

BOSTON — ART REVIEW

What Never Was and What Now Remains — LaKela Brown and Ruby Sky Stiler in "Classic Beauty: 21st Century Artists on Ancient [Greek] Form"

Review by Elizabeth Corkery
9 November 2018



Installation View, "Classic Beauty: 21st Century Artists on Ancient [Greek] Form," 2018. Image courtesy of Providence College Galleries

The story of western civilization is largely narrated by its objects; the likenesses of its most prominent figures, icons of its faiths, depictions of its victories or commemorations of its loss. The voices and experiences largely left out of these narratives are well known, making the suggestive histories that artists Ruby Sky Stiler and LaKela Brown build through their work a compelling inclusion in Providence College Galleries' (PC-G) current exhibition "*Classic Beauty: 21st Century Artists on Ancient [Greek] Form.*"

Based in New York City, Brown and Stiler are both female-identifying artists whose work often employs either depictions of female form or the identifiable accessories of female adornment. Two specific pieces in the exhibition, "*Jewelry, Chicken Head and Hands Composition with Gold,*" 2018 and "*Seated Woman,*" 2015 by Brown and Stiler respectively, use the vernacular forms of the museum artifact and monument while leaving room for a productive instability around their origin or perceived history. These are not objects of stone, or a material that would link them to a specific earthen place or geographical site. Rather they are formed from materials that could as easily be associated with theatrical scenery as artistic construction – quick-dry plaster, foam, fiberglass, paper collage. Installed in PC-G's Reilly gallery, Stiler's "*Seated Woman*" becomes as much architectural as figurative. Formed from a stack of roughly ten large blocks Stiler's *Woman* reaches to over twelve feet tall. Due to the modularity of construction and the figure's conspicuously missing head, Stiler prompts a further commitment to her theatrical construction – perhaps not all the blocks had been recovered from the sculpture's fictional site of discovery and we are only being presented with what could be preserved.



Ruby Sky Stiler, "Seated Woman," 2013. Foam, acrylic resin and thermal adhesive, 121 x 108 x 96 inches. Image courtesy of Providence College Galleries

This omission of the woman's head also compositionally undermines the Egyptian adherence to representing the completeness of human figures. Typical in Egyptian art, torsos and arms would face the forward so that they could be presented in their entirety. Then – despite the anatomical impossibility – legs and feet would be depicted in profile so that they too could be most completely rendered. Stiler, in her image placement, adheres to the perspectival shifts in the figure but actively resists any completeness of the woman by failing to provide the final stack of blocks that would present her most defining characteristic, her head.

Any kind of specific female figuration is missing from LaKela Brown's piece "*Jewelry, Chicken Head and Hands Composition with Gold*," female life – specifically African-American female life – is immediately called forth through her careful object selection. Brown's plaster reliefs emerge from the converse actions of pouring of plaster into molded forms or impressing objects directly onto its surface. Brown is left with less fluidity than Stiler in her decisions about scale, as she is ultimately beholden to the 1:1 relationship to physical objects she casts. While sculpture typically has the ability to constantly push a viewer into the present through a physical engagement with the piece in the here-and-now, Brown's reliefs are at once sculptural but also able to address history and memory. Rather than the thing itself we see a former impression and along with that impression comes the understanding that these plaster tablets may well outlive the items they trace. In the ultimate act of immortalization "the people of Pompeii, trapped in an emulsion that marked their death, but which paradoxically carried forward their image into eternity."⁽¹⁾ In her work, Brown makes a judgement about what objects from her own life she will carry into eternity and through those decisions is about to question how and why certain objects are historicized.



LaKela Brown, "Jewelry, Chicken Head and Hands Composition with Gold," 2018. Plaster, foam and acrylic 33 x 45 x 2 inches. Image courtesy of Providence College Galleries.

In “*The Story of Art*,” Gombrich identifies that one Egyptian word for sculptor is “he-who-keeps-alive”(2) and in contemplating the work of Brown and Stiler, perhaps a more appropriate sculptural descriptor could be “she-who-brings-forth”. While operating out of the same visual vocabulary of historical artifact or reconstructed monument, both artists are writing a history while molding a present. They are building from scratch, proposing a history with an inner life and a shift in who is pushing the narrative.

1. Sarah Robayo Sheridan, “The Etched Side of the Image” from *Seven Films by Paul Sietsema*, (Milan, Mousse Publishing), 15.
2. E.H Gombrich, “The Story of Art,” (London, Phaidon, 1950), 58.

“Classic Beauty: 21st-Century Artists on Ancient [Greek] Form” is on view at Providence College Galleries’ Hunt-Cavanagh & Reilly Galleries until November 17, 2018. Artists include Robert Andrade, Daniel Baird, Lakela Brown, Matthew Craven, Vivian Greven, Molly Kaderka, Lucy Kim, Kirstin Lamb, Shari Mendelson, David Ross Harper and Ruby Sky Stiler.

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICK



Ruby Sky Stiler

Nicelle Beauchene Gallery

327 Broome Street

September 6 - October 7

Feminists have made a project of decoupling womanhood from motherhood, even going so far as to denaturalize it. This impulse informs groundbreaking bodies of work, such as Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document*, 1973–79, a conceptual piece that records the parent-child relationship through various means,

such as diary entries and stained diapers. But there are fewer examples of how paternity might be reimagined—even celebrated—through this lens.

