

bitforms gallery

The Unanswered Question

Auriea Harvey

April 4–May 25, 2024

Opening reception: Thursday, April 4, 6–8 PM

Gallery hours: Tuesday–Saturday: 11 AM–6 PM

The Unanswered Question is Auriea Harvey's second exhibition with bitforms gallery that debuts a new body of sculpture and digitally-collaged murals. Harvey draws the exhibition title from a number of sources: a piece of music by Charles Ives, a series of lectures by Leonard Bernstein, as well as one of her playlists. In Ives' instrumental score, the flutes act as the protagonist—a role Harvey identifies as a truth seeker questing for answers. The artist's own unanswered questions occupy states of illusion to manifest scale, truth, violence, and fantasy.

Harvey's practice exists in and between the real and virtual. *The Unanswered Question* situates both realms of existence on the same plane where 3D sculpture, monumental plinths, metallic prints, and layered wall frescoes overlap not as simulacrum, but as a suspension of disbelief. Scale plays an important role within the collapse of these spaces, as physical sculptures are exalted to human height or hover in mid air while digital compositions are printed larger-than-life. Behind each sculpture, their printed likeness is echoed on the wall by swaths of collaged polygonal models. These models are the root of 3D scans and as such are also the origin of all works on display. The exhibition is enveloped under the gallery's static yellow light to simulate a semiconductor clean room, a sterile space made to manufacture electronics, as well as a sodium lamp, which is used to remove the color spectrum and render external environments black and white. In this way, the viewer is enveloped into the same incubator as Harvey's sculptures.

Alleluia Alleluia is a bronze sculpture situated atop a large, pyramidal plinth. "Alleluia" is a word used repeatedly during incantation to praise the lord. Harvey explores her fascination with this word as a bridge between the physical and divine body. The angel is composed from one wing of the *Victory of Samothrace* merged with a portrait of Harvey singing. The angel's open mouth is echoed in the mural *Spiritual Warfare* and sits in good company amongst horse head figures from the Parthenon marbles and found models of chariots, zoomorphic columns, and primordial spears. Collage and synthesis, another link between the real and virtual, are everyday dynamics within the artist's life in Rome where antiquity and contemporary metropolitan life merge. The artist presents her frescoes as theatrical stage dressings ornamented with a collection of motifs frequently seen in her own sculptures; busts, doorways, roses, ornamented skulls, wings, wheels, and arrows meld into one another, overlapping in a pastiche of 17th century illusion. Anachronistic shadows cascade across each tableau in a charming contrast to the soft, low resolution models within each composition. Harvey's practice is one of amalgamation; past becomes present, virtual becomes real, and utopia becomes war.

Harvey's sculptures are born digitally, a state she references as the living, realtime version of the work. *Known Unknown* is presented within this native environment and demonstrates Harvey's own confrontation with violence as an allegory where she must fight with both a lion and a tiger. However, in an attempt to address and express images of violence, a tableau of utopia emerged instead, in spite of the artist's intention. *Known Unknown* contains luxurious color and rich dimension. Viewers are invited to witness the work as a truly 3D object onscreen where a signal is sent to each pupil in a mimicry of 3D glasses. Once viewers observe the image in the round, they can then explore the piece with a mouse to zoom, pan, and rotate the sculpture.

The scroll is a key gesture of uncovering within Harvey's practice that is mimicked by the expanse of a limitless digital landscape. The featured motifs are created with a technique from the practice of model-making called "kitbashing", a type of 3D collage which aids in sculptural ideation. While they are expressed in the gallery both as murals and highly rendered prints, the artist considers their simple lighting and highlights as components of their digital nature. *Fate* and *Constellation* are metallic prints that depict several iterations of Harvey's mythologies through fantastic busts, 3D scans, and digital constructions. Self-portraiture is an inherent feature within the artist's practice, as data captured by the artist of herself is incorporated into each composition. This process offers Harvey the opportunity to interject her

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personal history into classical narratives as a new world of lyrical arrangements where her sculptures commingle with and confront the history of art. Harvey's murals are sold purely as digital landscapes via NFT that allow visitors to buy a piece of the exhibition. In collaboration with Verse, the digital murals are available online where they are presented larger than the web page itself in an insistence that viewers scroll, expand, and uncover the entire work. In confluence with the obelisk-like pedestals in the gallery, Harvey's illusionistic bridges connect on-and-offline in a feedback loop of inquiry and discovery.

b. 1971, Indianapolis, IN
Lives and works in Rome, Italy

Auriea Harvey is an artist living and working in Rome. Her work combines digital and physical processes to create sculptures in physical space and mixed reality. Drawing from her extensive experience in net art and video games in the collaborative groups Entropy8Zuper!, Tale of Tales, and Song of Songs, she brings a synthesis of personal narratives and character development to her sculptures – making the untold visible through form, interaction and immersion. Harvey's practice engages time, media, and material to define sculptural production in the present moment.

The artist begins her process by making scans from life. These scans mutate as they are sculpted, materialized, and combined with Harvey's extensive library including 3D models based on her own clay sculptures, works of imagination that are digitally sculpted, and objects encountered in museums throughout the world. The amalgamation is 3D printed, to which the artist adds organic elements, or translates into bronze, glass or other precious material. The artist also creates purely digital versions of her sculptures that explore virtual materiality, bridging the gap between the digital and the physical, the possible and the impossible.

As Harvey creates her models, she molds characters with their own narratives. Each nexus of elements produces a series of sculptures which she continues until the narrative is complete. Harvey sifts through cultural artifacts, filtering well-known tales through her own retellings to reinvent, reinterpret, and shapeshift.

The artist has been at the forefront of art and technology through many aspects of her career, including seminal net artworks, celebrated videogames, and her current exploration of mixed reality sculpture. Harvey was a pioneer of the first wave of Internet Art, contributing to the first Internet project commissioned by a major institution (the Guggenheim Museum) and winning the first major prize given for an interactive work (from the SFMOMA). She co-authored the Realtime Art Manifesto, widely recognised as the foremost call of the independent games movement in the 2000s. Harvey is a leading voice in the resurgence of digital art today with a major survey exhibition at The Museum of the Moving Image, NYC.

The works of Auriea Harvey can be found in the permanent collections of the Whitney Museum, Buffalo AKG Art Museum, HEK Basel, Walker Art Center, KADIST Collection, Rf.C Collection, and Rhizome's Net Art Anthology. She has had international success, including exhibitions at the Tinguely Museum, Basel; the Victoria & Albert Museum, London; the New Museum, New York; The Museum of the Moving Image, New York; and ZKM, Karlsruhe. She is represented by bitforms gallery, NYC.