

CULTURED

Paris When it Sizzles: a Preview of Paris+ par Art Basel

Kat Herriman

October 18, 2022



Kim Farkas, *22-20*, 2022.

“What I would like is for collectors to explore Paris beyond the postcard,” Paris+ par Art Basel director Clément Delépine says ahead of the inaugural edition of the fair. “I would also want people who are perhaps intimidated or, not interested in visiting the fair, to find something about it whether that is a curated program of sculptures in the Tulleries, which is absolutely free, or a program of conversations with not necessarily artist but people like Jeremy O’Harris, illuminating. We aren’t a school per say, but we provide a context, the kind that might lead you to a masterpiece that you wouldn’t see anywhere else.”

In this way the fair’s first edition, which officially opens to VIPs this Wednesday and runs through the weekend, has two audiences, much like the city in which it is situated: the tourists and the locals. Delépine and his team, who had less than a year to put the event together, took the two birds getting stoned approach—opting for an extensive conversation series that is open to the public, with or without fair entry, as well as an emphasis on off-site projects that sprawl out around the city, hoping to entice those that live there, as well as bring the out-of-towners to explore corners that they haven’t previously tread.



On Kim Farkas' vesical sculptures

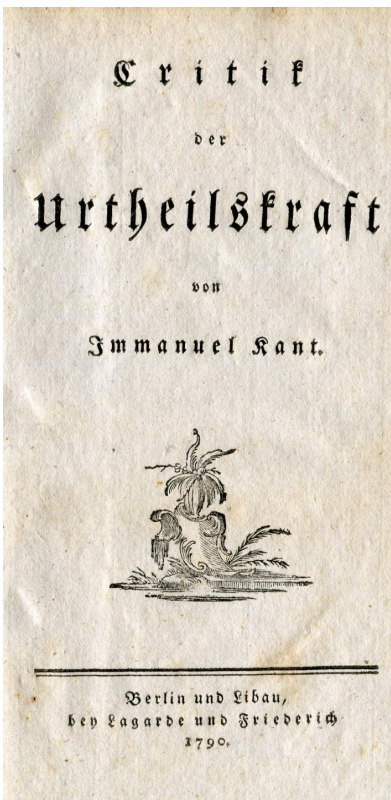
by Stefano Pirovano

Kim Farkas pursues the Kantian idea of the manifold forming a unity as a concept that leads to pleasure (and the first edition of Paris +)

After meeting Kim Farkas (born 1988, based in Paris), one realizes how an artist can be deeply immersed in the present. Yet, the 230 year-old *Critique of Judgment* by Immanuel Kant offers two passages that say more about his luminous vesical sculptures than what we could possibly do. Let's take a deep breath and jump back over two centuries in the history of ideas to observe that:

1) If the harmony of [something] manifold to [form] a unity is to be called perfection, then we must present it through a concept; otherwise we must not give it the name perfection. [1]

2) An aesthetic judgment is one in which the basis determining it lies in a sensation that is connected directly with the feeling of pleasure and displeasure. [2]



Immanuel Kant, *Critik der Urtheilskraft*, Berlin und Libau: Lagarde und Friederich, 1790. First edition, courtesy of Rudi Thoemmes Rare Books, London.

Take the first statement: if you have been lucky enough to handle the Farkas' pieces, or have seen him at work, what strikes is the perfection with which its parts are assembled together, down to the smallest detail. In contemporary art, perfection often bears a negative connotation, which can nonetheless change to something praiseworthy if it becomes an expressive element, i.e., it becomes the imprint of those "clear and distinct ideas" (to put it as Kant did) that are the foundation of the sublime. We know how much Picasso, an artist whose work has been considered perfect in his own way, despised Raphael's precision. This does not mean that Raphael ceases to be a master, or Picasso is not to be considered a perfectionist. Two contemporary artists such as Olafur Eliasson and his pupil Tomas Saraceno also tend to formal perfection in respect to mastering the plasticity of light; Farkas follows a similar research path.



Kim Farkas *22-04*, 2022 (detail). Custom composites, LED bulb and fixture, stainless steel. Courtesy of
courtesy of the artist and Downs & Ross, New York. Photo: Gregory Copitet.

Raising the bar to the level of the mind and looking at the narrative in Farkas' vesical sculptures, the elements of its general poetics converge into the "unity" mentioned by Kant. The objects that constitute his sculptures—selected first, drowned in epoxy resin after—are excerpts from a conversation centered around his persona, a story that promises to remain open to the intellectual evolution of the author and his environment. Farkas has Peranakan roots, a South Asian ethnicity whose long and complex history granted the opening of a dedicated museum in Singapore, the city where Farkas lived before moving to Paris. The distance of his "perfect" works from the type of executive perfection typical of industrial production becomes a reflection on his life story. The agreement of the multiple in unity—concept merges with form—becomes evident in his "vesicas."



Kim Farkas *22-04*, 2022. Custom composites, LED bulb and fixture, stainless steel. Courtesy of the artist and Downs & Ross, New York. Photo: Gregory Copitet.