In “Fathers,” Ruby Sky Stiler applies her syncretic method to depicting the intimacies of fatherhood. Her reliefs, grids of painted foamcore panels, make history’s symbolic patchwork of references into a tangible object. Her style draws from the compositional techniques of antiquity. Here, she turns to the history of father-and-child portraits. One of her references—in fact, one of the few examples in art history—is Mary Cassatt’s 1884 painting of her brother and nephew, *Portrait of Alexander J. Cassatt and His Son, Robert Kelso Cassatt*. As the father reads, the son perches on the arm of his patterned chair, slinging a hand around his neck. The Philadelphia Museum of Art added the metadata tag of “conjoined twin” to the painting’s collection entry, nodding to the way that the figures’ dark clothes seem to blend together.

Stiler’s *Father and Child* (all works 2018) reimagines the proximity of the two protagonists. In this relief, the child sits in the crook of the father’s elbow. They gaze at a vase on which Stiler has sketched line drawings of athletic men. Women appear in Stiler’s reliefs, too, but alone, in contemplation of similar objects. On some works, such as *Seated Woman (Facing Right)*, Stiler’s casual pencil notes appear on the figure’s torso, registering the (female) maker’s hand. We might imagine Stiler’s practice as part of a future archaeology, in which a more advanced society—one less terrorized by the gender binary—searches for a new lineage.

— Wendy Vogel

The New York Times

When the New York Times Becomes Art

JUNE 5, 2017

BY MARGARET CARRIGAN

In this age of alternative facts, we're increasingly aware that the news can be manipulated like any other malleable material. [FLAG Art Foundation](#)'s latest exhibition, "The Times," drives that point home in presenting the work of more than 80 artists who incorporate physical (and ideological) aspects of the *New York Times*. On view through August 11th, the show explores how the self-pronounced "paper of record" has shaped both the scope of world history and our own daily lives.

"We started planning this show two years ago with a shortlist of 12 to 15 artists who we knew had historically used newspapers in their practice," says Jonathan Rider, associate director of FLAG. "But in the wake of the election, we decided to do it as soon as possible." To be sure, the importance of—and contention around—news media has only grown since Trump moved into the Oval Office. The president took to Twitter in February to lambast his critical naysayers as the "enemy of the American people" and his administration has even gone so far as to bar major outlets (including the apparently "failing" *New York Times*) from a White House press briefing.



Dave McKenzie, *Yesterday's Newspaper*, 2007.
Courtesy of the artist and Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects. Photo by Dan Kvitka. Courtesy of the Flag Art Foundation.

According to Rider, once his team started putting plans for the show in motion, they were shocked to uncover more and more artists using the newspaper in their practices. By the time the list of artists had expanded to 50, FLAG decided to announce an open call for submissions, which garnered over 400 responses that were pared down within a few weeks. "We got submissions from artists living in the middle of the country who have never really shown anywhere before, as well as from artists living in New York who are showing at top galleries," he says. (Roughly half of the works included in the exhibition are a result of the open call.)

"The Times" opens with [Ellsworth Kelly](#)'s *Ground Zero* (2003), a simple collage of the paper's front page bearing the headline "Picturing the New Ground Zero" on which the artist pasted a small green trapezoid indicating what he

thought the memorial should be: open green space. The Kelly collage is joined by [Dave McKenzie](#)'s *Yesterday's Newspaper* (2007)—which, like its name suggests, is a readymade, updated daily—and a new work by [Rirkrit Tiravanija](#) that is comprised of pages from the *Times*'s inauguration edition painted over with the words “tomorrow is the question.” Together, these three works reflect on how the news both documents the recent past and spurs considerations of the future.

Yet the Gray Lady can't always be relied upon to be a faithful mirror of history or public opinion, a theme on which many of the works on view riff. Take, for example, *The New York Crimes*, a 1989 performance by the HIV/AIDS activist art collective [Gran Fury](#). Group members removed the front page of the *Times* from as many papers as they could get their hands on and replaced it with their own that featured stories about the AIDS epidemic; these altered editions were distributed by hand at an AIDS rally outside of City Hall. “Things like women with AIDS, AIDS in prison, intravenous drug use—those were topics that, at that time, just weren't being talked about, not even in the most major publication in the US,” says Gran Fury founding member Avram Finkelstein.

Gran Fury may have roguishly posed as *Times* writers, but artist [David Colman](#) was actually a regular contributor at the paper, where he helmed a Style section column for a decade. His assemblage in the show, *The Irony Hook* (2017), includes a snippet of his writing, along with sundry other objects like an iron meat hook and old letterpress blocks spelling out the Latin phrase *non verbis sed rebus* (“not through words but

through objects”). Colman describes his visual art practice as akin to writing. “Finding physical stuff and arranging it in a way that works to say something—I find it very analogous to amassing information for a story,” he says.

Colman isn't the only journalist with work in “The Times.” Longtime art critic Paul Laster dispenses with words entirely in his collage *Tracer* (1991) and focuses instead of the advertisements found in the *New York Times Magazine*, which he skillfully lifts and transfers using 3M Scotch tape. According to the artist, he was always attracted to how the pages were spatially laid out, if not what they said. “I would go around the West Village, where my wife and I were living at the time, on the night that everyone would put out their week's newspapers and magazines,” he says. “I'd find multiple issues of the *NYT Magazine* with pages of red, yellow, blue and other delightful colors.”

