

JUDY FOX

Judy Fox is an American sculptor known for her realistic figurative sculptures of fired and painted clay. She recently completed a new body of work which applies her extensive knowledge of the human anatomy, its subtleties of gestures and skin textures to a wholly invented menagerie of intriguing, sexually charged, worm-like creatures. These beings are totally alien yet have an inner logic that makes perfect sense. They are very believable, it is easy to imagine how they would move and interact, how they would feel to the touch and against the skin. Their squishy, moist bodies exude raw sexuality and seem to exist mainly for just one purpose: to reproduce. Her sculptures of octopuses and other ocean dwelling invertebrates bridge the gap between her hyper-realistic sculptures of humans and her alien inventions most perfectly - both are alien and yet familiar. Like all her work they have strong personalities and seem very human, despite their outward appearance. Everything Judy Fox does is sculpted and painted to perfection. Her technique of layering transparent colours imbues the classical forms with sensuality. To really appreciate her work, it should be seen in the flesh and in the round, no photograph will ever do it justice.

Wolfram Ladda



Please tell us about your background.

I grew up in suburban New Jersey in a wholesome Jewish family, went to public school. I thought I'd be a doctor, like my father.

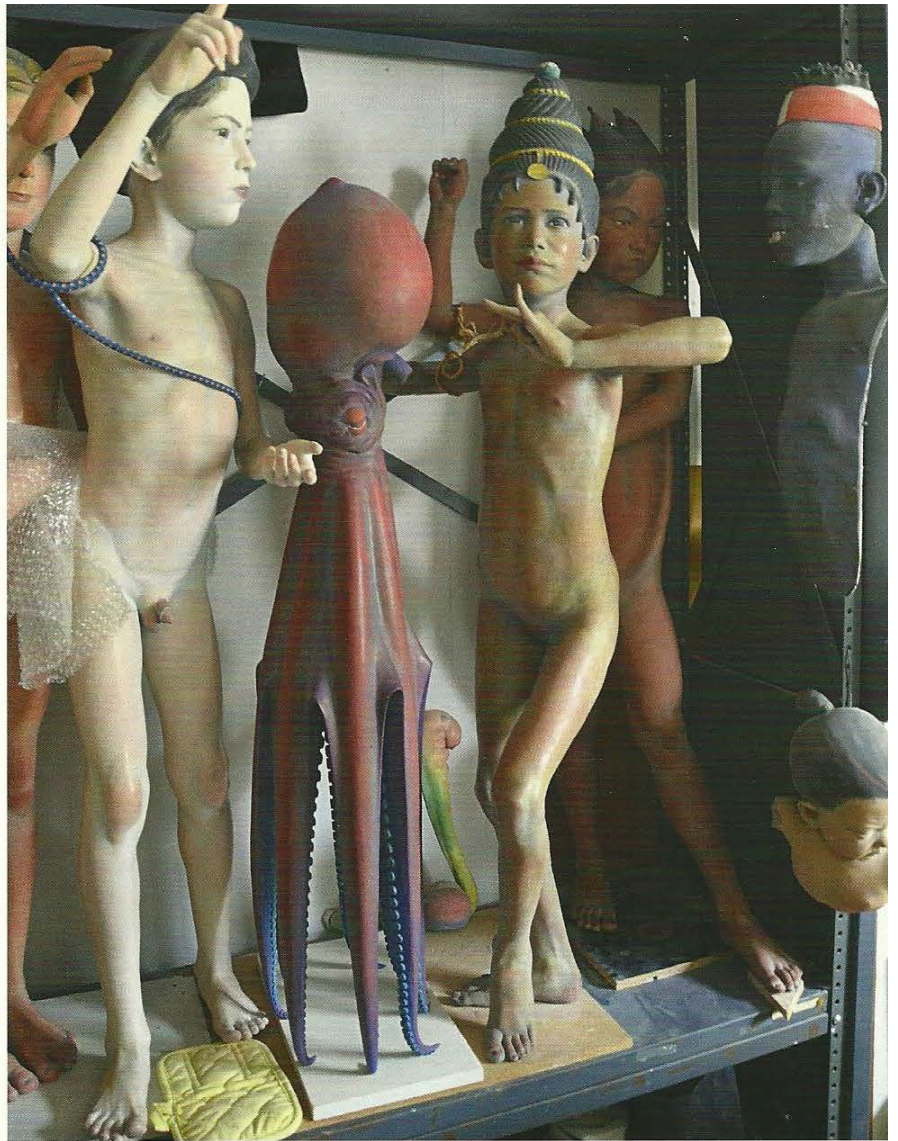
I first sculpted at 15, at an arty summer camp. When I first carved into a block of plaster I felt my neurons line up and vibrate. I majored in sculpture as undergraduate at Yale, then went to grad school in History of Art, and Conservation, at New York University. The historical study helped me to envision figurative sculpture as contemporary art. For example, learning how sculpture has been painted throughout the past led me toward painting my own work.

