

TBA review: Ruby Sky Stiler's figurative sculptures

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Special to The Oregonian

Perhaps it sounds prosaic to observe that art history forms the building blocks of contemporary art. But, in the work of artist Ruby Sky Stiler, that truism takes a rather literal shape in a series of figurative sculptures that treat the remains of classical art like so much debris, waiting to be sifted through and cobbled together into new forms.

In a group of three sculptures on view at the Works, Stiler conjoins slabs of what appear to be concrete (but is, in fact, a modern, lightweight material) into human forms, in which each slab depicts a different portion of the body in a pick-and-mix amalgamation of incongruous classical styles. In one, the figure's torso is halved between a nude woman, whose form is redolent of the goddess in Botticelli's "The Birth of Venus," and the flowing folds of a toga, presumably inspired by a Greek statue. As the earmarks of Renaissance art and antiquity collide within the spatial logic of her work, Stiler affects a kind of historical flattening, in which contradictory styles, geographical origins, and chronologies are permitted to commingle in the same collage-like statue. The figures themselves are further confused with various anatomical inconsistencies, such as the mixture of male and female elements or the presence of extra appendages. That these sculptures do not actually refer to specific works is important, too: Stiler is approximating a kind of past-ness through her deployment of familiar forms that, ultimately, undermines their seeming deference to art historical models.

Surrounding the sculptures, Stiler presents a series of 22 small, two-dimensional works, in which she weaves pages from paperbacks with monochrome graphite drawings. While these pieces reflect the palette of the sculptures in stony grays, they lack the same degree of conceptual acuity. Certainly, texts possess the same capacity as works of art to be disassembled and reconfigured, but, in relation to the instantly recognizable epoch-scrambling of her sculptures, this minor body of work seems little more than formal exercise.

-- **John Motley**

TBA Festival

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Ruby Sky Stiler: "Inherited and Borrowed Types"

Where: The Works at Washington High School, 531 S.E. 14th Ave., 503-224-7422

Hours: Noon to 6:30 p.m. daily

Closes: Oct. 17

Admission: Free

Website: pica.org

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