

# RAGMAG

MAGAZINE

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ORBITAL  
MECHANICS  
ASTRONAUT  
CHRIS HADFIELD

THE  
MOTORIZED  
ISSUE

THE THIRD IN THE  
MEN'S POWER SERIES

START YOUR  
ENGINES  
KARTER  
CHANT  
ETYEMEZIAN

GEARS  
OF INFO  
AUTHOR  
STEVE BERRY

ASSEMBLY  
LINE  
ARTIST  
KRIS KUKSI

NAGY SOURATY

MAN AS A VEHICLE



# REUSE, AMUSE + BEMUSE

INSIDE THE HEAD AND STRUCTURES OF **KRIS KUKSI** IS A POST-INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

BY MAHA MAJZOUB

**K**ris Kuksi's sculptures might be made from recycled toys but showing them to the kiddies is not a very smart move, particularly since they bear no resemblance to the original items used. His monumental artwork is not easy on the eye; not for those into esthetically appealing, safe art. It can be a hard pill to swallow especially if you head up to it unprepared for such magnitude and depth. Kuksi's work takes you to the darkest rooms of your imagination, and locks you up there for some time. The artist says the things you would like others to say for you, and then you force out a gulp when you hear the words uttered.

The mind-blowing, macabre, and beautifully grotesque art of the Kansas-based Kuksi is fascinating and confusing in true Hieronymus Bosch style. It will taunt you by the sheer complexity of detail, leaving you even more baffled as you stare for hours at all the figurines that were smacked into coexistence. One can only imagine how

long a typical Kuksi sculpture takes, as there is nothing really typical about the painstaking process.

He spends what looks like thousands of hours to assemble, collect, cut, and reshape countless old toys, mechanical parts, and pop culture refuse -- all things he classifies under "mixed media". He finds these mass-produced, kitschy, and many a time just oddball things in some of the most random locations. They might fall into his lap or he would comb hobby shops, antique stores, jewelry stores, toy stores, or the Internet for them. He sees the sculptures in whole in the form of dreamy-like representations -- usually in the wee hours of the night when he is beyond shattered and about to surrender to slumber. He sketches these uncannily clear visions and then goes on to manipulate the materials until he translates every detail of those images. The possibilities for mixing this hodgepodge of stuff together are plenty, but they have to be glued together by "a flowing composition and visual balance", Kuksi says.