[Ruby Sky Stiler](#) initially started using the *Times* for its formal qualities as well, citing its thin weight and smooth texture as ideal for her woven paper works. *March 23, 2017* (2017) included in the FLAG exhibition, is part of an ongoing series of abstract compositions resembling textiles, which are created by slicing and weaving together two twin pages of the *New York Times*. She started them just after Trump's inauguration in January. “I view the project as a version of a diary,” she says. “Plus, it always struck me as cool how quickly the paper becomes a historical object.”

The objecthood of history is also embodied in [Lauren Seiden](#)'s sculpture, *The Future is Lost in Yesterday's News*

(2016) made up of *Times* papers that she sourced from her apartment building's recycling bin over the course of eight months. She read them all, then glued the pages together, drew on them with graphite until they were completely effaced, and stacked them on top of each other to create an imposing grey monolith. "The cultural climate we are living in has made us all re-evaluate our lives," says Seiden. "For me that meant really considering the idea of time and information as a navigation of our history, and what we choose to remember and what we select to forget in order to create our own narrative." Towering over the average viewer, the work becomes a kind of monument that memorializes the idea of "yesterday."

For [Fred Tomaselli](#), who has been using *New York Times* pages in his practice since 2005, memorialization was top of mind when he created his new collage specifically for the FLAG exhibition. It features a blown-up version of the paper's front page from January 11th of this year; the artist drew over the image of President Obama, adding colorful rays emanating from a pair of sharp, beady eyes (cut out from a photograph of a bird). "It was Obama's last speech before the Trump turnover," he says, "the last time for a long time that we would have a semblance of eloquence emanating from the Oval Office. It was a poignant moment worth commemorating."

One curious oversight in "The Times" is that it barely addresses the growing digital presence of the illustrious paper it

so robustly seeks to explore, especially since the overwhelming majority of the population now consumes its news online now. (Indeed, the *Times* has seen such an uptick in digital engagement that it recently announced a slew of buyouts and layoffs, including the elimination of a Public Editor in favor of a crowdsourced watchdog collective shaped by online readers and commenters.) [William Powhida](#)'s *NY Times Review (After Büchel)* (2017), a hand-drawn mockup of a fictional online review of his current show at the [Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum](#) by *Times* critic Roberta Smith, is one of the few works in the show that engage with the paper's web presence. "The days of clipping out a Friday review for your press book are long gone, along with some of the prestige," he says. "The *Times* isn't what it once was."

A performance by PlayLab, however, manages to translate the online news experience into a physical one. Every Thursday afternoon for the run of the exhibition, a member of the collective will sit atop a stationary bike positioned near the gallery entryway from where they will chuck a rolled up copy of that day's paper at visitors as they come in. "We're playing on the idea that you're getting shit thrown at you all day long, every day, digitally," says PlayLab co-founder Archie Lee Coates IV. "It seems like it would be weird to have an exhibition about the *New York Times* and *not* have the news just flung at you."

—Margaret Carrigan

The New York Times

Art and Its Inspiration, Side by Side, at the Aldrich

By SUSAN HODARA JULY 11, 2015



Elif Uras, “Pregnant Haliç II” (2015), stone paste and cobalt under transparent glaze. Bar Özcetin

another assortment of items displayed alongside her works. The show is an examination of hierarchical categorization, artistic influence and how meaning and value are altered by placement and proximity — themes that pervade the Aldrich in its latest semester of shows, “Circumstance.”

“Circumstance” consists of concurrent solo exhibitions by six contemporary artists. The museum commissioned the artists to produce new pieces and asked them to choose other objects and artworks to provide context and reveal their sources of inspiration.

Stepping into the Leir Atrium at the [Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum](#), visitors encounter a motley group of objects arranged on a wall and an adjacent platform. There are photographs, a massive cluster of handmade rope and an anthropomorphized banjo with spiky hair. Nearby are a woven basket, a Victorian vase and a yellow plastic toy telephone. Interspersed throughout are [Nancy Shaver’s](#) quirky quiltlike assemblages of fabric-wrapped wooden blocks, some mounted on the wall, others perched on metal rods and one attached to a tree stump.

The installation is part of Ms. Shaver’s exhibition,

“Reconciliation,” which continues on the museum’s second floor with

“They each created a different ‘circumstance’ through which to view their work,” said Amy Smith-Stewart, the Aldrich’s curator. “We wanted to show that inspiration comes from all kinds of sources, and we actually put those sources in the galleries.”

For Ms. Shaver, inspiration comes from found objects, particularly fabrics culled from rural thrift shops. Inspiration also comes from the Depression-era photographer Walker Evans and the French modernist artist and textile designer Sonia Delaunay. The presence of Evans’s photographs and Delaunay’s designs in “Reconciliation” underscores the exhibition’s spectrum of aesthetic, economic and cultural references.

A comparable spectrum is evident in [B. Wurtz](#)’s exhibition, “Four Collections.” Three of the gallery’s walls are covered with more than 200 colorful aluminum roasting pans and food containers, embossed with patterns that Mr. Wurtz has been painting since 1990. On the fourth wall, selections from the artist’s collections of American Brilliant cut glassware, Jasperware ceramics and Danish Krenit bowls are displayed elegantly on a narrow white shelf.



“These are domestic objects that tend to be in middle- and upper-class homes,” Ms. Smith-Stewart said, “whereas the pans have no socioeconomic status — they touch everyone.” She likened the interplay of the painted pans and the collectibles to that of the chorus and the gods in Greek theater. “But here,” she said, “which is the chorus and which are the gods?”

