

Julia Kunin
“Mechanical Ballet”
Through March 4, 2021
Kate Werble Gallery

Julia Kunin’s *Mechanical Ballet*, her first solo show with this gallery, consists of 9 sculptures that are made of clay, glazed with an iridescent finish that creates a sense of infinite mirroring and multiple reflections.

Kunin has maintained a rigorous studio practice in NYC since the late 1980’s. She makes arresting sculptures using a visual language based on the poetics of the surreal, combining forms of the body, the machine and architecture. Her larger works operate as totemic figures, composed of stacks of symbols that use imagery from once utopian structures.

Kunin spoke a bit about several works included in this exhibition. Excerpts from the conversation are included below:

Tell me a bit about the sculpture *Green Colossus*?

Colossus was made by using scratched and worn scraps of slabs saved from previous work. I loved the way the clay fragments were covered in drips, and had a chunky feel to them and I was able to work quickly, without caring about the outcome, because I was using rejected pieces of clay. I attached the scraps to a clay box form I had made, and began to build a portrait. Wanting it to be more dimensional, I cut two holes for eyes in the box, and then attached two concave semi- spheres. The image became spectral and skull-like. Dripping liquid clay on the surface was a way of making numerous shiny puddles and layers around the portrait. Above all it was incredibly satisfying to see the buildup of texture, knowing that the puddles would be as reflective as mirrors.

***Vasarely Eyes* seems like a literal reference to a painting by Vasarely, how did you come to make this work?**

Since 2009, I make an annual pilgrimage to the Vasarely museum in Pecs, Hungary. It wasn’t until 2013, however, that his imagery began to make its way into my work. “*Vasarely Eyes*” incorporates some of Vasarely’s optical illusion of the circle in the square, or sphere inside of a cube - a perfect fit. The incised clay arabesques and obsessively repetitive curvy lines pay homage to the nature inspired patterns seen in Art Nouveau vases. This psychedelic imagery goes back to the turn of the century (19th -20th), enhanced by the ever-changing color of the glaze.

What is your reference for the sculpture *Amerigo Tot*?

Viktor Komarov was a cosmonaut who was on the 1967 Soyuz spaceflight. Upon landing, Komarov's parachute did not open. Each day I passed by Amerigo Tot's memorial to Komarov, made in 1979. I was drawn to the spacecraft like form with its concentric barrels and bold heavy shapes. Much of Tot's imagery made its way into my work as I became more interested in combining the body, the machine, and some elements of Art Deco. Tot's monument personified both Komarov's bravery, and the failure of a utopian vision.

One of my favorite works is the freestanding sculpture, *Double Chamber*. Can you talk a bit about how this was made?

I loved the seemingly random layering of slabs on the backs of my wall reliefs, and was excited by *Double Chamber*'s transition from wall piece to free standing sculpture. Each side of the work reveals what is behind the scenes. Nothing is hidden. As a result, I was able to create deep and high relief, accentuating the geometric elements and abstraction of the body that I used in "After Amerigo Tot". On one side you can recognize a kind of portrait, and on the other side, the tension created by numerous angles converging in multiple locations. I like the rawness of this piece and intentionally dripped clay on the sides to create texture. In retrospect, it is an homage to Louise Nevelson.

The gallery will be open for viewing Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, 11 – 5 and appointments are preferred. Appointments can be made online here through the website, www.katewerblegallery.com.