

Jon Kessler: *Petrified*

January 16–March 1, 2025

Level Two

Magenta Plains is pleased to present *Petrified*, a selection of bronze and ceramic sculptures from a brand new, never-before exhibited body of work by Jon Kessler. The three freestanding works utilize upcycled bronze spills while incorporating materials as varied as scavenged metal, glazed clay, and German porcelain figurines. The result is a series of whimsical constructions that speak to contemporary anxieties around climate and ecology while simultaneously evoking an alternative world of wonder.

The sculptures in *Petrified* draw on multiple influences, notably Alexander Calder's "stabiles" and Japanese ikebana flower arrangements. In addition to their dynamic compositions, the sculptures imply movement or are otherwise kinetic. Small counterweights, polished chime-like rods, or cattails wrought from brass fluidly react to a viewer's presence in the room. For example, in *Scorched Earth II* (2024), elements pierce a piece of metal polished to a mirror sheen, giving the impression of the surface of water. Above, extruded glazed stoneware resembles driftwood, while porcelain figurines of herons perch on its surface. A small porcelain lamb sits nestled in the folds of a shattered iPad.

Kessler's work has long straddled the boundary between speaking to modern anxieties and actively eliciting them in the viewer. Past projects have dealt with war, terrorism, surveillance, the military-industrial complex and global warming, often in confrontation and always intended to provoke powerful reactions from the viewer. In *Petrified*, Kessler has moved away from these aggressively confrontational works toward more subtle and mournful evocations of ecological fragility.

Utilizing many familiar tropes of the 20th century artist: the assemblage, the found object, the political affect—Kessler has opted for a series of surprisingly intimate and considered constructions. Expanding on his recent explorations in bronze and ceramics, these works conjure post-pastoral landscapes, where beauty and ecological collapse intertwine. Combining industrial debris, the residue of kitsch, and repurposed pieces of technology, these relics of the future balance elegance and entropy, offering a poignant commentary on reclamation and regeneration.

Jon Kessler has had numerous solo institutional exhibitions, such as *The Web*, Swiss Institute, New York, NY which traveled to Museum Tinguely, Basel, CH (2013); *Sculptures from the 80s and 90s*, Fisher Landau Center for Art, New York, NY (2010); the Drawing Center, New York, NY (2007); his first immersive installation *The Palace at 4 AM*, exhibited at MoMA PS1, New York, NY, Louisiana Museum, Copenhagen, DK, ZKM Center for Art and Media, Karlsruhe, DE and permanently installed at the Phoenix Kulturstiftung/Sammlung Falckenberg, Hamburg, DE (2005); a retrospective of his Asian inspired sculptures, *Jon Kessler's Asia*, exhibited at Kestner-Gesellschaft, Hannover, DE, Neue Galerie am Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz, AU, and Puerto de Santander, ES (1994); the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA (1991); the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, TX (1987); the MCA Chicago, IL and Cincinnati Art Center, OH (1986). White Columns, New York, NY (1983); and Artist's Space, New York, NY (1983).

His work has been included in group exhibitions such as *L'Ennemi de Mon Ennemi*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, FR (2018); *Art in the Age of the Internet, 1989 to Today*, ICA Boston, MA (2018); the Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY (2017; 1985); *20/20*, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA (2017); *Something Old, Something New, Something Borrowed, Something Blue*, Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin, IT (2014); *Contemplating the Void*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY (2010); and many others. Throughout the 1980s and 90s he exhibited regularly at Luhring Augustine Gallery in New York, Galerie Max Hetzler and Galerie Gisela Capitain in Cologne, as well as Galerie Chantal Crousel in Paris. In the 2000s he has held exhibitions at Deitch Projects and Salon 94 in New York.

Kessler's works are in the permanent collections of many institutions including The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; The Brooklyn Museum, New York, NY; The Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN; The Broad, Los Angeles, CA; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA; The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT; Phoenix Art Museum, AZ; Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, ON; Chase Manhattan Art Collection, New York, NY; Ella Fontanals-Cisneros Collection, Miami, FL; the Tinguely Museum, Basel, CH; the Burger Collection, Hong Kong, CN; Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, NL; and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY.

He is the recipient of several National Endowment for the Arts awards, a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation award, a Foundation for the Performing Arts award, a St. Gaudens Memorial award, and a Creative Capital Grant. He is a Professor of Art at Columbia University where he has taught since 1994 and has lived and worked continuously in a former paint factory in Williamsburg, Brooklyn since 1980.