Let's look at the second Kant statement mentioned above. Like lamps, Farkas' pieces contain a light bulb that, when on, illuminates the resin-fixed objects of the main body; these are things found in the many Chinatowns of the world or 3D prints of the artist's own designs. They come alive with light, sparkling reflections and, especially when they alone illuminate what's around them, causing the kind of visual pleasure Kant might have referred to. (Think of the candle on the table, a lighthouse in the night, the stars in an unpolluted sky.) Clearly, the idea of artistic beauty has greatly evolved since Kant wrote his *Critique of Judgment*, and so has our aesthetic judgment. Displeasure does not necessarily lead to negativity; some artists even start with such feelings to change the nature of the beautiful. Today, few would question Picasso for the same reasons that he was questioned—even considered revolutionary—in his time. What is beautiful is replaced by what is expressive; a contemporary taste for Central African masks, Matisse's paintings, unfinishedness, and unrestored furniture that has made the fortune of an astute dealer like Axel Vervoordt attest to this change.



On Grist and Sunstroke, duo show with Justin Chance at CFAlive Milano installation view

For Farkas, the pursuit of the pleasant is as bold as it is functional. As in the early seventeenth century European Caravaggist paintings, he uses light to reveal, and like Eliasson or Dan Flavin before him, he builds a symbolic space with it, a location that evokes distinctive features of a composite culture. Like the art of his friend Naoki Sutter Shudo, with whom he founded the publishing house Holoholo Books in 2015, Farkas' vesical sculptures exist to represent, functioning as if they were figurative paintings extended into the third dimension. However, if for Sutter Shudo light is only suggested (a street lamp in his piece does not really turn on), Farkas means for it to happen in real life; he includes electric wires, switches, plugs, bulbs, or anything else that serves to carry light, to turn on his vesical sculpture not so much like a lantern as like a firefly.



Kim Farkas, *22-20*, 2022, Custom composites, PETG, LED, electronics, H.248 X ø60cm),
photo: Grégory Copitet.

On the occasion of the first edition of Paris +, as part of the projects conceived for the Jardin des Tuileries, Farkas will present his first outdoor work. The sculpture is titled *22-20*, meaning his twenty-second work of 2022. The choice to title the works following a sequential numbering is a way to underline the logic of consequentiality to which his works respond. They are organic entities that evolve in a process of bivalent adaptation. On the one hand, as we have said, they change in relation to the poetic necessity of which they are an expression. On the other hand, they adapt to their environment. For the Jardin des Tuileries, Farkas' sculptural surface thus loses its transparency to become dark, reflecting what is around it instead of allowing a glimpse of what it contains. The light does not cast the shadows of the objects immersed in the "vesica," but shines through, so to speak, from a harmonic complex of muscle masses. The scale of representation appears reversed: from small to large, from a cellular entity to a structured body. The agreement of the multiple into unity as a concept that again leads to visual pleasure.

[1] Immanuel Kant, "Critique of Judgment", translated by Werner s. Pluhar. Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis/Cambridge, 1987, p. 416.

[2] Ibid. p. 413.

Numéro

Alien-like sculptures by Kim Farkas, from tradition to sci-fiction

ART 13 JANUARY 2022

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For each issue, *Numéro art* showcases the French artistic scene's most promising young talents. Today, focus on artist Kim Farkas, whose alien-like sculptures and molded shapes become crossroads for centennial traditions and sci-fi fantasies.

Through his sculptures and installations, 33-year-old French artist Kim Farkas, who is of Peranakan and American descent, develops a speculative materiology from contrary polarities: out of their zones of friction and points of contact, form emerges. Among his pieces is an oblong envelope that evolves, grows and develops, adorned with the liquid reflections of a toxic preciousness. Barely petrified, as if animated by muffled palpitations, it swallows and digests various found objects taken from the real-world economy of goods and merchandise that are then reinjected into the symbolic economy of Farkas's oeuvre. More specifically, these opposing polarities concern the multiple ways in which time-honoured beliefs meet post-Fordist globalization.



Kim Farkas, 20-16 (2020). Composites Materials, copper spring, funeral incense sticks and Reiki stones. 37,5 X 7,5 cm.

In his more recent work, the surface effects, which result from a reappropriation of DIY techniques – from tuning to hacking – are partially reterritorialized through contact with commemorative objects produced for export to Asian communities abroad (reiki pieces or votive papers), while the post-natural organicity of pieces resembling epiphytic organs or digestive ducts is achieved through a gradual purification of his referential apparatus, as Farkas moves away from representation to presentation.

