

# ARUSHA

GALLERY

The exhibition *Strange Company* features a new body of work by Kim L Pace that takes us on a journey into an unfamiliar world, populated by hybrid beings. Ensembles of exquisitely made and vividly coloured mask-like faces, reclining figures, and richly detailed storytelling vessels provoke us to expand upon our ideas about the intersections and blurred boundaries between the human and nonhuman realms. Pace invites us to explore the spaces between the known and the unknown in her new works, where we may uncover connections with whatever ‘strange company’ we find ourselves in.

Writer Kyran Joughin discusses the process and works in the exhibition with artist Kim L Pace. They talk about the works in relation to their interests in common, of giving ‘voice’ to inanimate objects and materials, in order to explore both other forms of being and the position of the ‘other’.

Kyran: I noticed you talk a lot about letting go or letting something happen in the process of making your work; there’s a corollary to that, which is that while ‘letting go’ but not necessarily engaging the unconscious, you are at once becoming most yourself and becoming other. Can we talk about you and clay, or what of you is also encountered in your material?

Kim: Yes, letting go of control is part of my approach. Rather than an automatic process, it’s more discovering something I have a hunch about, and perhaps come to see more fully through making. I work with a range of materials however clay has a distinctive nature that sets it apart. When manipulating clay, it almost guides me, revealing its own characteristics that can inspire new ideas, fostering a kind of collaborative process. I’m also excited by the unpredictability and transformation of clay and glazes during making and firing. I find this sort of ‘channelling’ and dynamic interaction really compelling. I also bring an intentional, conscious approach into the process, which leans towards intellectualising and reaffirming established ideas, so collaborating with the clays’ inherent qualities enables me to discover new things.

Kyran: Your work is very much about something becoming something else. As a viewer, not knowing quite what you're looking at is a good place to be. I think it gives you a pause, you slow down the viewer through the indeterminate qualities, for example, you ask yourself - is this permanent or it could be changed again? You don't necessarily know how stable something is, or how precious it is; you have a sense it's been manipulated, but you don't know if that manipulation just ended, or if it could be changed again. Where a work has a knitted-like texture for example, or is reptile-like, you're not sure if it's hard or soft, if it's friend or foe, which is always in your work and is really unexpected in ceramic.

Kim: I do seek ambiguity in my work, I want questions to arise for the viewer, and to arouse a slight feeling of discomfort, laced with a sense of endearment for the characters. Working in this way I hope to engage with the viewer in a sort of dialogue, rather than telling them what to think or feel when they encounter my work. The excitement of evoking human/ nonhuman qualities in the clay, like fur or skin, is also really important to me and helps to convey the characters’ hybridity.

Kyran: A mask waiting to be inhabited is unheimlich. It's a shell, a person but with none of the signs of life we look for, like eyes. Some of your masks or mask-like works provoke questions like, is it supposed to be worn, or is something behind it? Is it a mask, or is it a form that has something of a mask, in that they're frontal? Tell me more about what the attraction is to masks, or why you don't make the back of the head in these works, which you have done in your figures.

Kim: The figures are more fully realised characters that came from a desire to embody a whole being. The mask-form emerges when working quickly with clay in slab form, and it's a really different process to making a whole figure or a head. I want the mask forms to suggest nascent beings that appear to be emerging, coming into being and that convey a sense of immediacy. My father gave me a collection of masks, previously used for ceremonial or initiation purposes and I found them quite frightening and also appealing. The masks seemed to symbolise our relationship too, as in the metaphorical masks we wear to present ourselves to the world. I'm also really captivated by the expressiveness of European folk masks from carnival and early theatre, where the performer becomes 'other'.

Kyran: Your figures have limbs that look posable, they have eyes and mouths but no feet or hands. I think the hollow body suggests the potential for something that could happen, and this links to your hollow vessels. I notice the titles of your urns and receptacles imply they are things for holding stories, which relates to the whole history of ceramics.

Kim: The figures blur the lines between human, natural, and spiritual realms, and I wanted to pare back and use the barest elements I could to convey a presence. Clay has to be hollow, or it'll explode when fired and I decided to make a feature of that. Also, hollow figures could be inhabited, they suggest the flow of air, perhaps being taken in and then expelled. Historically vessels have often been more than functional, they were as much about storytelling, often specific events, like battles, festivities, rights-of-passage and mythological themes.

Kyran: With a vessel there's a speculative quality, a suggested narrative, that has a broad dimension of time; it seems familiar, but it is also strange. It's not the linear form of a page, it's a sculptural form which holds something and then tells its own story around the outside, so it's a magical thing as well. Your works hold stories, and they are also for catching the stories that haven't been written or told. You're not telling a specific story with your vessels.

Kim: I've just been working on a vessel which is populated by a huge quantity of figures. These characters are interacting in certain ways where you can't tell if it's violent or affectionate; I like the idea of suggesting potential, perhaps conflicting readings. This particular work is in the 'Family Secrets' series, some of which are included in the exhibition. There's definitely a nub of very personal experience integrated into the work, but as the title suggests, it's not explicit.

Kyran: Yes, it's about making the space. There's an element in your work of inviting the viewer to empathise with a gesture, but also or instead, an invitation to recognise a more abstract emotion and empathise with that. Often it speaks from a really particular experience but it takes a shape that people can inhabit. In other words, you have made something that other people can fit themselves into. As a viewer, you go into an enquiry where you're oh, wait, I have had something like this, so it's more recognising

something about yourself, which affects you more deeply, rather than feeling 'for' the artist who is making the work. Encountering the work becomes an opportunity, rather than a didactic moment, there's a story there although you're not pinning it down.

Kim: I find working with specific stories, even taking on a persona, a bit limiting for me - for example, to work in a very confessional mode I would feel I'm trapped in the story, like a butterfly in a glass paperweight. I have time for the feminist dictum 'the personal is political', although I'm making work that is multi-dimensional and nuanced, rather than sensational or Voyeuristic.

I also explore future potentialities as much as the past; that's why I engage with the fantastical, which links to my long-term interest in popular and folk culture and tales. It's the enduring magical elements of fairy and folk tales I love, where animals and inanimate objects speak or shapeshift and perhaps reveal an underlying relation between human beings and all phenomena. The wood from a tree that has been cut down is still alive with the currents that charge the forest it came from, and in the works 'Daphne Flees Apollo', 'Otik's Quest' and 'Leshy's Revenge', I'm working directly with these ideas. Invisible forces or magical beings can contradict the laws of physics, logic and probability, and enable us to explore that which cannot be expressed, that which is too difficult to describe or perhaps not productive to attempt to do so. For me, it's very much about wonder, in every sense of the word.

*Kyran Joughin and toy bear Little Red Ted (we/us) collaborate in image and text, working out of L.A and London. Their work includes voices which are of bodies but not embodied, both animate and inanimate, using fiction and nonfictional forms. @petitoursrouge*

*Multi-media artist Kim L Pace works with a focus on ceramic sculpture. With over 25 solo (& duo) shows, including museum spaces in the UK, USA, Ireland and Australia, her recent group exhibitions include Royal Academy, London; Saint Quentin la Poterie, France; Rome and Lake Como, Italy and Sedona, Arizona USA. @kimpstagram*