So your first sculpting experience was carving plaster. Can you talk about how you went from plaster to clay in your modelling and how you developed the methods that allow you to create your works.

Well that was the last time I carved plaster. I did continue to make things as a teenager, relying on a sense of volume that was based on the experience of touching and holding things, along with how something looks from the front, and from the side. When I got to college I took classes in figure modelling. We used soft clay on an armature. To make a piece permanent you had to make a mould, and a cast from it. I was delighted to find out, later on, that I didn't have to make a cast, that I could just build a clay piece and pop it into the kiln.

After school I worked as an art conservator and made sculpture on the side, thinking over what I could do that would make a meaningful series. To poke fun at traditional masculine homage to sexiness and monumentality, I decided to start small and intimate, with babies. As my friends' kids grew

The images on these pages shown impressions from Judy Fox's studio taken during Wolfram Ladda's visit. As the work is set in a spatial context, we have foregone the inclusion of the dimensions and other details. This information is available from Judy's website.





up, and as my subject matter evolved, my models got older. I've done several full grown adults by now, but I still try to render in a way that is subtle and intimate rather than big and blunt.

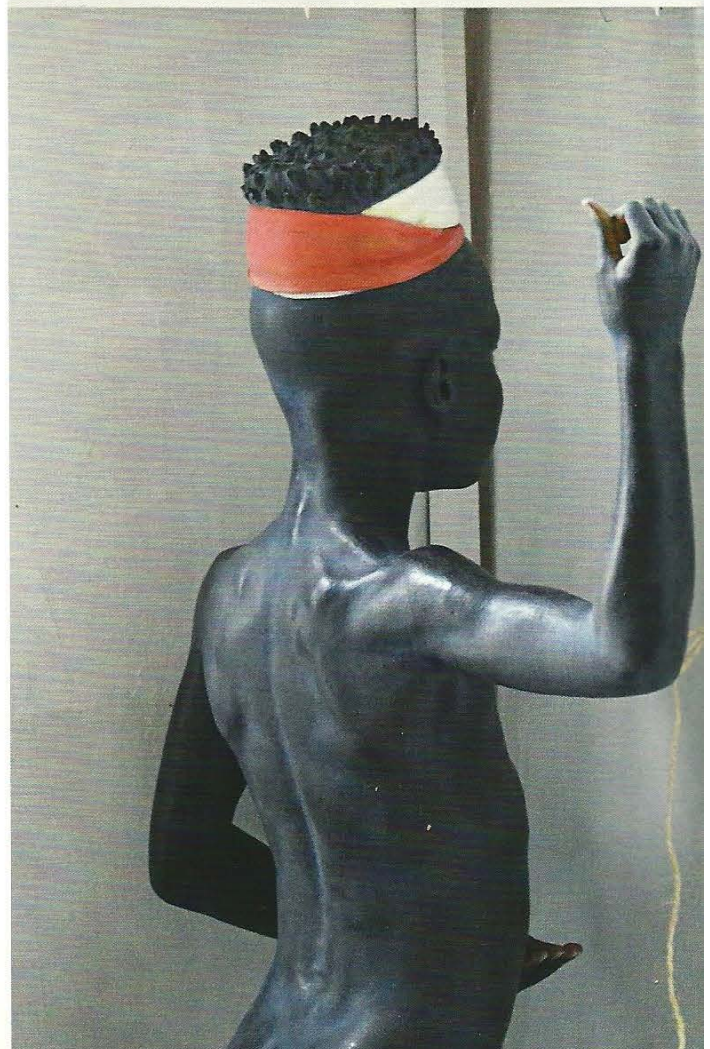
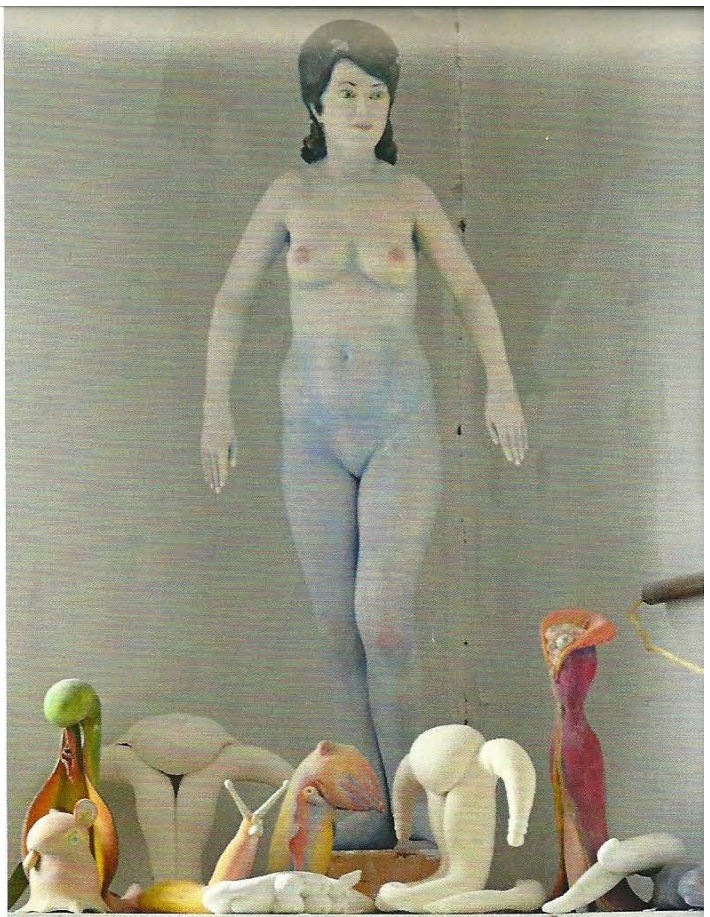
My method is indebted to training in figure modelling. It taught me the basics of coherent form: to control an outline in space, subdivide volumes and make them interact, observe detail as 3 dimensional shape rather than line. Once I have fully envisioned a piece, I work from photographs to make a full body portrait. I build the body up like a pinch pot, letting the clay harden as I progressed so it won't sag. I use modelling tools for general shaping when the clay is flexible, and refine the surface with fine rasps at leather hard. Larger pieces are built on an armature that is removed before firing. I finish and fire from the bottom up, eventually gluing the sections together. Copious time is spent carving the surface, into a rhythm of undulations that feels like cause and effect. When the curves flow and work with the anatomy, I finish and fire. I paint the bisque with casein, using many translucent layers. All that said, though, my fundamental craft is the understanding of form – it would be very difficult to hollow build the shapes upon which I carve without that understanding. My technique is tied to an underlying emotional stance and philosophical point of view. Curve rhythms carry emotion in form, similarly to phrasing in musical composition: they can be placid or agitated or loose or sharp. I believe that neurologically, patterns and curves, i.e. graphs of reality, are the way the brain grasps reality, and that the loving gaze travels over the body and face along harmonious curves. When I impose a curve structure upon ruthless observation, I feel I am evoking a tension between ideal and real. I use beautiful rhythm to get people involved with my work, so I can seduce them into seeing truth.