While studying at Paris's École des Beaux-Arts, Farkas began moulding heads in polished resin that bore a resemblance to the augmented, or at least altered, humanity of science fiction: alien heads, which would later become empty shells. These then mutated into ducts, tubes and abdomens – the oblong pouches that constitute his current work – which retain a resonance with the body. Though at first glance this body no longer has anything human about it, that doesn't mean it is fictional: through radicalization and exacerbation, it reflects the contemporary porosity of a body that is, from the outset, traversed by the non-human flows that inform it in return. In his 2015 essay *Tentacles Longer Than Night* – the final part of a trilogy on “the horror of philosophy” – Eugene Thacker invoked the “tentacle” as a figure of thought to signify the meaning of a contemporary world that has gone beyond the Modernist opposition between inside and outside, in the same way as Junji Ito's *Uzumaki* manga series (1998–99). Ito imagined a city that gradually transforms into a spiral: the shape begins to inform all its constituent parts, from blades of grass to houses, until it devours the inhabitants, who become demented and succumb to murderous madness. As Ito recounts, “The madness of the city's inhabitants is inspired by a duplicity: the tangible presence of the spiral combined with its intangible abstraction.” Farkas's tubular envelopes have a similar relationship to figuration, while emphasizing the more directly socialized phenomenon of “creolization,” as he refers to it. Complex and resistant, fluid and iridescent, his forms materialize diasporic individuals composed of layers of memory, geography and economic flows, summoned to constitute themselves as entities in the very absence of totality.



Kim Farkas, 21-24 (Detail) [2021]. Composites boxes, Loud-speaker and sound and video amplifier (11 min, 58s).

Art in America

SWALLOWED SYMBOLS: KIM FARKAS AT DOWNS & ROSS

By Travis Diehl, November 12, 2021



The sights and sounds of consumption wafted through Kim Farkas's recent exhibition "Permaculture" at Downs & Ross gallery in New York—although not from the streets below. A large projection in the first room showed footage of thick, translucent noodles saturated with dark sauce, blended with images of storefronts piled with bright-hued goods. The compilation of found videos toured a range of cuisines: The noodles in the foreground switched from round to flat, kinky to straight; the bowls became plates and then trays. A nest of ramen appeared, topped with four fried eggs. In the background, two women danced across a stage advertising Mamee, a Malaysian dry-noodle brand popular worldwide. A pair of chopsticks jabbed across the frame, maneuvering noodles mouthward, and the gentle ambiance of Peranakan Malay and accented English, songs and conversation, was broken by amplified squishes and slurps.

Ingestion was a theme throughout. The bulk of the show consisted of more than a dozen long organ- or jelly-like resin sculptures, seemingly folded and scalloped. Embedded in the resin were goods of the sort available in the gallery's neighborhood, and probably in any given Chinatown: dice, mahjong tiles, reiki stones, melamine bowls, and joss papers depicting watches, electronics, and banknotes made to be burned as offerings for ancestors.

As the anonymous eaters in the video grazed on Asian foods, these sculptures seemed to ingest, without analysis, the broadest signifiers of Chinese culture. Although the show points to New York's Chinatown by physical association, and while the video depicts other specific (yet unidentified) locales, its focus on mass-produced goods seemed to elide the regional and transcultural customs that distinguish one place from another. Farkas's sculptures gesture toward a composite Chinatown—not unlike the way Cady Noland's bullets and Budweiser cans “represent” the United States.

This generic form of cultural reference, the vague way the paraphernalia of gambling and superstition “flavor” the sculpture, suggests the sin of cultural appropriation, which leads to questions about the artist's identity. In this case, the press release—a letter to the artist from Los Angeles-based curator and writer Ana Iwataki—opens up the possibility of reading the work as an

illuminated sign of diasporic life: Farkas has a Peranakan (people of Chinese descent born in the Indonesian archipelago) and Jewish background (the word “diaspora” originally pertained to dispersed Jews), suggesting that he holds a genuine relationship to the ingredients on view. “Permaculture” might infuse the everywhere replicable space of the white cube with touchstones of Asian culture. With the sculptures' soft shapes and the video's comforting bustle, Farkas's show suggests the open, accessible sculptures and performances of relational aesthetics, known for convivial situations (dinner parties, arrangements of living room furniture) framed as art that, while attentive to how different people shape the experience, seem reproducible almost anywhere.

“Permaculture” captured some of the synesthetic pleasure of wandering through the Bowery and Chinatown, the lamp shops and kitchen suppliers, the languages and intonations on the crowded sidewalks. It also tokenized this atmosphere into a further set of commodities. As in a line of high-end home decor, Farkas modified the same forms into objects with different functions: the tubular resin pieces became wall-mounted sconces, freestanding sculptures, or illuminated mobiles suspended from bare copper wire. These can be fitted with LEDs, tinted burnt orange and purple by the gradient airbrushed on the objects' surfaces, or with speakers, as in the twin sculptures flanking the video. Farkas's sculptures exist in limbo: grounded yet dislocated, not lamps but not not lamps, sensitive to and sited in Chinatown ambiance but above it, too.

In mainland China, Xi Jinping has moved to ban the burning of joss paper goods, ostensibly to cut pollution but also to stifle a superstitious practice, just as he has restricted art and film. Meanwhile, Farkas's show treats the material culture of the diaspora itself as a magical bridge across huge distances, not just between people or cultures, but also between spiritual and mortal planes, or from art to not-art—in the hope that the good of one place might enter the other, and that the artist won't have to choose.

