

CAJSA VON  
ZEIPEL

LARGE-SCALE  
PROVOCATION



Tall, white and depicting from sexual scenes to daily life activities.

This is how one could define the sculptures by New York-based artist [Cajsja von Zeipel](#). But they are more than that: they relate to our fears, our ambitions, and also, to our size. By creating large-scale sculptures that you must admire by looking up, she creates a power dynamic and an interaction that makes you feel like having an interaction with a person of flesh and bone. Instead, they're made from plaster, carved with multiple tools like a Japanese fish knife.



**When did you get your hands dirty from plaster for the first time? As a curiosity, do you remember the first thing you sculpted?**

The first thing I sculpted was a hotdog in clay. I still do, sometimes; it's my 'thank you' gift for people that help me out. My first interaction with plaster was during a late night in art school. I have a tendency to not ask for help so I didn't really know what I was doing when I put my hands in a bucket of setting plaster while trying to cast them. I got stuck and had to violently bang my hands against the floor to get them out. Five years later I tried again.

**What does your practice look like? What is your most important tool? Is there something you can't live without in your studio?**

Everything is made by hand so I spend a lot of time in the studio. Sawing, carving, sanding. I've got a Japanese fish knife that is perfect for cutting Styrofoam. Without that, not much would get done. A lot of my best tools are from the kitchen, actually. I don't cook so it all ends up in the studio. I wouldn't survive without my Seamless app.

**Your works emphasize the human form with a strong reference to classical sculpture. Are you, besides making the visual link, referring to Greek mythology in any way?**

My interest in classical sculpture awoke rather late. I took it for granted, as I imagine is the case of most people living in European cities. To me, the aesthetic was something... well, nice looking, but at the same time, almost invisible – the perfect white surface, the idealized bodies. I felt the aesthetics of classical sculpture were burdened with outdated values and reminders of injustice. Something I interpreted as a very clear back then.

After a lecture in art history about melancholy and the myth of Narcissus, my eyes opened up to the current themes in this ancient story about one individual's obsession with oneself. This was around 2008 and I had just got my first iPhone. The selfie boom had started taking off. I was more or less glued to my smartphone's camera for years. Looking back, I do believe this was an important period for me, realizing that 'new' and 'now' is relative. About a year later, I found myself sculpting my first girl: she had a T-shirt on with the text Born 2 Die on its back. Very drama, a perfect narcissist.

**In one of your sculptures, a couple is about to have sex in a shopping cart, another one depicts a girl holding her friend's hair in a vomiting scene. Where does the element of provocation and untamed attitude come from?**

I do think it is interesting how far you can go, how much you can push and what you can get away with as long as you are talking a quite traditional language. Let me explain: by flirting with the aesthetics that most of us in the western world agree on as high-quality, intellect and high art, the content and the politics of the work can spin off to a place further away from the comfort zone without you not really noticing. It's like a Trojan horse to me.

**Size: pros and cons? Does the scale convey a message in itself?**

I believe most of the pros lie in the way size helps the work act out. I feel the large-scale emphasizes an empowerment of the figures in my work. The cons are purely practical, hard and heavy to handle, more difficult to transport and so on.

Scale as a message? Yes! Height is immensely powerful, don't you think? For example, just by looking up or down on somebody in a conversation sets the way you relate to one another and builds up a power dynamic (among other things, of course). I use that to establish a relationship and a hierarchy in between the viewer and my sculptures. So that you, when you enter an installation with my work, somewhat experience that feeling of walking into a social setting. Having thoughts about what you see but also about your own interaction. The work sees you back, so to speak.

**So when I enter a room in such a context, it gives me certain under grading feeling; a feeling of being watched from above or not being invited to join this gathering. Is this feeling of mine something that is a part of your game?**

Yes, that's what I consider my most important skill: the ability to create something similar to a human interaction in between a person and a chunk of plaster.

**Do you sculpt according to photographs? Live models? Or are your figures a result of the imagery of your fantasy?**

When I began working with the figure I was quite dependent on photographs. It was sort of a revolution for me when I started bringing over my fashion magazines to the studio. Until then I felt as though fashion was not art-world approved, they were two different worlds to me. I also work with models (aka partners and friends). The models have been both male and female, which is an important aspect in that the sculptures have an androgynous anatomy.

**What work of art do you wish you owned?**

I would give my left arm for Hieronymus Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights*.

**And now, what projects are you currently working on?**

A body of new work for Art Basel exploring what I started in my latest show at Company Gallery here in New York.

