

Tamara Zahaykevich

In Conversation with Meg Lipke and Anne Schaefer

*We had the privilege of seeing this work as it was born in the studio, and with the great excitement it elicited, we began formulating questions about the work. Tamara's work is currently exhibited as part of a two-person exhibition at **Turley Gallery**, October 7–October 29, 2023.*

Turley Gallery

98 Green St, Hudson, NY 12534.

Open Friday–Sunday, 12–5 PM, and by appointment.

AS: New components of the work have been generated by casting older forms in the studio. Prior works in progress that had been set aside have been given new life by being grafted to new sculptural elements. Pedestals are repurposed and fully integrated into the sculptural works. Found objects have made their way into the work. Molds and editions from your residency at Dieu Donne have been utilized. How are you considering your past informing your new work?

TZ: I think about two things in the consideration of this question: 1. utilizing what I have on hand and 2. a continuation of a/my language. My studio shelves are stacked with paint, plaster, paper, pulp and tools such as saws and sanders. Rubber molds have accumulated over 30 years, and larger artworks - cumbersome space hogs - are all fair game for use in generating new objects. I love the term grafting because it suggests re-generation.

ML: I like the idea of elements in the studio being roots to graft on to.

TZ: Thinking about the piece with the bag (*holding on kelter*, 2023), there was a grafting with that piece. It started with an older, abandoned work and with the addition of several new stacked elements that are almost like strata - these new elements have been grafted to give it life as a hybrid form.

ML: This desire to accept new identities in the work is an impulse that runs through the show.

TZ: I agree. My fascination with materials and process is a constant feed of ideas that informs how I make something. In the physical sense, I question how materials can be supportive? How do gravity and structural elements affect the success of a form? Molds avail the imprinting, by repetition, of the language that I've been building since the conception of the early faceted foam core works.

AS: Interesting, in the same way repetition was used in the faceted foam core works, do you think about the casting as an activity you would repeat, as in the creation of multiples?

TZ: Yes, I would cast from the same form multiple times but for use in unique ways - not as a conventional edition. The process becomes incredibly iterative. Each move generates the next and I like the idea of one thing generating multiple



holding on kelter, 2023

Foam board, plaster, wood, paper, paint, metal, clay, casters, 63.5 x 24 x 21.5 in

offshoots - each one connected to the mold but taking on a life of its own.

ML: Let's talk about the pedestal and its place in this show. In your work you've used the pedestal before as a neutral plinth that a sculpture might appear to sit or droop on, and you've also made bodies of work that hang flat on the wall. The pedestal is innately and historically part of sculpture presentation, and here you're integrating it instead of using it for its function. How did you arrive here?

TZ: The pairing of object and pedestal often seems ridiculous to me. The pedestal is expected to be this neutral object that serves the function of display/presentation. For this reason I was in fact terrified of the pedestal for years and thought a lot about how to make it relevant. It seemed to me that an equivalency had been established between painting relying on a wall as a neutral support to a sculpture/form relying on a plinth. The floor is more wall-like than the plinth is, by nature of being planar. I have never viewed the plinth as neutral, always noticing how it's treated and considered as well as how well it supports the form. Has it been used before to display another work? If so, how many times has it been painted? Can I see the paint roller marks on the surface? Until I could contemplate integrating the pedestal with the form, I dared to only



Old Man of the Mountain, 2000,
Foam board, 22 x 48 x 10 in.



Things Would Be Different If I'd Been to Arizona, 2000, Foam board, 21 x 8 x 7 in.



In Position, 2006, Foam core, 49.5 x 14 x 13 in.

make works on the floor as in past works, *Old Man of the Mountain* and *Things Would Be Different If I'd Been to Arizona*. But since the floor can be unsafe for the presentation of smaller scale pieces, a pedestal can be utilized to keep the pieces safe.

The first "pedestal-head" was *In Position*. It's a small abstract body/form seeming to have its legs crossed, hanging over and extending beyond the boundaries of the plinth. The early pedestals were built out of foam core, the material that I used for everything at the time. The assembling of the foam core naturally showed the hand, the imperfect knife cuts, and buckling caused by viscous glue. I've made more pieces that hang on the wall than sit on the floor. So I still get very excited that there are so many possibilities for interfering with the plinth in relation to the combination of variables that are supplied by the form. There are also inexhaustible scenarios to question the pedestal's function and issues of display. Constantin Brâncuși, Nicole Cherubini, Anthony Caro and Rachel Harrison are several sculptors that come to my mind when I think about non-neutral pedestal use.

ML: Some of the forms appear to mimic ceramic vessels, but instead of a hard, earth-made material, they are made from very thin paper. The forms recall vases or urns, but their function is ineffable - they appear to hint at

something the viewer has to ascertain. Anne and I have discussed that this dynamic elicits a connection to the interiority and exteriority of the body. Do you agree?

TZ: YES

ML: Additionally, there is humor in this work, as well as the tragedy of being human. Can you talk about how you balance these two impulses in the work?