Virginia Poundstone, “Quilt Square (Tulip)” (2015), stone, plate glass and aluminum. Jean Vong

A plaster cast of the head of the Greek goddess Iris, from the marble original at the Acropolis, graces the entrance to [Ruby Sky Stiler](#)'s "Ghost Versions." The exhibition presents two new pieces by Ms. Stiler, wall-scale reliefs made of Hydrocal plaster. Their repetitive patterns echo the motifs in an accompanying display of classical plaster casts lent by the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the [Bellarmine Museum of Art](#): torsos and busts, drapery, architectural fragments. Ms. Stiler's 21st-century wall reliefs, made from castoff materials in her studio, evoke diverse artistic associations, including Henri Matisse's cutouts, [Louise Nevelson](#)'s constructions and Native American pottery. Their juxtaposition with reproductions of ancient sculptures raises questions about the nature of authenticity and authorship, and the permeable boundary between kitsch and art.

The other shows are equally provocative. [Penelope Umbrico](#)'s exhibition, "Shallow Sun," explores the vanishing role of natural light in the digital age. For her installation "Sun Screen (Camera Obscura)," the artist substituted a projection of images of the sun found online for the light entering the museum's camera obscura. Installations in the neighboring Opatrny Gallery use photographs, videos, monitors and cables to comment on the encroachment of digital technology on all things analog.

In "Flower Mutations," [Virginia Poundstone](#) considers the socioeconomic significance of the flower and its representation in art and design. Her sculpture "Quilt Square (Tulip)" rests in the museum's outdoor courtyard, its slotted glass, stone and metal

panels alluding to Giacomo Balla's painted wood "Futurist Flowers," three of which are on view inside. Flower-based works by other artists, including [Christo](#), [Nancy Graves](#) and Andy Warhol, share the space. Outside, Ms. Poundstone planted an earthwork of 3,000 tulips that blossomed into a glorious but fleeting garden.



Nancy Shaver, "Blue Chair as Base" (2015), blue airline chair with "Blue Bat" (2015). Courtesy of the Artist

In her ceramics, [Elif Uras](#) blends traditional Eastern abstract patterning with Western figuration to address gender roles in Turkey today. Her exhibition, “Nicaea,” fills the Screening Room with pieces created in Iznik (formerly Nicaea), a Turkish town renowned for its ceramics production during the Ottoman Empire. Ms. Uras’s vases suggest the female body; her platters are adorned with contemporary scenes of women at work. In the center of the gallery, a breast-shaped fountain on a tiled platform spouts water over images of women surrounded by a swirling sea. “Nicaea” also includes an intricately decorated 16th-century Iznik plate. Of Ms. Uras, Ms. Smith-Stewart said, “She’s taken the tradition and turned it on its side.”

To encourage public engagement, the curators have invited residents of Fairfield, Litchfield, New Haven, Westchester and Putnam Counties in Connecticut and New York to submit proposals for “In Context With Our Community.” This series of four-week exhibitions in the first-floor Small Space gallery pairs a work by one of the “Circumstance” artists with a responding display conceived by a community member.

“We wanted to put out the concept we devised as curators to see what others would come up with,” Ms. Smith-Stewart said.

They also wanted to activate museumgoers’ connections with each “Circumstance” show. “We hope they will question what they see,” Ms. Smith-Stewart said. “What am I looking at? Who made it? Where is the artist’s voice? Why is it in the museum?”

In a broad sense, the museum itself provides the context, the circumstance, for all of the works on view. “The way you present objects — where you present them — gives them meaning,” Richard Klein, the Aldrich’s exhibitions director, said. “You might think an art museum is a neutral space, but it isn’t. There is no such thing as a neutral space. Where you see something is going to alter your impression of it.”

The six “Circumstance” exhibitions run through Oct. 25 at the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, 258 Main Street, Ridgefield. For more information: 203-438-4519 or aldrichart.org. For details about “In Context With Our Community”: aldrichart.org/opportunities/publicproject.php.

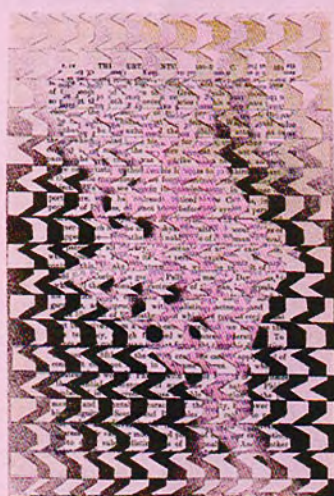
The anniversary issue *20 years of independence*

PURPLE FASHION

FEATURING **Rei Kawakubo**²⁰⁶, **Peter Beard**¹⁹⁰, **Brice Marden**²¹²,
Chan Marshall²⁰⁰, **Daniel Pinchbeck**⁸⁶, **Cynrien Gaillard**²²⁴,

