

FRIEZE

Erika Verzutti's Material Tricks

The first major US survey of the artist's work at the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, is a joyful display of her syncretic ways of making

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Erika Verzutti's *The Dress* (2015) comprises a pair of thick bronze wall reliefs, identical save for their colour: one is painted gold and white; the other black and blue. If the palette seems familiar, it might be because you recall the image of a dress – white and gold or black and blue, depending on your perspective – which went viral the same year, sparking an epistemic crisis about how unstable and subject to interpretation the world is.



Erika Verzutti, *Crisis of Sculpture*, 2023, polystyrene, papier-mâché, brass, and oil, 1.4 × 2.1 m. Courtesy: the artist and Andrew Kreps

The more than 60 sculptures in 'New Moons', Verzutti's current exhibition at the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College, emphasize the ways in which the cross-pollination of references and modes of making can scramble logic and complicate meaning. Wax looks like brie cheese in the wall relief *Gober* (2016), while the lumpy *Turtle* (2015) more closely resembles a modernist coffee table than the eponymous reptile. In the newly commissioned wall work *Crisis of Sculpture* (2023), veiny limbs ending in brass moons sit on a gouged celestial surface that you desperately want to stick your fingers into. Constant play with materials both 'high' (bronze, wood, porcelain) and 'low' (clay, Styrofoam, papier-mâché) underlines the performativity of Verzutti's objects: heavily tactile bodies evoking plants, animals, cosmic formations or a slightly confusing combination thereof.



Erika Verzutti, *Tarsila Com Novo / Tarsila with New*, 2011, bronze, acrylic and graphite, 28 × 54 × 29 cm. Courtesy: the artist, Fortes D'Aloia & Gabriel, Andrew Kreps Gallery and Alison Jacques; photograph: Eduardo Ortega

Verzutti refers to groups of her works as 'families' (rather than the more generic 'series'), evoking the importance of interconnection and kinship across her practice. In her well-known family 'Tarsilas', bowed phallic shapes recalling the vegetal forms of *Sol poente* (Setting Sun, 1929), by fellow Brazilian artist Tarsila do Amaral, entangle with iridescent balls or balloon-like vegetables referencing the work of Jeff Koons. Verzutti has reproduced the embrace across numerous sculptures varying in scale and materiality, each signalling her fascination with rebirth and troubling the notion of the 'unique' art object. This promiscuous treatment of art history echoes throughout the show: in *Missionary* (2011), for instance, a sliced papaya forms the head of an inclining gourd reminiscent of Constantin Brâncuși's phallic *Princess X* (1915–16), while the playful sexuality of recurring orbs moonlighting as breasts, balls or eggs sit within the lineage of Brazilian feminist artists including Celeida Tostes. The endless possible chains of association reverberate with the concept of *anthropofagia* (anthropophagy), posited by Brazilian writer Oswald de Andrade in his *Manifesto Antropófago* (Cannibalist Manifesto, 1928), about how Brazilian modernism emerges from its distinct ability to 'devour' disparate cultural influences. Verzutti, however, doesn't so much eat as chew, spitting out hybrid forms always in the process of becoming something else.



Erika Verzutti, 'New Moons', 2023, installation view. Photograph: Olympia Shannon

A mini survey of Verzutti's works from the past 15 years is arranged in a long procession within the exhibition's second gallery – a 'parade', as curator Lauren Cornell calls it in the exhibition literature, teeming with joy, irreverence and liveliness. The tenderness of Verzutti's material process affords each of the differently scaled works a kind of sentience, acting as maybe the one unifying principle across a practice dedicated to deprivileging cohesion. Flanking one end of the procession is an arrangement of 632 pieces of studio detritus – poked, prodded and discarded stones and pieces of clay brought back from the dead to form the new configuration *Cemitério com Franja* (Cemetery with Fringe, 2014). At the parade's other end, *Pavão* (Peacock, 2014) displays a fan of plumage made up of brushes, presumably the same ones Verzutti used to paint the bird's clay body. Making and 'made' collapse into freely fluctuating forms where a singular aesthetic experience becomes impossible: *The Dress*, as Verzutti presents it, is both blue *and* gold; and if you stare at either side for long enough, it might just change colour.

Erika Verzutti's 'New Moons' is at the **Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College** until 15 October

Main image: 'New Moons', 2023, installation view. Photograph: Olympia Shannon