

Mark Frygell's sculptures manifest his image world into three-dimensional form

Exploring the collage-based, composite constructs of Swedish artist Mark Frygell.

by Manu Sharma | Published on : Apr 25, 2021

Swedish artist Mark Frygell has a fascinating creative practice that presents an eclectic mix of influences that mesh together seamlessly in order to create a coherent tapestry across his paintings and sculptures. His work blends natural, man-made and yet more abstract forms, and each of these brings a unique aesthetic quality to his craft; deftly mutated by Frygell in order to leave us wondering where the human element ended and when nature began to take its course within his canvases and clay constructions. However, if one wishes to read his work as a melting pot of personal interests, it is perhaps his clay-based sculptures that are favourable within this ambit, as Frygell seems to outdo his own visionary sensibilities with each subsequent project.



Shy one
Image: Mark Frygell

The artist was born in the small town of Umea in north **Sweden**, and was raised by a single mother who herself was a painter. Humorously, Frygell tells STIR, "In some ways I guess I have been in training all my life". However, cheer soon evaporates as he expands on his formative relationship with artistry, saying, "To be honest though, I didn't really start my artistic career until I was quite old. Growing up looking at my mother's horrible economic situation and stress didn't really make me attracted to the field and I was sure I would never become an artist." Despite this, Frygell displayed creative leanings, and eventually got involved in his town's local punk scene, immersing himself in music, concert organisation and fanzine creation and distribution. The artist developed a fascination with tattoos through the people he met in the punk scene, and eventually decided he would become a tattoo artist. He says, "It seemed like a job that went well together with playing in punk bands and touring. I had a short apprenticeship at a tattoo studio in my city but they said I had to learn to draw so I set about doing that". After some time spent at technical art school, the artist returned, in a sense, to his roots through a newfound love for painting. He explains, "From there on, I decided to go 100 per cent into being a painter/artist; quit all bands, went to Art Academy and studied Art History. At 30, I was done with my studies and moved to **Stockholm**, where I live today. Here I have a studio where I go more or less every day". He currently works with a gallery called Andrehn Schiptjenko, as well as a tattoo studio called Deepwood Tattoo.

Frygell's sculpture practice is relatively young, going back to a show in 2016. He first displayed what he describes as a series of "collage sculptures" here, and these were meant to be viewed in relation to his painting work, which was also on display at the show. Frygell's pieces were built using memorabilia that he had fused in plaster, which he then carved. "I was working with collage painting at the time and collage sculpture seemed like a natural compliment. This later went into me defining my image world more clearly to myself and refining the materials," he explains. Frygell would decide to take time off from his collage-practice; instead choosing to focus on his form, figurative references and core aesthetics and eventually came to view his sculpture work as a "vessel of exploration"; enabling him to better understand what his image-worlds would look like in a three-dimensional format. He explains, "They are most definitely standalone pieces. I just feel that when you are heavily invested in working with images you really need to step out of that two-dimensional format constantly to really understand what you are doing, and in the long run, develop your work into something unique and meaningful".



Threads
Image: Mark Frygell

Among his many formative influences, Frygell mentions a childhood preoccupation with action figures, and connects this to the myth of Judah Loew ben Bezalel, who was a 16th century Rabbi in **Prague**, that it is believed possessed a clay-man of life in order to defend the Jewish community. Frygell focuses on this creature, known as the "Golem" to describe the life-like quality man-made objects such as toys can possess. Much of his sculpture practice alludes to this quality, yet, Frygell rarely allows it to cross the threshold of pure recognition. Frygell also possesses an appreciation for ancient sculpture, and tells STIR, "I love looking at pre-Christian sculptures for this quality of 'aliveness' in them. I think that the fact that they are made with an agenda less controlled by larger social contexts make them very intimate and personal, even if they absolutely were constructed with a purpose". He continues, "Usually I do not like art that has a purpose, but I think these objects feel different because the purpose is most of the time unknown to me and it doesn't distract me from the art. For the same reason, I really like folk art sculpture. Pieces are usually made as a hobby or to combat boredom, which I think is a very good start for creating something fantastic".

Thematically, Frygell likes to leave things open-ended for the larger part. He mentions a desire to create psychedelic representations of the human body, and of our life-world, but does not force himself to adhere to any strict thematic clubbing beyond that. The artist enjoys obtusity in creative practice and seeks to create objects that spark thought and imagination. He says, "All the themes and expressions that my sculptures and paintings contain exist in real life, it's just that I give it form for others to observe it in another light, and maybe understand the world a little bit better, or in a best-case scenario, interact with it in a more elevated way". In a world of increasing politicisation, artists such as Frygell, who, to use an oversimplification, create for the sake of creating, are becoming an increasingly rare breed. It will be fruitful, no doubt, to engage with work such as his, and ask ourselves, why do we create? Answers may vary, but for Frygell, it is profoundly straightforward: "We use art and culture to develop ourselves emotionally and spiritually as a society".

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