TZ: The function of the vessel is still somewhat of a mystery to me as well. I suppose that a paper vessel holds space and has volume. Vessels hold and vessels also need to be held - a duality that is very compelling to me. In the case of *for real*, it stands in as a head, as does *holding on kelter*.

I went to school at a time when ceramics were very much considered craft and not in the same league as sculpture. There have long been suggestions for disrupting the functionality of the vessel to “elevate” it from craft. I’m glad that we have come to a time where the vessel can be a form in its own right.

I think the comic/tragic aspects of this work are attributed to the work being “in the round”. Whether a totem or a pedestal, the works create a natural relationship to the body. For me it is not a matter of balancing these attributes. They coexist. While imperfect, slouchy, and imbalanced, the forms stand and take space just as we do. Allowing for vulnerability is my antidote to years of reaching for perfection and achieving failure. Acceptance of human fallibility allows for breakthroughs.

The work gives me the opportunity to explore all these varied aspects of being human, some of which come naturally to me and others that are harder to embrace. A number of the pieces in this current exhibition have direct bodily associations.

AS: The bodily associations in *for real* are so palpable for me. Not only does the totem-like form relate to the body in scale, the physicality and abject nature of the surface are so incredibly visceral.

TZ: Yes, I think there are a lot of ways in which the materials may provide an entry point for the viewer to start making these associations without being overly prescriptive.

AS: There is a significant shift in color palette in this new body of work. Older work has often been characterized by an abundance of color and this new work embraces a lot of white. The primary material of paper and the process of paper casting is highlighted and seemingly privileged in the visual hierarchy of the work by leaving it unadorned and abstaining from additional interventions on the surface. How are you thinking about color in this new work?

TZ: Yeah, I’ve noticed that the palette is influenced by the incidental color of the materials I’m using instead of paint or color as a material. Chosen color occurs in my work when color is a starting point. These works were initiated largely with paper and paper pulp. Much of the work includes manufactured paper that was torn and wetted to cast over existing forms I’d made in the past. The incidental color that comes through is a transfer of what had previously been stuck to the mold or from what was on my gloves or fingers at the time of casting.

Color can shift perceptions of form. Color takes a back seat in



for real, 2023

Polystyrene, polymer mediums, fabric, paper, plaster, shellac, paint, pigments
88 x 20.5 x 12 in

this group of work, prioritizing form.

I have used found or gifted found objects as armatures. In this work, I am allowing those objects to be exposed - shown in their raw state, which is also providing incidental color. There is an expediency to working this way and embracing the raw materials. As well as a relief to abandoning the obsessive tendencies in past work, I felt a need to exert significant control over prior work and new strategies allow for breakthroughs.

AS: We often talk about work by examining opposite qualities, i.e. a tension between refined and rough or delicate and sturdy. These visual qualities quickly provide us an opportunity to engage with the gendered attributes they connote. I find this new work escapes these comparisons - the qualities of surface, the hybridization of forms, the suturing or grafting of elements together all disrupt binary comparisons. How are concepts of binary structures informing the development of this new work?

TZ: Some of my skill set falls into what is widely considered as “male skills.” A lot of this work involves engineering and building, which I have not formally studied. Being self-taught enables me to apply these skills to further enable the expansion of my language, explore possibility, as well as learning very specific things to support each individual piece. Building and the relationship it has with my body is really important to the work.

Perhaps the new work embraces a wide spectrum of qualities all being equally privileged, which is something that I believe connotes freedom. Every day I think about what it means to be a cis woman making art. In my personal life, when I become aware of sexist messaging, I ponder how I can reframe ingrained oppressive messages, so that I can push beyond limitations. In my work, it becomes a question of, Can I do this challenging thing that I haven't done before? Even if there is no precedent for it? Can I do it without needing permission? And the answer is always, Yes, I can do it and I will.

Tamara Zahaykevich (b. 1971) is a Ukrainian American artist, living and working in East Chatham, NY. Her work has been featured in solo exhibits at Satchel Projects (New York, NY), Jeff Bailey Gallery (Hudson, NY); Kansas (New York, NY); and Bellwether (Brooklyn, NY). Group exhibitions include ICA Boston (Boston, MA); Tibor de Nagy (New York, NY); The New Britain Museum of Art (New Britain, CT); The American Academy of Arts and Letters (New York, NY), and Feature, Inc (New York, NY). Zahaykevich is the recipient of two Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grants and has been in residency at Dieu Donn e Workspace Program, The Marie Walsh Sharpe Studio Program, Macdowell, and the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. Zahaykevich's work has been featured in BOMB, Hyperallergic, and The Brooklyn Rail, among others.

Meg Lipke, meglipkestudio.com, and ***Anne Schaefer***, anneschaeferstudio.com, are both artists living and working in Upstate NY. This interview is this first of a growing project of periodic conversations between 3 creatives highlighting one art practice - ***3inconversation.com***