

Auriea Harvey: *Year Zero*

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By Charlotte Kent



Auriea Harvey, *Webcam Movies*, 1999. Video (color, sound), CRT monitor, media player, 5 min 56 sec, loop, 17 1/2 x 16 1/2 x 17 inches. Courtesy bitforms gallery, New York. Photo: Emile Askey.

On View

bitforms gallery

Year Zero

March 6 – April 24, 2021
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The digital art of game designer turned sculptor Auriea Harvey is so well-established that it is hard to believe *Year Zero* is her first solo exhibition in the United States. *Year Zero* offers a compelling argument for dismissing distinctions between physical and digital art as her digital and material practice merge in this impressive body of sculptural works. The first room screens three examples of her earliest work to establish her long-standing excavation of her life and history, of antiquity and mythology, for the perpetual hybridity in her practice.

Webcam Movies (1999) foreshadows her more recent hybrid self-portraits with archival web footage of the artist in her workspace when she was perpetually online as a part of the infamous net art collective, hell.com. *Webcam Movies* is shown on a now-antiquated Dell CRT monitor, which establishes ties between the ancient and early adoption, the mythic and contemporary, evident in her turn to 3D-printed sculpture for this body of work.



Auriea Harvey and Michaël Samyn, *The Endless Forest*, 2005/2021–ongoing. Online multiplayer game. Courtesy bitforms gallery, New York.

Harvey was trained as a sculptor at Parsons, and mark-making has been a longstanding part of her practice. A video of her flipping through sketchbooks dating back to 1990 reveals her drawings, collages, notes, paintings, character designs, and the gestation of sculptural ideas. It is a revelation to recognize the gestures that contributed to the creative mind behind the multiplayer online game, *The Endless Forest* (2005–ongoing), or the website *The GodLoveMuseum* (2000–2007), both of which are screening in the first room. *The GodLoveMuseum* was hosted on her website, Entropy8Zuper!, with collaborator Michaël Samyn, as five distinct chapters—*Genesis* (1999), *Exodus* (1999), *Leviticus* (2000), *Numbers* (2002), and *Deuteronomy* (2006)—and awarded the first SFMoMA Prize for Excellence in Online Art in 2000. Harvey is an artist who turned to the digital when it was still nascent and now turns to the physical as the digital is pervasive. The sketchbooks operate as a segue to the second room of the exhibit, dominated by a dozen small mythic creatures positioned upon a ziggurat.



Auriea Harvey, *Ram I (ancestor black and white)*, 2020. 3D-printed acrylic and composite (PLA plastic, chalk, bronze, iron), bronze powder, self hardening clay, epoxy clay, acrylic, 12 1/4 x 8 1/4 x 8 3/4 inches. Courtesy bitforms gallery, New York. Photo: Emile Askey.

Living in Rome since 2019, she is surrounded by classical statuary of hybrid beings and her small works resonate with that history. Harvey read numerous mythologies as a child. Video games allowed her to create such fanciful realms. These sculptures partly respond to her well-worn copy of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. She's transformed her earlier sculptural practice—life-sized metal and cast installations with elements of performance—to use 3D scanning, sculpting, and printing techniques that combine natural and artificial materials with found elements. Her figures, just like her materials and practice, are hybrid creatures.

The study for *Ram* uses a scan of her face as the starting point for the mythic character, its smooth whiteness echoing the white marble of classical sculpture halls, but becomes two wildly different pieces. The mottled bronze and iron in *Ram I (ancestor black and white)* (2020) produces a monochromatic, otherworldly effect disturbed by the smoothness around the nose and mouth flecked with yellow. The wax and maroon pigment on *Ram II (ancestor red)* (2021) is reminiscent of the ochre hues of Pre-Columbian figurines. Harvey pulls from many traditions to create new characters, transgressing barriers of time and space and efforts to distinguish between analog and digital.

Ox (2020) stands at the top of the ziggurat in pride of place, a nod to her character design days, while also merging multiple generations of matrilineal references. It combines ram and *Minoriea* (2018), a key character at the center of a VR game she developed. Its many references make it the start of Harvey's burgeoning mythic realm.



Auriea Harvey, *The Mystery (v2)*, 2019. 3D-printed resin, bronze paint, patina, varnish 2 3/4 x 4 x 3 1/4 inches. Courtesy bitforms gallery, New York. Photo: Emile Askey.

A shelf of small works reveals the transformations that occur in 3D design and printing, a recent practice that is often misunderstood as merely producing what is conceived digitally. She starts with a scan of an object that undergoes cycles of mutation as she draws from her extensive library of 3D models based on her own clay sculptures, artworks encountered in museums, and other creative developments in her studio practice. *The Mystery (v1)* (2017) is a classic vanitas in which a 3D-printed plastic skull and a long-stemmed rose appear to be steel. In *The Mystery (v2)* (2019), the dark, 3D-printed resin skull, bronze paint, patina, and varnish dominate, the same rose stem vanishing behind it. The next version, also from 2019, appears like white marble, the details of skull and long-stemmed rose softened, worn away by time. The final version, *The Mystery (v4)* (2020), is Baroque, with the rose in full bloom, a braid winding through the left eye of the skull. This glimpse into the investigative and creative process reveals the artistry in finding the narrative and purpose of each piece.

The exhibit also includes charcoal drawings and monoprints, as well as her final game produced with Michaël Samyn. *L.O.C.K (Locis Omnes Caelesistis Kyries)* (2016) plays on the back wall of the gallery, a video documentation of the interactive video game where touch screen users trace circles to move through astral domains. It is hypnotic, and a significant backdrop to an exhibit that transports you from the busy scene of the Lower East Side to a mythic cosmology of another time and place. *Year Zero* establishes Harvey's creative powers across media and material, launching a new direction for her work with anticipation of so much yet to come.