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Hunt , 2013 cardboard, painted paper, wood, string
84 x 13 x 38 inches

Monika Zarzeczna: Sculpture and Collage

Lesley Heller Workspace through June 1, 2014
by Dar Dowling

In the middle of a fierce rain storm I headed out to the Lesley Heller Workspace, and was utterly blown away by the work of Monika Zarzeczna. While I walked through the space I found myself falling in love with the sculptures, and collages surrounding me, many of which are part her Trophy, Landscape, Stool Idol, and Souvenir Series.

There is something deliciously intangible about Zarzeczna's work, lush with color and textures, she takes you on a provocative and fascinating journey through a very peculiar, yet beautiful world. One where her sculptures may at times remind you of airplanes, toys, car parts, or perhaps discarded bits of debris, or something more magical that this Polish-Dutch artist has seen and been inspired by during her travels through the city and her Brooklyn neighborhood.

This is Zarzeczna's first solo show, and it's definitely a must see, so much so I recently caught up with her to learn more about her artistic journey, discovering along the way that she is just as intriguing as her work.

You started out working in the two dimensional and now you're making sculpture - how did that come about?

While in art school I always had trouble with the idea that the composition needed to fit inside the rectangle. I was more interested in what happened outside of the picture frame. So I started working with extra long paper, rolls, and book forms. Later on I even painted life



**Room with Wing , 2012 paper collage
28 x 33 inches**

size figures on canvas to be cut out and applied directly on the wall "sticker" style. Then one day in my school's studio complex, someone was getting rid of some plywood and this is really where I started making relief works, cutting out shapes, painting them and arranging them and leaning them against the wall. I liked how the 'fabricated' image had weight of it's own and gave into gravity the same way our bodies do. I also started toying with the idea that the art I made was an object in our reality, as well as it being the "window" to the imaginary, influencing our day both physically and mentally.

Did you begin transitioning into making sculpture at that point?

No, I still considered myself mostly a painter or "drawer" back then. These projects, and later ones involving walls of paper cutouts, were more like extended drawings. Instead of being constrained by the frame of an image, you can use the whole wall or room to create a narrative. I loved creating narratives with figures, so I basically continued working in 2D and every once in a while 3D. The idea of weight and gravity was put somewhere to ripen. I actually feel as if the sculpture was already inside me, and just waiting to come out.

So when did it emerge?

About 2 years ago I went back to Europe to visit my family and was traveling without my husband, so while killing hours in airports and on planes I spent a lot of time in my head. For some reason the idea of being cargo, packed in a metal tube and carried into the air, stuck with me. It started a whole session of thinking about vessels, containers and such.

When I came home to Brooklyn, an artist in my studio was throwing out very large sheets of cardboard and suddenly I had this urge to create a large airplane – in 3D. Working on this, learning about the material and about big shapes was a lot of fun. The first two sculptures were really just a test but by the 3rd, I realized that the now abstracted vessel I had made,



**Stool Idols: Perch1 , 2013
cardboard, paper, acrylic,
and tempera on paint
57 x 20 x 30 inches**

was communicating in a way I had not anticipated – it was very exciting. It felt like old ideas had finally



**Souvenir 4 , 2014 paper, string, and wood
27 x 4.5 x 6.5 inches**

ripened and I could now control them, use them as my vocabulary. Before I knew it I had a series of work that was communicating my ideas but at the same time telling me things I had not expected.

What is your process like when you're creating a piece of sculpture?

Ideas and observations from daily life build up. It might be a color combination I saw, a discarded object, the way seaweed moves in the water, or something else. All these impressions cause some sort of reaction but they usually get stored away somewhere –sometimes for years.

Then something more close to home or in the moment happens – maybe a piece of news or a growing awareness of a social problem - if it bugs me enough it becomes something I need to 'talk' about visually. At the same time the materials seem to just come to me, perhaps my husband brings me some residual materials from work, or a friend gives me stacks of thick colored paper or some acrylic paint he's no longer using.

All by chance and I might sit on those materials and ideas for a while but very slowly it's like a puzzle coming together. Also while making other pieces I get ideas for new shapes that might communicate my feelings about that piece of news, or what's bugging me about a social problem. Over time I start to see how I can use that discarded cardboard and acrylic paint in order to get a conversation going.

But then as the sculpture starts coming along it starts to show its own voice. This is the most exciting part of the process for me, because it's at this point when you really start to make something that surprises you, when you create something you have not seen before.

I've heard that you sometimes invite other artists into your process. How does that work?

I really rely on the feedback of other artists when a piece is almost done – not with all pieces, but with many of them. Sometimes a piece you make is so strange and new that it takes a while to get used to even if you are the maker. In those times I might ask an artist friend to come in and say what he or she thinks. Finding out that they are tickled by the piece encourages me to complete it. If it turns out the response is dead, I also know what to do.



**Landscape Drawing 1, 2012
ink, soft pastel, graphite, and colored pencil on paper**