

CONOR HARRINGTON + MONICA CANILAO KRIS KUKSI POLLY MORGAN ERIC JOYNER BARRON STOREY

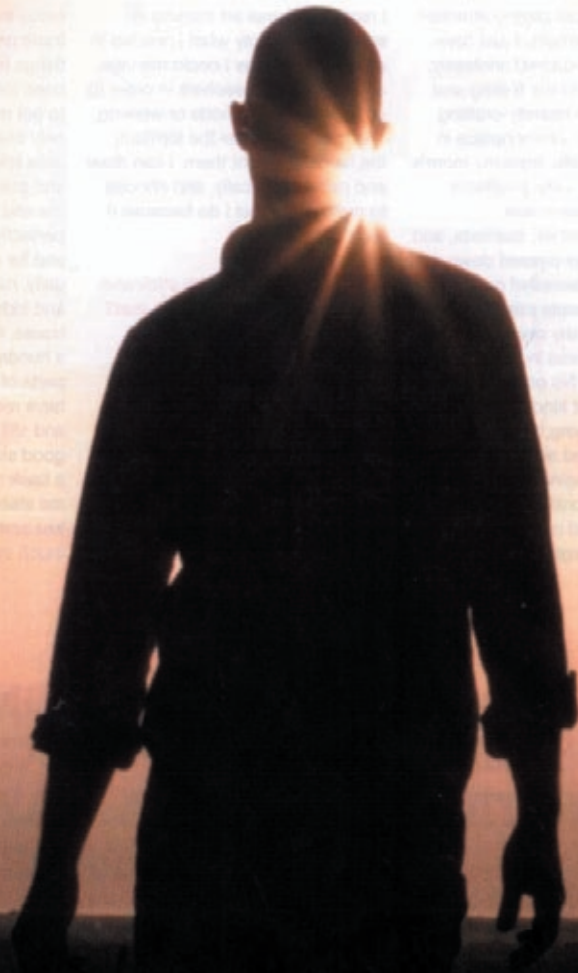
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THE EVERYWHERE COLLECTOR



An inherent patience and determination is needed to complete a mixed-media assemblage in the mode of Kris Kuksi. First, the dogged global search for the perfect miniature collectible pieces, whether on the streets of Singapore or a flea market in Viechtach, Germany. Second, you must have this yearning to build something, to gather all the knowledge and practice you channeled with Legoes as a child and apply this to your new found place amongst the finest mixed-media assemblers in fine art today. And third, you may have to bunker down in Hays, Kansas, at least for the

foreseeable future, as you build a mini-empire of ornate and assembled pieces.

Kris Kuksi has completed these tasks as he embarks on a solo show at Joshua Liner Gallery in New York City this fall (as well as being part of a group show at the Shooting Gallery). Commissions from major collectors have been allocated, the prospect of a sold-out show is expected, and only one question remains: Where in their home does a collector put a 10-foot long assemblage from Kris Kuksi? —Evan Pricco

Evan Pricco: As a kid, did you build staged scenes with your Legos, GI Joes, Micro Machines?

Kris Kuksi: Oh yes, I was a freak about Legos, building and combining them, creating crazy spaceships and castles. I also built dioramas for my action figures that included using bricks from a dilapidated barn. I even built small shrines for dead animals I would find out in the trees around my grandma's house. I was constantly building and making drawings of my fantasy worlds.

Have you always been organized, or at least had interesting organizational tendencies?

Organized in the sense that I know what I need for each piece I'm

working on and where to find it. Online ordering has become an instant locator for those items I'm after. My studio, however, appears like a landscape of wreckage and cataclysmic aftermath, a result of the full tilt, artistic mode.

You were/are a painter, but these elaborate pieces get all the attention. How did these pieces become the focal point of your output, and do you still incorporate paintings into your shows to coincide with the sculptures?

In 2006 I was showing at the Lineage Gallery in Philadelphia. Three major sculptures were displayed and sold rapidly. Then I made some more and showed them, and they sold rapidly. Since then I have sold (nearly) every

one I've made. Apparently, the sculptures have an appeal that "wows" viewers and collectors alike. I think it has to do with the dimensional effect because they are like small worlds that you can spend a long time exploring. But painting is still a wonderful thing; it has just become more exclusive. I continue to savor my time painting for myself during quiet times.

Are you happy that people ended up really appreciating the sculptures even though you had been a painter? Was there ever a point where you said, "I wish I could just paint all day instead"?