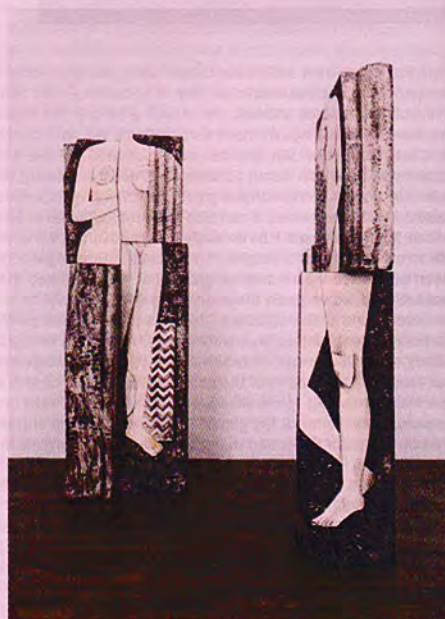
RUBY SKY STILER ARTIST

TEXT BY JULIANA BALESTIN / PORTRAIT BY ALEXIS DAHAN



Ruby Sky Stiler was born in Maine in 1979. She spent her childhood in New Mexico and attended the Rhode Island School of Design and Yale University. She puts together sculptures, vases, and paintings in a way that makes one think of both classical marble figures and modern painting and collage, while not exactly being either one. There is the implied monumentality of the remote past in her use of figures and a modern elegance in their surface articulation,

both of which should actually be betrayed by the fact that she uses foam board for a material. Her recent exhibitions at Nicelle Beauchene in New York and at SAKS Gallery in Geneva, weave together progressive art history and a flirtation with kitsch. The seemingly disjointed but very compelling result is a lesson in contradiction.



NUDE FROM PARTS, FIGURES 5 & 6.
INSTALLATION VIEW, NICELLE BEAUCHENE GALLERY
TOP: NO TITLE, 2010, WOVEN TEXT BOOK PAGES,
SPRAY PAINT, NICELLE BEAUCHENE GALLERY

3 - F: 20,00 € - RD





RUBY SKY STILER

STUDIO VISIT

Monumental Nudes

Ruby Sky Stiler is a pop of color as she comes out to meet me in front of her Gowanus studio, which is nestled amongst auto repair shops and a Home Depot. We walk up to her studio, which is painted white and roughly organized into stacks and piles of books and materials. In the middle of the space are two sculptures that Stiler is currently working on. The works function like prisms — each facet becoming an ancient nude, or a minimal sculpture, or an abstract material exploration, depending on your viewpoint. Stiler's work will be on view this coming fall at Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York City.

OM: *Let's talk a bit about these sculptures — they deal with similar tropes as your earlier work — the Classical female nude — while factoring in scale in a larger way. Can you talk about this transition?*

RS: This transition in scale started as an intuitive challenge for myself — and as a way to push the forms. I think sculpture on this monumental scale has an authoritative power. I think of Richard Serra and Picasso's concrete sculptures... or the Easter Island heads. An object on that massive, permanent scale can demand attention, as well as make us aware of the fragility of our own bodies. My sculptures are modest in comparison, but are still surprisingly large.

OM: *The shapes of these sculptures also have a distinctly macho-minimalist feel, as you say. Which is great, because you are taking that stripped down form, and adding the hand and the figure back into it. Do you see these works*



as being in conversation with that thread of art history?

RS: I think this work is borrowing from and paying homage to many artists and areas of art history. They are influenced by classical forms and fertility figures, as well as the modernist interpretation of those periods. And, from some perspectives they have a spirit of a minimal monolithic configuration. The female form, with its robust organic curves seems to be in contrast to the chunky, geometric, architectural tone that those types of structures traditionally present. This might engage a dynamic, or conflict, between power and vulnerability. There is also the aspect of repurposing and combining parts of disparate relics, from across a range of cultures and civilizations.



OM: *That brings up the 'faux' element, which becomes a major theme in these sculptures, both in the material and subject matter you use. What I like is that you are a 21st century woman working with Plastic Age materials, but creating these ancient looking female nudes. How do you relate to these figures and their historical reading?*

RS: Yeah, I was initially drawn to this set of materials (foam, resin, fiberglass) simply for their facility and availability to me. I guess I work in a sort of impulsive and unplanned way and like to have the ability to change my mind a lot and I struggle with the forms it's never a simple path. These materials lend themselves to that mode. The higher materials that mine reference (stone, marble) wouldn't allow me to make mistakes in the same way. The Home Depot near my studio really is a contemporary version of a quarry. This mimicking of more elevated (and outdated?) materials brings in the subject of taste, as the objects are quoting ones we've all seen before, through materiality as well as representation of the nude. So the questions of skill and craft, high and low, and their play with imitation bring up questions of kitsch.

Also, I think there is the question of whether the figures are individuals, or are generalized idealizations. I don't think of these as self-portraits, but I think there is the possibility that the figures depicted have something to do with personal ideals for my own body... a desire to be bold and sensual, and unembarrassed of my naked self.

My hope is that they have their own complicated emotional impact; beyond all of these tropes and traditions, and that they ultimately go beyond those hierarchies and become their own thing.



Olivia Murphy
Photographer - Clément Pascal

REFINERY29

ART & CULTURE

Jan 27, 2012 8:00 AM

The 9 NYC Artists You Need To Know Now



Ruby Sky Stiler, Nicelle Beauchene

Andrea says: "I love that [Ruby's work](#) is very serious and formal in one sense and at the same time isn't afraid to have a sense of humor! She plays with these familiar and almost cliché classical shapes, and the viewer is given the satisfaction of recognizing them...but also pushed to examine them from multiple vantage points. As familiar as they may seem, the fractured cubist statues never fully resolve, and as you look closer, what seemed to be marble or ceramic is actually foamcore and hot glue, with coy highlights of pink or gold paint."

