously balanced, simple, geometric compositions, which are then overpopulated, layer by layer, to create a kind of beautiful mess. The foundation layer is generally left in its metallic rawness, while the visually and physically foregrounded bits are painted a streaky white, gold, or frosty blue. It's hard to put a name to many of the objects found in these sculptures, short of saying that they're serious-brassy wheels, metal spokes, and guns, guns, guns. "Armature" is the mot juste here, since all Kuksi's characters seem to be packing heat.



Kris Kuksi, Churchtank Type 13 (Retired), 2013, Mixed media assemblage, 35 x 15 x 37 inches; Courtesy of the artist and Joshua Liner Gallery.



Kris Kuksi, Der Uberschensch of the Post-Post World Calamity Variety, 2013, Mixed media assemblage, 54 x 48 x 16 inches; Courtesy of the artist and Joshua Liner Gallery.

the title down to the details. The sculpture's central figure is a towering Goliath with impressive facial hair. He has a rifle posed military-style against his shoulder, and is draped in a lacy shawl, with garters around his thighs to boot. A man on skis takes a break on his bald head, while an angel between his feet points a gun straight up at his crotch. In all their effusions, any attempt to decode all the elements of a Kuksi sculpture would only be a joke on the viewer.

The work that offers the most direct commentary on religion's inextricable relationship to violence is Churchtank (2013). Situated on the floor of the gallery, a church sits on top of a tank. Crouching down and peering inside, the viewer is met with a dollhouse interior, but instead of tiny furniture, there's military equipment. A miniature rifle rests upright against a ladder, a canteen hangs from a pole, and a tiny wine bottle sits on the floor, dwarfed by a pair of disproportionate combat boots. Like a dollhouse, there is something playful and touchable about the structure and the objects inside, despite the faint blood splatters on the church/tank.

In the end, Kuksi's works are compelling because of their sensory appeal, which belies any single interpretation of the work's message. While there's aggression, there's also a good amount of care in the artist's painstaking organization of violence into something lavish and sculptural. While the titles and subject matter of these works are suggestive, the emphasis on the ornament designates them as art serving principally as art, and not mercenary to any political agenda.

—Allison Geller

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