



CULTURE

Kristen Morgin's "My Best To You, Little Girl-Boy" at Anthony Meier Fine Arts

Unfired clay and found materials unite for fragile pop-art works in this SF show

by **David Graver**

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With iconography, nostalgia and sentiment as entry points, a curious new exhibition known as "[My Best To You, Little Girl-Boy](#)" continues to unfurl with deeper inspection. The show—LA-based artist [Kristen Morgin](#)'s first with SF's [Anthony Meier Fine Arts](#) gallery—features 20 sculptural works employing trompe l'oeil and collage. References to the Hulk, Star Wars and The Hardy Boys are all present, but it's her use of a specific material that demonstrates a metaphoric element—and it requires some exploration. Morgin works with unfired clay, lending all of her Americana-laden pieces tremendous fragility. At once, each piece appears familiar and unsettling as more time is spent gazing.



"The processes for working with unfired clay (essentially dirt) and working with fired clay (ceramics) start the same. I make something out of clay," Morgin explains to CH. "The difference in my process is that I skip the last steps in the ceramic process which would include firing and glazing which in turn would chemically transform the clay into a stony, glass-like material." Morgin's sculptures are finished with painting as the final process. "The clay objects that I make are not transformed by fire. The works are very fragile. They are, in fact, painted dirt."



Of course, none of Morgin's works look merely like painted dirt. It's the expertise in construction and the references she pulls that make them feel real. "Sometimes the objects are special—such as toys, books and records. Sometimes the objects are not special—such as bits of scrap plywood, empty cigarette boxes and pieces of cardboard. Yet when one discovers what the objects are and the simple materials they are made of it is slightly unnerving," she continues. "I think I have enjoyed the unnerving effect of being confronted with an object that is the result of someone's mad skills and is also both humbly honest and deceptively untrue at the same time."



Fragility allures the artist, and her relationship to it conveys substantial meaning. "The fragility of my work is a kind of metaphor for mortality and a reminder that nothing is permanent and that precious objects do not always last," she says. Her further inspirations vary, but Morgin almost always happens to be making something. "There isn't a special moment when I know what I will make next. I just follow my instincts. I make what occurs to me. I start things and stop all the time. Sometimes I fall down rabbit holes. It is constant though."



Of equal interest, a contrast is drawn between Morgin's work and the gallery itself. Anthony Meier Fine Arts is housed within a Willis Jefferson Polk-designed mansion from 1911. It's an extraordinary venue, where preservation factors heavily, whereas Morgin's works feel fleeting. The experience, altogether, conveys the multi-faceted nature of identity. As Morgin concludes, "Americana and pop culture interest me because they are familiar, informal, stupid at times, and ripe with great themes like good vs evil, man vs nature, new and improved, and so forth. Much of the imagery I turn to is straight out of my youth. Other bits are stand-ins for family members. War imagery comes up as well as references to music and musical instruments. My grandfather was a musician and he fought in the second World War." Morgin isn't the first artist to make these references, and she's certainly not the only sculptor to draw inspiration from her past, but she's managed to do both in a way that's delicate but powerful.

"My Best To You, Little Girl-Boy" is on now at Anthony Meier Fine Arts (1969 California Street, San Francisco) and will run through 25 March.

Images courtesy of Keith Petersen, San Francisco