Ruby can be seen at SAKS Gallery in Geneva, Switzerland this Spring or at [Nicelle Beauchene](#) in New York.

Photo: Courtesy of artist; "No Title (wall relief, wavy hair)." courtesy of artist.

Nine to Watch

Glimpse art's future in the pages that follow >>



Nick van Woert
Annie Lapin
Neil Beloufa
N. Dash
Marcello Moscheta
The Sala-Manca Group
George Young
Ruby Sky Stiller
Thomas Mailaender

LEFT TO RIGHT TOP TO BOTTOM: NICK VAN WOERT, ANNIE LAPIN, NEIL BELOUFA, N. DASH, MARCELLO MOSCHETA, THE SALA-MANCA GROUP, GEORGE YOUNG, RUBY SKY STILLER, THOMAS MAILAENDER



Ruby Sky Stiler

By Scott Indrisek

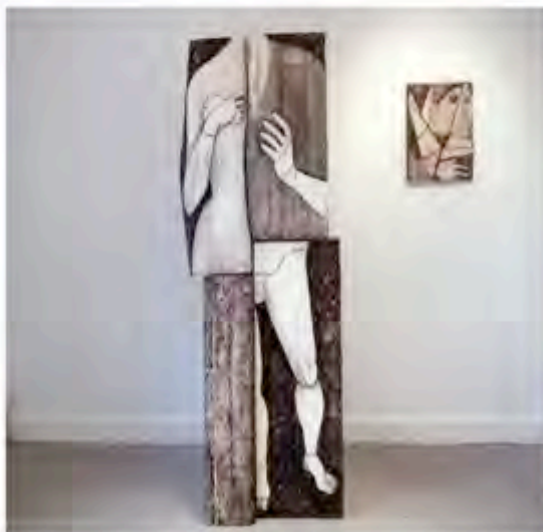
"I'm interested in shifting between these states of high and low," says Ruby Sky Stiler, a Brooklyn-based artist who makes large fabrications, in foam core or concrete, that mimic (and mangle) the forms of Classical sculpture. Epic works like the sculptural urns *An Old Friend from the Future*, 2008, and *An Earlier Vessel*, 2009, "participate in the language of high art and kitsch," explains Stiler, who earned her MFA from Yale in 2006. Her *Partial Nude, in Light*, 2010, which was installed this fall at Socrates Sculpture Park, in Queens, New York, displays many of her signature tropes: what the artist describes as "the assuring patina of antiquity," adopted to create "a mood of authority," and the marriage of disjointed shards: "I'm drawn to the gesture of creating a whole, complete form without having all the correct parts on hand." The piece was her first foray into working with concrete, which she found to share with her more usual medium, foam core, a "utilitarian-chic" quality, in that "both can simulate more expensive materials, like marble or ceramic." The imagery on her sculptural objects is often based on archival reference materials adapted using a sort of poetic license. "I'm trying to summon a *vibe* of specificity rather than being actually specific," she says.

Lest she be typecast as an adulterator of antiquities, it's important to note that Stiler's art

consists in more than reconfiguring ancient forms. *Old and Cool/New and Boring*, 2007—which looks a bit like an alien football that's crash-landed in a gallery—demonstrates her firm grasp on materials and intuition for texture. "This piece is funny, because its surface is so tough and aggressive," the artist explains, "but it's otherwise a very vulnerable form: overweight, no autonomy." For her 2009 solo show at Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, in New York, Stiler imported a wooden floor—a stand-alone piece, *Attic*—to skew the way visitors interpreted the works on display. "I wanted to create a backdrop that encouraged the works to drift freely between high art and a neglected object relegated to the attic," she says. The artist has also been experimenting with two-dimensional forms, including a series of collages that mingle text and image in geometric arrays.

Stiler supplements her practice by teaching in NYU's art department and assisting the multimedia artist Olaf Breuning (see page 34). "If you have to work for the Man," she says, "it might as well be a really funny Swiss man." In 2011 she will present new work at Nicelle Beauchene Gallery and in the project room of Derek Eller Gallery, also in New York, as well as an installation at the unconventional artist-run space the Suburban, in Oak Park, Illinois.

"I'm drawn to the gesture of creating a whole form without having all the correct parts on hand."