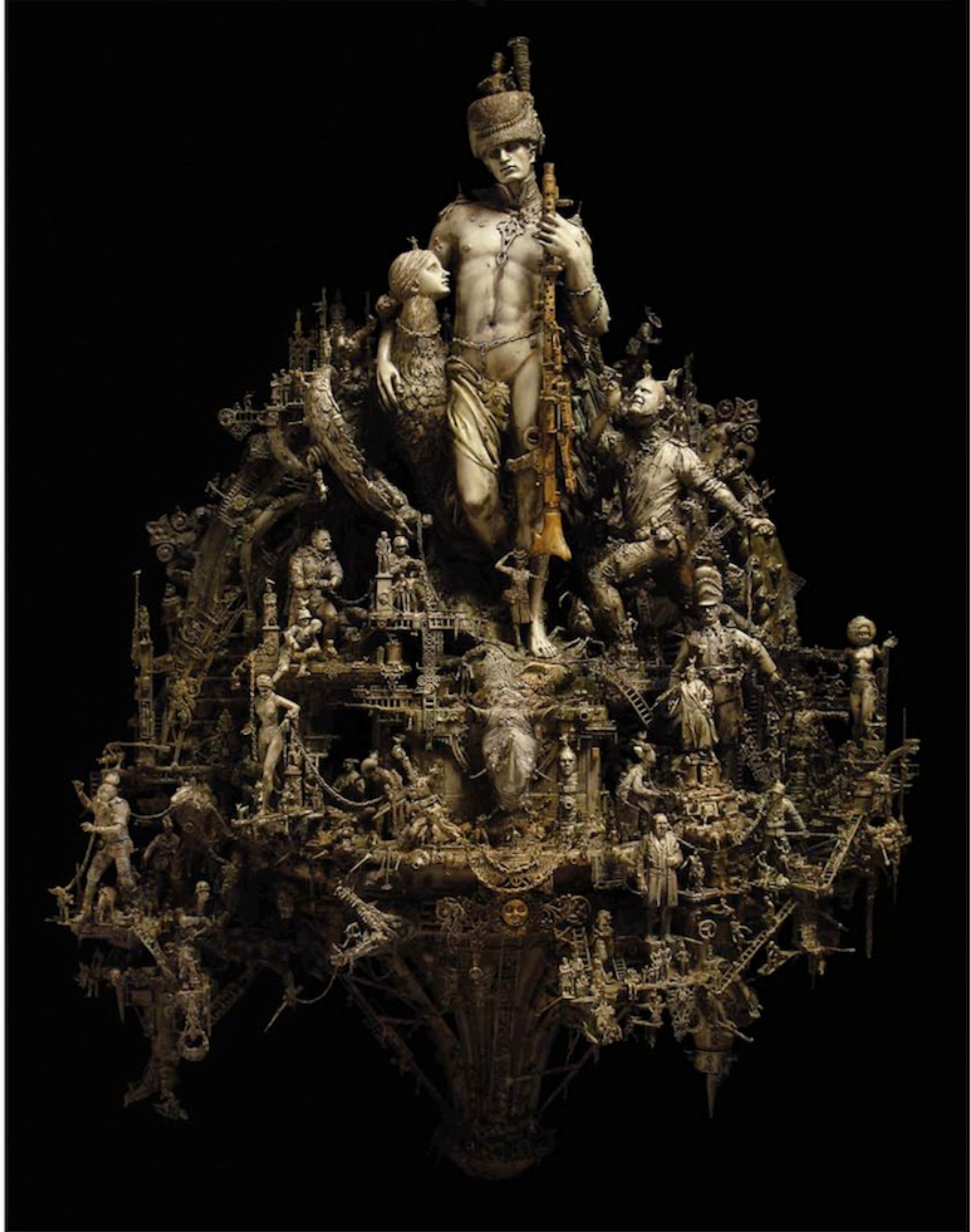
BELOW:  
ODE TO HERNACULUM



As you gaze at the body of work of the 38-year-old sculptor, you can't help but feel this man has been here before. In his artist statement, Kuksi says he feels "that he has always belonged to the 'Old World'" while his artwork is very much a reaction to "the corrupt and demoralized fall of modern-day society -- a place where new beginnings, new wars, new philosophies, and new endings exist." It is ultimately a commentary on the historical rise and fall of civilization, an allegory to the materialistic present, and a visualization of the possible future of humanity. ▶

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## HOW BIG IS YOUR GUN?

The Baroque period infused pieces make hard-hitting cross references to philosophy, mythology, religion, and morality. He admittedly idealizes the Greco-Roman ages, while he enjoys reading about philosophers of the time such as Pythagoras, Herodotus, and Aristotle.

Kuksi incites echoes of the past with satirical observations on today's industrial world. "The Recreation", a 31"x24"x8.5" sculpture completed in 2009, is a reworking of Michelangelo's "The Creation of Adam" where instead of Adam, God's hand reaches out for what looks like a soldier.

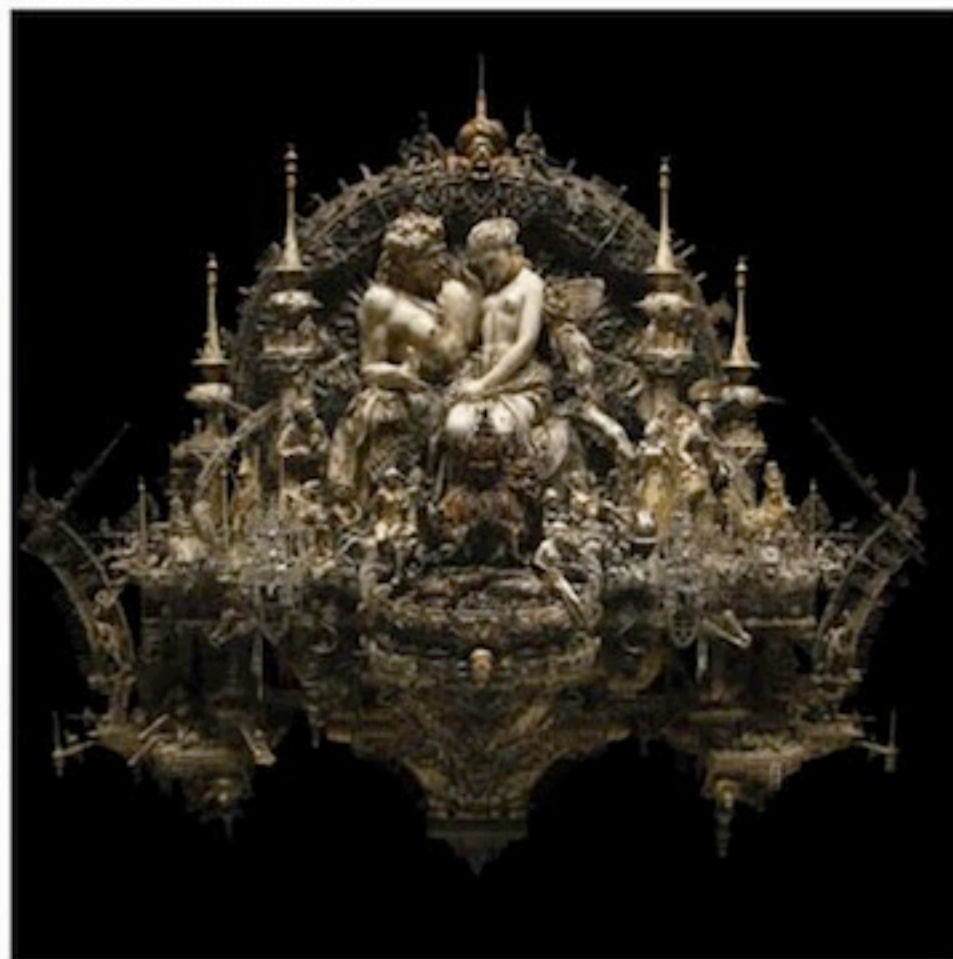
**'I HAVE HAD SOME OPPOSITION FROM SOME RELIGIOUS FANATICS IN RESPONSE TO THIS SERIES, BUT THAT'S OK BECAUSE I THINK THE WORLD NEEDS STUFF LIKE THIS-- SOMETHING TO WAKE UP THE SENSES'**

