

BOMB

New Organisms: Cajsa von Zeipel Interviewed by Osman Can Yerebakan

Sculptural figures that embody the excesses of contemporary life.

Mar 28, 2022

Interview

Art



Cajsa von Zeipel, *I <3 NY*, 2019, acrylic nails, aqua resin, artificial sushi, baby Pug stress reliever, cord organizer, shoestring, fiberglass, glass eyes, hardware, heart keychain, hot pink lacquer pants, I <3 NY dog clothes, large wine glass, paracord, patches and pins ("Peace out," Boe, Flowers, Knife, Decisions, Trixie Mattel), piercings, pigmented silicone, pleaser platform heel, resin flower pedals, sewing pins, small handcuffs, stuffed animals (Cockapoo and Pomeranian puppies), Styrofoam, swivel chair, t-shirt (Living my best life), transparent heart sock, tulle, white and pink faux fur, white denim, zip ties, 59 x 50 x 55 inches. Courtesy of the Rubell Museum.

Coco Chanel famously said, "Before you leave the house, look in the mirror and take one thing off." Cajsa von Zeipel's psychedelic sculptures of immediate connection do the opposite. Young girls with erratic gestures are piled under mountainous excess—dollar-store finds that marry '90s Nintendo nostalgia with a contemporary delirium of tech-erotica. Her work pulls viewers into a rabbit hole of Barbie-doll-house-pink bodies adorned with slogan tees, bulbous backpacks, and animatronic kittens with deadpan eyes. The sculptures' devilish expressions are foreign and caricature, at once familiar and odd, disgusted and aroused.

Von Zeipel's ongoing titular exhibition at Miami's Rubell Museum includes five silicone figures brimming with zeal and stuff. Overdressed with objects and emotions, they are hyperbolic mannequins of a dystopian department store where the offerings are difficult to dissect because everything seems to both ooze and coalesce.

—Osman Can Yerebakan

Osman Can Yerebakan

Are the girls' reactions to specific experiences or people in your life?

Cajsa von Zeipel

When I was a student at the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm, most of my friends were club kids and fashion people. Back then, I wanted to be a designer. Today, people always ask me if they're self-portraits. At first, this bothered me; but the older I get, the more I can take it as a compliment. If I am not using an item, one of them will or vice versa.

OCY

So you swap clothes.

CvZ

If I'm getting ready for a party at my studio, I grab something from one of the sculptures—they're a good resource. Back in Sweden, I lived in my studio for two-and-a-half years. Naturally, all my clothes were there too. This was when I was doing my earlier work in installation, and most of the pieces ended up containing my personal items because they were mixed with my materials. I found some kind of comfort in combining two worlds.

OCY

Let's talk about the economy of the work. You use cheap stuff, but I cannot help but think it must be costly to obtain all of this stuff. Yet I have a feeling that is not true.

CvZ

I started making work in this fashion more than three years ago. That's when I started buying stuff, which came as an aha moment. My mom's side is a little hoarder-ish, so I have a familiarity with constantly organizing things. I walk by dollar stores on my way to the studio, and nothing costs more than ten dollars. I also live right by Canal Street where the sculptures' faux designer bags come from. In terms of cost effectiveness, I do everything myself without an assistant. The money I save from not paying for a salary goes to the materials.

OCY

Do you interact with people you shop from? Is the engagement a part of the process?

CvZ

I am mostly in Marshalls, so shopping is usually fast. I go in with a mission for that day, like "neon green" or "car stuff." When I come up to the register, people usually have an expression like, "How many kids do you have?!"

OCY

Do you connect the dystopian nature of your sculptures to cyber reality?

CvZ

I am quite scared of technology! When I departed from plaster and started working with silicone a few years ago, a whole new world opened up. After working with inherent art historical references around plaster, this was a one-hundred-and-eighty-degree turn with no looking back. I should let you know that the work doesn't come from sci-fi, which has never been a huge interest of mine. However, I do love to repurpose objects and see what comes out. I give myself the challenge to turn things into new organisms. And it is impossible to think of a future without technology.

OCY

The work captures that area where technology becomes more about flesh and flesh about tech. Maybe the danger starts there.

CvZ

This makes me think of a Los Angeles vibe of self-care. For example, I love stuff like GOOP, hormone cycles, or sleeping patterns where the body is at the center of a debate. I am quite intrigued by the Crispr technology of taking a cell from the body and turning that into a sperm.

OCY

The body is at the core of it all, positioned to face various transformations. The efforts seem to be in the direction of a better world, but what do you think?