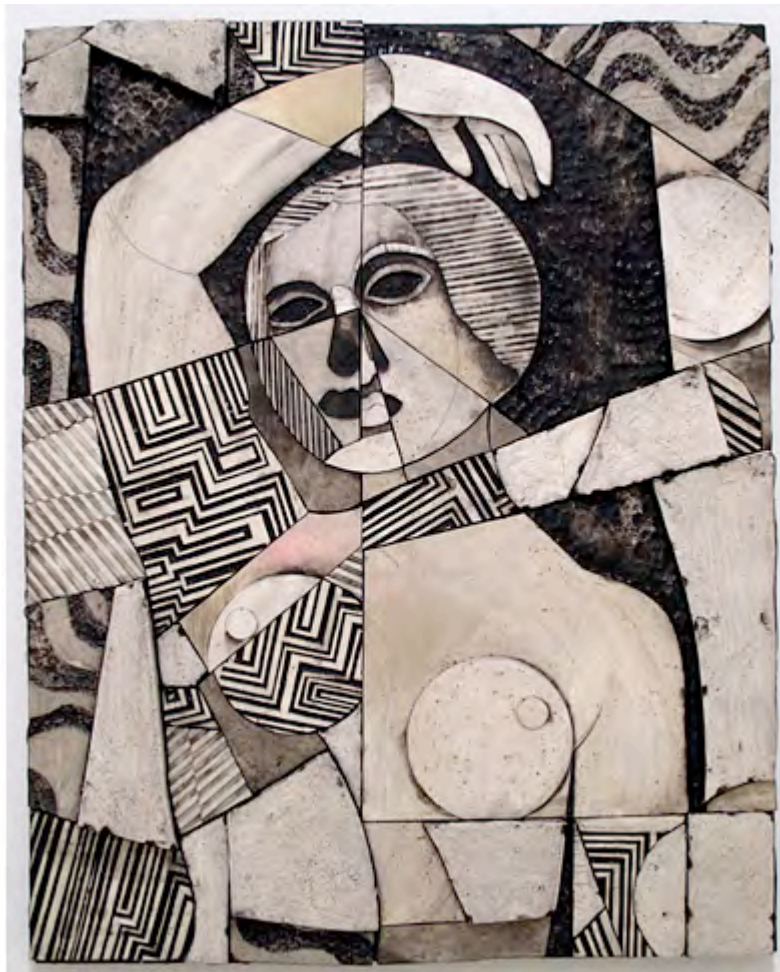
LEFT: *An Old Friend from the Future*, 2008. Foam core, polymer adhesive, acrylic gouache, 34 x 35 x 78 in.

ABOVE: Installation view at Calicoon Fine Art. From left: *Figure from Parts, Past and Present*, 2010. Acrylic resin, polymer adhesive, foam, 28½ x 66½ x 13½ in. *Scraps Head*, 2010. Acrylic resin, polymer adhesive, foam, 15½ x 18 in.

QQ3 With Ruby Sky Stiler

Interview with Timothy Hull, February 2011

Ruby Sky Stiler is a Brooklyn based artist who had two concurrent shows in New York City. A solo exhibition at Nicelle Beauchene in the Lower East Side which runs until February 27th and a project-room show at Derek Eller in Chelsea that recently closed. Her work is noted for creating sculptures and environments that invoke classical icons, up-ended feminist imagery and formal pursuits.



Timothy Hull: The title of your current solo show at Nicelle Beauchene is *Inherited and Borrowed Types* and I was wondering if you could elaborate on how that relates to the imagery and concepts.

Ruby Sky Stiler: *Inherited and Borrowed Types* is a chapter title excerpted from *A Handbook of Greek Sculpture*, a dusty old book I found at a yard sale a few years ago. The chapter outlines the influences from which early Greek art was derived, and indicates that the highest, most idealized forms of Greek art can be, in most cases, traced back to an origin which is not Greek. The term "type" in this context refers to any figurative Greek form. My sculptures also mimic a "type" which I didn't originally invent. In this show, I continued the lineage of borrowed "types" by referencing the classical figurative canon-and pushing them into a territory that is my own. I've also used this same book as a basic art material, through weaving its fragile, yellowing pages together into collages shown alongside the sculptures.



TH: Your sculptures have a real two-dimensional quality to them, almost like they use the language of painting and drawing. What can you say about the very close connection between 2D and 3D in your work?

RSS: The two-dimensional quality mimics low relief, a technique typically incorporated into architectural facades, as opposed to freestanding figurative sculpture. I began placing discordant fragments rendered in this way together to form a whole figure-and was interested in how the resulting object would formalize the activity of my process. The single sided pictorial slabs also provide an alternative, abstract view that speaks more to the language of 20th century sculpture

than ancient art. My intention is for the sculptures to be seen in the round, and the minimal shapes that form their "backs" are equally as meaningful as the figuration.



TH: Are there particular ancient myths, stories or parables that have inspired your work? Where does some of the source material derive from?

RSS: Nothing in particular. I've sampled iconography from sculptures depicted within the pages of reference books for classical art, but I used a wide range of sources to conjure these sculptures: contemporary, ancient and imagined. Recently, I've been looking at Picasso's concrete sculptures, Louise Nevelson's assemblages and vintage fashion illustration and textiles, to name a few. Generally, I've tried to create a mood by harnessing the cultural currency of a seemingly ancient form, though a broader range of references influence me.

TH: If you could travel back in time to a particular period and be a passive observer for a day, where would you go?

RSS: I would love to go to ancient Pompeii, which is the site that inspired this vein in my work in the first place. But I would get out before burning lava covered me and turned me into a future famous archeological discovery!



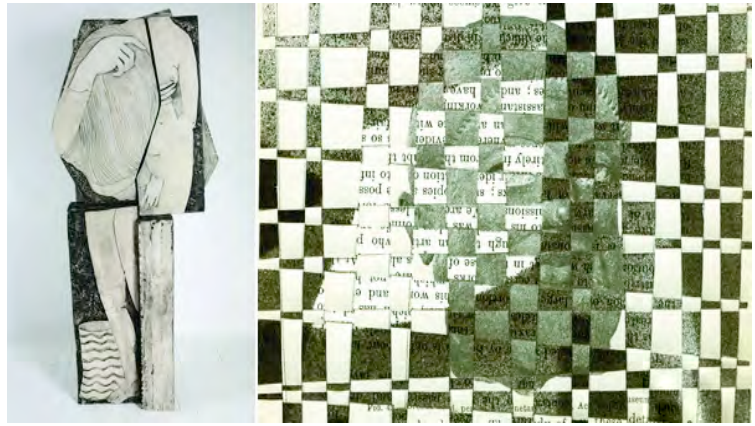
All images courtesy of Nicelle Beauchene and the artist.

