



Art Review: Heads It's Tails

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by James Croak

The image of the Ouroboros manifests itself in a variety of cultures and eras that had little knowledge of each other: the image of a snake or serpent with its tail coming out of its own mouth, begetting itself or, in reverse, feasting on itself. You decide.

It was found in a funerary book in the circa 1350 BCE tomb of Tutankhamun, and shows up in the Middle Ages 28 centuries later as an alchemy symbol. Many contemporary psychologists find fascination and currency with the image, including Carl Jung and Erich Neumann, who saw it respectively as an archetype and as a stage of ego development.



Ouroboros drawing from a late medieval Byzantine Greek alchemical manuscript.

Sculptor Alexandre Arrechea is keen on the Ouroboros and showed immediate familiarity with its meaning at his well-attended Keszler Gallery Annex opening on July 20 on the site of the former Southampton Village power plant. The star piece of the show is the beautifully-constructed and comical Ouroboros of the Helmsley Building, a compelling piece that sculpture lovers dare not miss.

When Arrechea was asked why he selected the Helmsley Building, which squats on Park Avenue like a pissy vendor unwilling to budge for traffic, the sculptor offered "Queen of Mean," referring to the borough's nickname for the late Leona Helmsley, owner of the structure. Perfect. One historical usage of the Ouroboros is as a symbol of the eternal return. Hope not, actually, since once around with the "rhymes with rich" landlord was enough.

Helmsley, 2012 is a near perfect sculpture: launched with a mythological underpinning, pop, full of idea, and having the inner necessity that all great art exhibits.



Alexandre Arrechea with "Hemsley," 2012 at Keszler Gallery opening. Courtesy Keszler Gallery, New York, NY.

Arrechea has produced a series of large-scale sculptures based on New York City buildings, including the Chrysler building and the Empire State building. The bar was set awfully high by Arrechea himself with his *Helmsley*, 2012 and it's one the others don't vault. Several are curious objects with excellent metal work, but remain simple sight gags lacking anything important.

Using the Chrysler building as a coiled garden hose is novel, but what does that tell us about this 1930 Art Deco structure? It was a Great Recession era project by Walter P. Chrysler that kept many workers employed when other jobs had disappeared. Its massive and massively popular 61st floor eagle gargoyles are synonymous with New York City and now the structure is memorialized as a coiled hose?

Ditto for the Empire State Building, a large scale sculpture, which Arrechea has coiled into the Pentagon with its layers of connecting halls all in perfect scale, but, again, the point? This is another tour de force of metal work recently exhibited on Park Avenue, but the idea is AWOL.

No matter. The Helmsley-Ouroboros is enough for a show and indeed Arrechea packed them in last Saturday night for a fun opening at Keszler Gallery Annex. A DJ kept the mood festive, busy caterers kept the crowd fed, and the immense space made for a great Hamptons evening.



The Keszler Gallery Annex Opening on July 20, 2013.
Courtesy Keszler Gallery, New York, NY.

BASIC FACTS: The Keszler Gallery Annex is located at 200 North Sea Road, Southampton, NY 11968. www.keszlergallery.com.

Alexandre Arrechea's solo show is co-presented with MagnanMetz Gallery in New York City.

[MagnanMetz Gallery](#) presented Arrechea's "No Limits" installation along Park Avenue in conjunction with York City's Department of Parks & Recreation and The Fund for the Park. "No Limits" was on view from March 1, to June 9, 2013.

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