Yes, I am very happy. In doing these sculptures, I realized how much I enjoy them and discovered that I am indeed more of a builder than

(right)
Detail of *Venus Admiring Mars' Gun*
Mixed-media assemblage
17" x 28" x 8"
2008

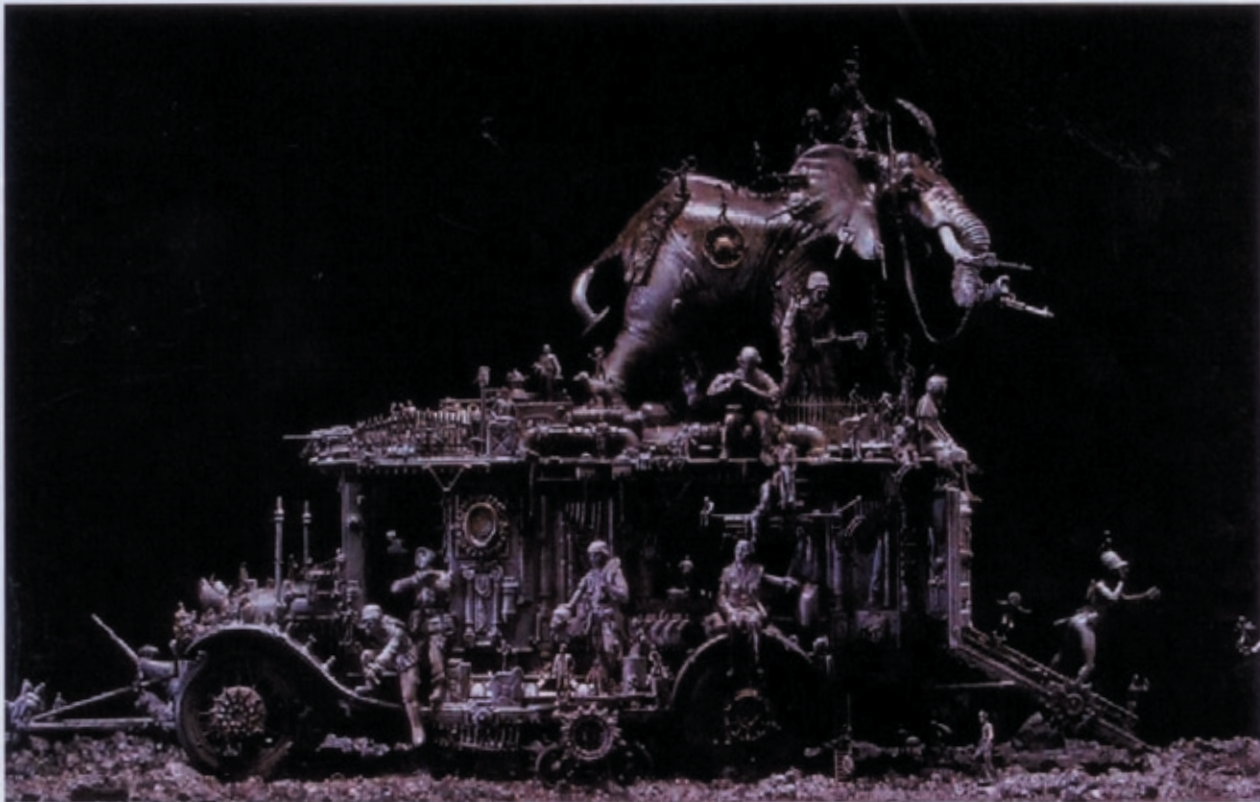
(pages 98-99)
The Deadly Sins
Mixed-media
40" x 24"
2007

a painter. I do love to paint and I'm not at all troubled by the success of these assemblages; however, painting can be at times more of a struggle. In fact, I have gotten so frustrated at times that I have destroyed them. There have been a few nice works I ran my fist through or even torn from corner to corner off the stretcher. Kuksi's rage!

How do you refer to your work? As sculpture? I don't want to keep calling it sculpture if you refer to it differently.

I call them mixed-media assemblages. I think that best describes it in a nutshell. Not too vague, not too specific or "post-cataclysmic landscapes in 3-D!"





(above)
Afterworld Transporter
 Mixed-media assemblage
 10' x 12' x 26'
 2008

(right)
 Detail of *Imminent Utopia*
 Mixed-media assemblage
 132' x 72'
 2008

Who would be your contemporary? And historically, whom do you admire and find influence from?

I don't know of anyone else who has done this kind of work in the same sort of process; although, there are already artists out there who like to mimic me. But those old dudes like Bernini, Bosch, and Bruegel are my top favorites. Nothing beats landscapes of hell, twisted contorted figures, hedonism, and flowers sprouting from anuses.

How do you distinguish how to make each piece different? Is it a case of finding and buying new figurines from around the world that somehow go together, or do you know exactly what you are looking for and seek new pieces out?

Occasionally there is a very specific effect I desire; however, all are more or less improvised as I develop and compose. Sometimes finding a title is an afterthought in the search for what is appropriate. But the major element is usually decided upon in the beginning.

You are a collector, at least in the sense that you collect all these hard-to-find model pieces and figures from around the world. Is it like a game to you, for example, "What cool, unique thing can I find today"?

It certainly is and most of the good stuff is in the East. Japan is a haven for collectables and miniatures, though. I am probably one of the biggest buyers of the model railroad industry, at least here in

Kansas anyway.

You get pieces from Ukraine, Singapore, Germany, Prague, Philippines, Lithuania, Japan, etc. What has been one of the more interesting stories of finding an amazing piece to fit into your artwork?