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Ruby Sky Stiler

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Left: Ruby Sky Stiler, *Nude from Parts*, (Fig.1), 2010, foam, acrylic resin, foamcore, 28 1/2 x 66 1/2 x 13". Right: Ruby Sky Stiler, *Untitled*, 2010, paper, spray paint, 5 x 7 1/2". From "Inherited and Borrowed Types," 2010.



Ruby Sky Stiler's handsome yet disorderly foamcore sculptures, which often reference classical antiquity, have been exhibited at Callicoon Fine Arts, Socrates Sculpture Park, and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery in New York. Here she talks about her solo project for TBA:10 in Portland, Oregon, which opens at Washington High School on September 9.

I'VE BEEN DEVELOPING the work in this show for the past year. Kristan Kennedy, a curator at the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, encountered two of the initial sculptures in my studio, and the undertaking moved forward from there, with a steady dialogue between us and the site in mind. The project consists of three "figurative" works, each slightly larger than life, and a group of twenty-two collages. I've created a corresponding artist's book that includes the collages and shares the title of my installation: "Inherited and Borrowed Types." Though the pieces themselves are independent, I'm excited to see how the formal, academic aspects of Washington High School create a different context to support them, and I have worked with the space to tease a distinct mood from the classroom/gallery.

The reference to classical iconography popped up in my work a few years ago. I was in Naples for a brief visit with friends, and we visited Pompeii, the formerly ash-buried Roman town—*cum*—tourist attraction. A controversy involving the colors of the frescoes captured our attention during our time there. Apparently "Pompeii Red," which is synonymous with our collective sense of this historical time and place—and a standard paint-chip color—*may* have been an archaeological mistake. Reports stated that the original color could have been oxidized through the heat of the fire and mutated to appear red. Meanwhile, the entire site has been restored with this color in mind, which is nuts. I love this subject, which exists primarily through the lens of contemporary historians and is therefore a constantly evolving and engaging fiction. The sculptures in this show play with authenticity and with how that quality is perceived, creates value, and can prompt an atmosphere of authority surrounding the object.

My basic process for this work is to jam together disparate parts to make a whole. I think of this as a hopeful, loving gesture: finding solutions (or a suitable repair) that will bring the figure to life out of crumbling, incomplete appendages. The sculptures are made to be viewed in the round: From one side, a classical figure is seen, while the opposite section gives off an abstract modernist vibe. The resulting sensation is that these works are referencing both ancient art history and sculpture of the twentieth century. My incorporation of shifting perspectives, varied art-historical references, gender combinations, and juxtapositions in scale encourages a sense of *striving* to make something work, even when one doesn't have all the appropriate resources at one's disposal. This activity feels like a metaphor for daily life.

The shifting line between common kitsch and singular originality is an element that interests me. On first glance, these ancient-seeming figures appear to be chiseled from marble. Looking closer, it's clear that they are constructed from contemporary art supplies and conflate iconography that spans different centuries and societies. On the one hand, elements of these works copy from recognized ideals of art history, and in this sense, they are tacky imitations. On the other hand, however, I aim to make the sculptures' presence feel elegant, convincing, and originally expressive.

— As told to Lauren O'Neill-Butler

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Ruby Sky Stiler

NICELLE BEAUCHENE GALLERY

163 Eldridge Street

May 9–June 14

Archaeological reconstruction, the writing of history, and the arbitrary value of objects—these are big ideas in Ruby Sky Stiler's first solo exhibition, "High and Low Relief." While some artists might treat such subjects with a heavy hand, she approaches them with wit and lightness, especially through the use of Fome-Cor in her sculptures. To piece together an amphora, *An Earlier Vessel* (all works 2009), she covers shards of the material with cartoonlike drawings on colored paper that depict elements from Greek vase painting—warriors, chariots, horses, maidens, and decorative patterning—in mock classical styles (with red and black figures), as well as invented ones. Hot-glued in a haphazard fashion, this slapdash restoration confounds any clear narrative and playfully critiques how conclusions drawn from incomplete archaeological evidence often turn out wrong. The jagged fragments in two wall works, *High and Low Relief* and *Handle with Care*, and in a five-foot stele, *No Legend*, are more tightly constructed and highly illusionistic, with a coating of pigment and acrylic resin on the foam board's white surface that transforms the flimsy material into something resembling marble. The "stone" looks authentic from afar, but up close the blank plates and carved faces, patterns, and words resemble leftover props from a movie set—another source of fictionalized history.

Long wooden planks—stained a smoky black and installed throughout the gallery about six inches above the floor—give a cramped feel to a room with already low ceilings, but the work, titled *Attic*, doesn't transform the space quite enough to effectively question the value a gallery or museum grants objects that might otherwise be relegated to, and forgotten in, a dark, dusty garret. The inclusion of two lighthearted sculptures—a ladder and a faux rock, both amusingly decorated with colored wool-felt gloves that invoke department-store window displays—also detracts from Stiler's stronger, weightier ideas about historical and cultural worth found in the other works, which treat the past as something continuously rewritten and rebuilt, never set in stone.

— Christopher Howard



Ruby Sky Stiler, *An Earlier Vessel*, 2009, acrylic gouache, archival Fome-Cor, hot glue, 38 x 24 x 24".