CvZ

The way we look at gender today is a positive aspect. Think how the conversation has evolved even within ten years and how much young, queer people can express their bodies. A friend told me that the last one hundred years was about technology, and the next hundred years will be about biology. That made me think about things like 23andMe or how much info we pump from DNA today. As technology opens up, how we interact with it through our bodies keeps evolving. My partner and I are working with IVF to have a baby, and we know more about our sperm donors than we do about any of our friends.

OCY

Let's talk about the facial expressions. The sculptures make me think of Bernini's *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* sculpture or *Mona Lisa* whose facial expression is still an art historical debate.

CvZ

I always start with modeling the face in clay, and the rest comes later on. It feels like fifty per cent of the sculpture sits on that facial expression. People sometimes ask me if I cast the faces. Look at them: Who has a face like that?! With silicone, I feel like a surgeon operating over a face. I cut out the flesh, sculpt the nose, and form the cheekbones. I try to achieve a specific expression of some artificiality. It feels like the work promotes my plastic surgeon skills, so don't be surprised if I open my practice soon.

OCY

Face is a big part of the meme culture. Think of the resting bitch face or all other memes that rely on an expression. You can come up with a punch line underneath the face and you have yourself a meme. What do you think about this narrative-building aspect of faces?

CvZ

I, too, have been trying to mess with it a little bit. Plaster made me feel like I had to explain something or stay within a frame of proposition while I tried to squeeze in as many narratives as I could. Now, I can have some fun with the face, which starts with sketching on paper. I should also tell you that I test my sculptures in face apps to test and change their features. There is not a faster way to experiment.

OCY

Is Miami an inspiration in your Rubell Museum show? You must be intrigued by the shop windows with flashy beach attire along Collins Avenue.

CvZ

My first silicone sculpture from 2019 is in the Rubell Collection. She wears a lifeguard shirt from one of those stores, crawling in sand from South Beach. Back then, I was in Miami for Art Basel and brought the sand to my Chinatown studio.

OCY

How about the excess and vanity tied to Miami? Are you intrigued by the hedonism?

CvZ

There is something in the newness of the city that I am prompted by. When I first started to use objects in my work, I knew I wanted them to look soulless in a way that they don't look used. I like when the objects come into the work without identity and blend together to create something new, a form of stepping into a fantasy.

OCY

The sculptures possess a dormant mobility with suspended gestures within a sense of theatricality.

CvZ

I work with a big crew of sculptures to keep myself interested. Otherwise, I am easily bored, so mixing and matching with the bodies helps. They are like siblings sharing body parts: I could cut a torso from one and stitch it onto another one. I want them to be busy, which is a testament to living in New York City. In Sweden, it was about passive-aggressive stillness. When I moved to New York in 2013, my biggest input became the city with its million impressions every day. That intense energy creates a movement which I try to put into the sculptures. I used to be obsessed with how the body looks and search to create that ideal body in glossy magazines. Nowadays, I mix female and male body parts or parts that don't make sense to mess with the focus in the sculpture.

OCY

Your colors are unabashed and in your face. How was the process of switching from the muteness of plaster to splashy hues of silicone?

CvZ

I started with splashy colors in my earlier installations a decade ago. In plaster, I could never find a way to bring in color. Once I got rid of that burden, I am seeing how far I can go with a color palette. If I don't have an inspiration, I just go to Marshalls or an aquarium store. The objects pick the color spectrum, and I just obey. Sometimes, I am tempted to go for more. For the piece I recently created for the Athens Biennale, for example, I dabbled with mixing orange with neon purple with pink and metallic, but I stopped!

[Cajsa von Zeipel is on view at the Rubell Museum through October 2022.](#)

Osman Can Yerebakan is a curator and art writer based in New York. His writing has appeared in: The New York Times Style Magazine, Paris Review, The Guardian, Artforum, Artnet, Brooklyn Rail, BOMB, Observer, New York Magazine, Wallpaper, Village Voice, and elsewhere.*

[Cajsa von Zeipel](#) [Rubell Museum](#) [Osman Can Yerebakan](#) [sculpture](#) [fashion](#)



Cajsa von Zeipel, *A theory of feline aesthetics*, 2021, twelve stuffed animals (cats and kittens), two screwdrivers, three pencils, three pieces of artificial sushi, acrylic nails, acrylic paint, aluminum easel, aqua resin, aquamarine glass eyes, bedazzled paw key charm, camouflage hunting bits, combination wrenches, Dickie's utility pant, dog bed, drop cloth, ear gauge, earrings, expandable foam, fiberglass, hair coils, hardware, leveler, magnetic wristband, marbled yoga pants, memory foam, meowing cat, pad integrated football girdle, paintbrushes, pigmented silicone, plexiglass, safety glasses, Sherbet Lemon synthetic hair, zip-ties, sculpture: 95 x 27 x 30 inches, drop cloth: 144 x 180 inches. Courtesy of the Rubell Museum.