A couple of years back there was this old German guy at a flea market in Viechtach, Germany, and he had the coolest little trinkets I had ever seen. This little cigar box was filled with bits of religious and iconographic miniatures that looked like a gold mine for my work. But he wanted 150 euros for this little damn box! In my opinion it was junky yet cool stuff—but 150 euros? Come on! I tried to bargain down to 40 euros but he laughed and

said, "Ha-ha! Das ist ein problem?" I returned later that day to try and hit him up again, but he was still stern on the price. Finally, the flea market was closing up and when he wasn't looking I just stole the damn little box and took off. Poor guy. And to see what I subjected myself to morally for the sake of this crazy artwork I do.

I think it's okay you stole it. Do you remember what you used the cigar box for?

You know, all these pieces, no matter where I get them, wind up somewhere on some assemblage. It can be hard to remember what went where, but those cigar box trinkets wound up in *A New Divinity* and *Plague Parade: Opus 1* for sure. (Editor's note: Kuksi's advice, "Don't

be stealing from old, German, flea market merchants, kids!")

Does each country or region that you get pieces from have certain characteristics that the average person may not know? For instance, what makes Singapore a gold mine for you?

The East just has the coolest stuff. This is, most often, where I can find the really rare and out-of-production collectables. Singapore has these highly detailed little animal figurines that blow my mind, and the more realistic the better. It is actually overdue for a visit to the East. I think next year I'll take a vacation there and splurge.

How long does it take to complete a piece?

The process, again, includes a lot of improvisation, and it can go very quickly depending on if I have everything I need right there in the studio. I collect as I go, so perhaps more time is spent in just looking/scavenging/scrounging for the materials. A major piece around 3-by-3 feet can take about two weeks when working at a casual pace. At times, though, I have had to bang out a piece in just two days, which gives one just a glimpse at the kind of drive that exists when creating.

You live in Hays, Kansas. You mentioned that the local model shop owner has had overseas colleagues say to him, "Who in the hell in Hays, Kansas, is ordering 40 pieces of this rare figurine?" But you make it seem like an advantage to living in a more isolated place.

In my experience it really doesn't matter where I live. What matters is the accessibility and resourcefulness needed to get the items. If I can have them all delivered to Hays, Kansas, then, what the hell? Yeah, I am constantly draining the local model railroad suppliers of their inventory. But I like to think of it as a partnership with the miniature hobbyist and model builder who sustains the industry.

I really enjoy that I have rebelled against the belief that to "make it" one must live in a thriving art city. As long as my work is shown in these cities I really don't need to be an inhabitant. Fortunately, the connection to buyers and collectors has never seemed to effect my location. Traveling often within the year is helpful. So planes, email,

and the beloved postal service maintains my residence in the flat, barren wilderness of Hays, Kansas.

And then you go to other cities like Prague and Berlin, and really enjoy getting the chance to soak in the certain architectures and feeling of those cities. You get both the push and pull of living in an isolated place but then taking in these otherworldly places and infusing that into your work.

Yes. Well, if one believes in past lives, I have certainly been in Eastern Europe back in the day (of architectural renaissance). There is something about the historical design and symmetry of ancient Rome and the baroque era that really stirs my soul. And I bring that inspiration all the way back to Hays

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**"OH, IF I WERE ONLY AN INCH TALL,
I'D LIVE IN MY SCULPTURES AND
ALL WOULD BE BLISS."**

(page 102)
New Divinity
Mixed-media
36" x 36"
2007

(page 103)
Lunatic Lander
Mixed-media assemblage
12' x 10.5' x 12'
2008

(left)
Church Tank Type 5A
Mixed-media
5' x 12' x 10'
2007

and go bonkers with new work.

Have you ever thought about moving to Prague or Berlin? Or would that just be inspiration overload?

I spent about three and half months in Berlin last year. It was a great place to get creative; the beer and cheese were awesome, not to mention the Turkish cuisine, and I think *studentenfutter* is a great weight-loss plan for anyone interested. Prague is amazing, too; somehow the architecture makes me feel like a kid again. Traveling is great for the soul, but I think little flings in faraway places are enough to sustain my imagination. I suppose more often than not is better—Europe once a year keeps the doldrums away.

You mentioned something interesting about seeing refineries in that they look like "strange cities." You have to see a lot of that in Kansas I would assume.

There are a few huge refineries nearby where I grew up that are a part of that industrial, designed world that I admire. So take my love for the harmony and flowing grace of baroque and combine it with the rigid, linear construct of piping, trusses and oxygen tanks, and you've got a Kuksi.

How is the Liner show preparation coming along?

I am trying new subjects, getting in touch with classical art and exploring satire and social statements. With an overall length

of nearly 11 feet and over 6 feet in height, the show will showcase the largest sculpture I have done. It is a grand and awesome expression of my vision. In addition, I have a few other collectors after my work from all walks of life: rock stars, famous athletes, European aristocrats, and your average wealthy Joe Schmo.

Oh, if I were only an inch tall, I'd live in my sculptures and all would be bliss.

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For more information about Kris Kuksi, contact Kuksi.com.