The truth is that mortal bodies are flawed and idiosyncratic. When you observe proportions accurately you see how idealized the bodies we are accustomed to in art are. My creatures are of the flesh, imperfect. But their geometry longs for beauty, purpose, and transcendence. I think there is a pervasive feeling of inadequacy in our culture, reflected in the prevalence of plastic surgery. I reiterate this human drama metaphorically by forcing real looking, complicated people to pose as heroes.

Where does the imagery in your new body of work come from, what does it signify to you and how (if at all) does it fit in with earlier work?

In the early 1990s I had experimented with little surrealist objects, maybe 3-7" tall. At the time, I was especially interested in shapes that provoke emotional reaction, and particularly in creating conflicted reactions. I felt I could make even the most awkward of physical proportions look attractive by resolving curves. But I was also interested in the opposite, in making form repulsive. As a child I had been fascinated with icky things: worms, insects, spiders, and especially grossed out by leaches. My family had had a pet praying mantis that would perch on my forearm as its big abdomen would pulse and almost touch – icky and exciting. I saved earthworms from puddles, and particularly loved spiders.

Anyway, I freely experimented with lots of little animated forms (I had a no face rule) that would be both attractive and repulsive at once. For inspiration I looked at salamanders,



lampreys, parasites, caterpillars, slugs – by necessity very sensual animals, since they don't think much. I'd combine familiar gestures with alien shapes, and came up with quite a menagerie.

The fear and disgust we feel for very primitive life forms has strange implications for human sexuality, since soft flesh is reminiscent of human genitalia. Weirdly, the pursuit of beauty and romance secretly aims for a reward that is wormy, gnarled and gooey. Has the mutual attraction between mating snails been preserved through evolution all the way up to humanity? I think the underlying biology of life has been cleansed or censored from traditional nude figures, to shield us from our participation in the primitive.

The big worms embody that participation. They are like "intelligent design", where the creator directs evolution with the final masterpiece in mind – human gesture is prefigured in their crawl. The cephalopods add presence of mind to that mix. Plus, with their mutable shapes – bulges, cleavages, and wrinkles – can look like other things. Those double entendres you might not see on the first look. I had fun.

Wolfram Ladda studied fine art in Kassel and New York. He has lived in New York since 1978 and writes occasionally for NEW CERAMICS.





Judy Fox was born in New York City in 1957 and today lives in Elizabeth, New Jersey. In 1974, she studied at Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, RI, and at Yale University, graduating with a B.A. 1976 Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Skowhegan, ME. 1978 Yale University, New Haven, CT. She spent 1979 at the Ecole Supérieur des Beaux Arts in Paris, 1983 at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, New York, NY; M.A. in art history (1983) and restoration (1985). She has received honours from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the National Academy of Design. In 2006 she received a scholarship from the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation and the New York Foundation for the Arts. The prices of her work are between \$10,000 and \$100,000, depending on size. Medium-sized children cost \$50,000.

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