



ART REVIEW: Colin Christian Brings Sexy Back to the Future in “Cosplay”

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by Sandra Hale Schulman

Zap! Bam! Zowee!

If visual art made a noise, that’s what Colin Christian’s hyper-realistic, fetishistic, ComicCon and cinema saturated statues would sound like. These figurative sculptures, on view in “Colin Christian: Cosplay” through September 8 at the Vered Gallery in East Hampton, effectively conjure the psychedelic sci-fi aesthetic of the 1960s and ’70s—shiny, loud, cartoonish and anime.

The title of the show, “Cosplay,” is a conflation and abbreviation of “costume play.” Brought to 3D life in Christian’s life-size and larger than life fiberglass and silicone and LED light-infused works, these fembots—to borrow the appropriate “Austin Powers” and “Bionic Woman” term—straddle a wicked line between art and mass production toys for big boys.

The pieces were a big, buzzed-about hit at the Vered booth at different art fairs over the last two years, and have been featured in places as diverse as the permanent exhibition of the New York Museum of Sex and onstage with hip-hop provocateur Kanye West. Representing something akin to teen comic wet dreams come to life, the sculptures stand apart from the kind of work being shown at most contemporary galleries.

Even though Christian, born in London and currently based in Florida, was a high school dropout, he benefited from on the job training: It was only after making latex clothing for fetish stores that he came around to art, practically the only subject he enjoyed while he was in school.

According to his Vered website artist bio, he finds inspiration in “old sci-fi movies, pinup girl/supermodels, anime, ambient electronic music and H.P. Lovecraft,” and he infuses all of these elements in his work. Despite their initial sex doll impact, on closer inspection these are some badass babes who seem to be holding all the power and, perhaps, the keys to the secrets of the Universe.

Cast in resin, sanded, airbrushed to perfection and with glass eyes that sparkle with embedded Mylar stars, the double-take duality of these pieces causes a kind of bizarre “is it art?” confusion.

But the mass popularity of animated films, comic conventions and the sci-fi and fantasy genres, it seems, has now caught up to high end art. This kind of overlap serves as one explanation for the genesis of figurative sculpture like this—pieces evoking what the artist refers to as “modern mythology.”

In these figures there are timeless themes of good and evil, love and hate, peace and war. The yin

yang tension of the unity of all opposites is the cohesive force binding the light/dark polarities of these works.

Film is a major influence here; the works directly reference characters such as Barbarella, melded here with a popular pinup model named Miss Mosh for a figure, *Barbarella (Starring Miss Mosh)*, that includes its own psychedelic celluloid backdrop.



“Barbarella (Starring Miss Mosh)” by Colin Christian, 2014.
Fiberglass and mixed media, 81 x 35 x 26 inches.

I remember seeing “Barbarella” when I was about 10 and being scared witless by the leering sexuality and the chomping dolls with silver fanged teeth. Returning to the film in my 20s, I understood how cartoonish it actually all was.

Christian takes his Barbarella to that next adult level with the single exposed breast and phallic ray gun. In this non-threatening, space oddity girl toy, the vacant gaze and pristine white bodysuit keep her from having to fire a single zap.

The giant head titled *2001*, named for the iconic Stanley Kubrick film (now in Cinerama!), doesn't zero in on the stick-pounding missing links or the mysterious monolith. Instead, the focus here is on the helmeted space stewardesses who tend to the astronauts on the space station.

Looming like a moon on the wall, the more than 6-foot-high porcelain skinned head has actual stars in her slightly bloodshot eyes. PanAm logos adorn her helmet, referencing the company that represented a sky's-the-limit vision of the future for decades as the largest air carrier in the world. That unmistakable blue logo was displayed on the face of the skyscraper behind Grand Central Station on Park Avenue, seen by tens of millions every day until the company folded in 1991.

This Bubble-rella is the one who serves the jet set, her idea of the future is the now-discarded optimism of the '60s, and would you like freeze dried peanuts with that cocktail?



“2001” by Colin Christian, 2004. Fiberglass and mixed media, 7 foot 6 x 61 x 28 inches.

Passivity is not the name of the game for *Batgirl*; this kitten with two whips behind her back is ready to sink her claws into whoever ripped that really nice mask to expose one heavily made-up

eye.

A tabletop sculpture, she has the most defiant attitude of any of the pieces, snarling and ready to pounce. It's a piece about determination and getting back up after being beaten down, in the most literal comic book sense. Rendered in a sparkly finished lacquer coat, the costume gleams like a hot rod Mustang.



"Batgirl" by Colin Christian, 2014. Fiberglass and mixed media, 35 x 22 x 25 inches.

Pulling again from Kubrick, *Naughty, Naughty (A Clockwork Orange)* mashes up characters from that 1971 film, taking the protagonist Alex DeLarge and merging him with the Cat Lady, a woman with an erotic art collection who becomes one of his victims. The infamous single faux eyelash is here, on the bottom lid of one eye and the top lid of the other, spiky and evil beneath the brim of her black wool felt bowler.



"Naughty, Naughty (A Clockwork Orange)" by Colin Christian, 2014. Fiberglass and mixed media, 42 x 40 x 13 inches.

The real sci-fi space siren show stopper is *Player One (Starring Riot Girl)*, the 6-foot 8-inch high figure based on the 1982 film "Tron" and the movie's ahead-of-its-time idea of interacting with a virtual reality.

Digital technology has replaced "real time" here; this character is in her own helmeted Google Glass world. Receiving data and glowing from the inside out, she even comes with her own remote control to change how her lights flicker.



"Player 1 (Starring Riot Girl)" by Colin Christian, 2014.
Fiberglass and mixed media, 61 x 48 x 17.5 inches.

In the context of earlier science fiction and today's CGI movies, video games, and Japanese cartoons, the pieces in "Cosplay" are not unusual figures. In the context of a gallery like Vered, in tony East Hampton with Cezannes hanging in the next room, they are startling.

As Christian says of the work: "It's total submersion in another reality."

BASIC INFO: "Colin Christian: Cosplay" is on view at Vered Gallery through September 8, 2014. Vered Gallery is located at 68 Park Place, East Hampton NY 11937. www.veredart.com.

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