In Kuksi's oeuvre, war and religion are depicted as fraternal twins; he lashes out in equal intensity at both. Many of the statuettes in his sculptures live with guns, tanks, or other warfare paraphernalia. Many of his subjects have guns protruding from their bodies, such as "Eros at Play" and "General Heinrich Von Howitzerhead". His "Churchtank" series takes jab at the Church and religion in general as an instigator of war and torment. Religion, in his mind, is the antithesis of love and peace, only spreading hatred and discrimination in the fast-moving, spacious universe. Of course, this didn't exactly resonate well in Kansas, and it takes no stretch of the imagination to understand why. "I have had some opposition from some religious fanatics in response to this series, but that's ok because I think the world needs stuff like this-- something to wake up the senses," Kuksi explains. But the once devout Catholic who had even served as an altar boy has been taking very unorthodox routes in his art. So what happened?

When I started researching about the meanderings of Kuksi, I couldn't help but wonder why Hollywood has yet to make a picture about him. He has already established international success, with the likes of actor Robin Williams and Nike CEO Mark Parker being among the collectors of his art. But I suppose being so dark, intellectually provoking, and non-mainstream, he is more Art House Cinema.

Kuksi opened his eyes to an impoverished environment in Springfield Missouri and found himself growing up north of Wichita with a loving, albeit socio-phobic mother and alcoholic stepfather -- his biological father having left him and his two significantly older brothers shortly after Kris was born. Kuksi would soon find himself isolated from the world, closely monitored by his parents and being unable to mingle with schoolmates outside school parameters. His only outings were on Sundays to attend Mass with the family. This was compounded by the sharp slaps of poverty. So he turned inwards. ▶

LEFT: KRIS KUKSI IN HIS STUDIO  
RIGHT: PAN DISCOMFORTING PSYCHE





Having exhibited artistic predisposition since his tender years, Kuksi lived in his little artistic bubble of dreams. As he honed his drawing skills at school, his appreciation of life grew. That and his fascination with death. He would build temples in honor of the dead, believing he once lived in ancient Egypt. With the encouragement of peers and a school art teacher, Kuksi would go on to become double degreed in art. He would also study the techniques of the Old Masters of Italy and Austria, travel the world, and rebel against religious principles, which had secluded him from life.

"Do you think at this stage you have confronted all your childhood demons?" I inquire. "All except for the repressed ones," he tells me. Now Kuksi has other demons to fight: Handling global fame while staying grounded. Having established an impressive following of film directors, business tycoons, and musicians, Kuksi has been featured in over 100 exhibitions in galleries and museums worldwide including the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery.

"How does an artist from a humble background and with a difficult childhood deal with such success?" I continue. "Well, it's not a matter of what has happened to you as much as it's a matter of how you deal with it. I could have easily chosen a path that was similar to my alcoholic stepfather's. You certainly don't have to let your past decide how your future will be...But it does take some years and experience to be able to say that," Kuksi argues.

"And now you've charted your own course and appreciate the true essence of life. Yet your art tends to be morbid. Why is that?" I go on to ask. Kuksi fills in the blanks: "If everything in life was so nice and great we wouldn't have any problems. That's obviously not how our world exists. So the function of my work has to do with relating to the darker side of human psychology." For that reason the subject of his next sculpture "will be the darker side of the history of the United States--this being political conspiracies, slavery, the Civil War, and displacement of Native Americans," he says.

Despite his captivation with the bleak, the future looks bright for Kuksi's art, be it his sculptures, drawings, or paintings, as he continues to go from strength to strength. He is rewriting history and through his dark images is casting a strong beam of light on some of things many of us don't wish to see ■



TOP LEFT:  
ANDROMEDA, DETAIL  
RIGHT:  
IMMINENT UTOPIA

[www.kuksi.com](http://www.kuksi.com)

