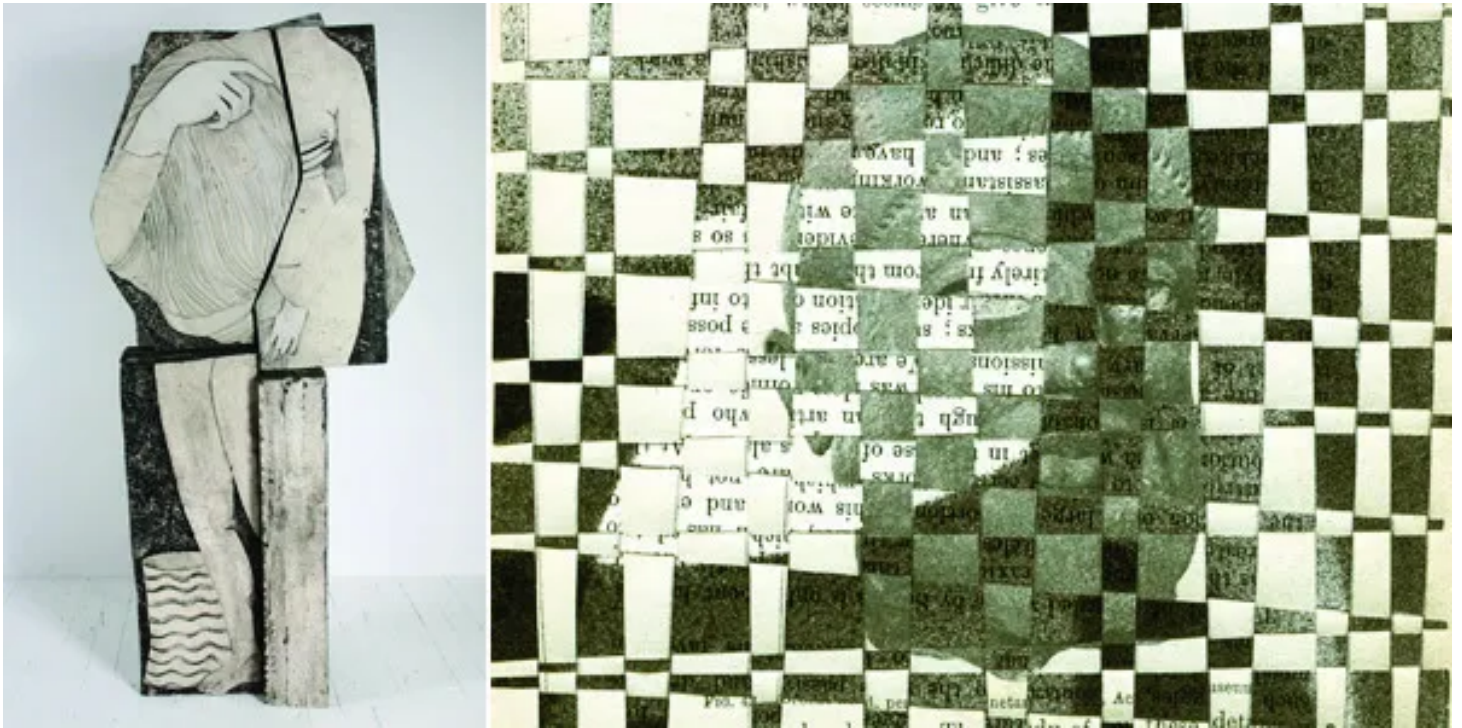


## RUBY SKY STILER

Ruby Sky Stiler discusses her exhibition for TBA:10

By Lauren O'Neill-Butler

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Ruby Sky Stiler's handsome yet disorderly foamcore sculptures, which often reference classical antiquity, have been exhibited at Callicoon Fine Arts, Socrates Sculpture Park, and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery in New York. Here she talks about her solo project for TBA:10 in Portland, Oregon, which opens at Washington High School on September 9.

I'VE BEEN DEVELOPING the work in this show for the past year. Kristan Kennedy, a curator at the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, encountered two of the initial sculptures in my studio, and the undertaking moved forward from there, with a steady dialogue between us and the site in mind. The project consists of three "figurative" works, each slightly larger than life, and a group of twenty-two collages. I've created a corresponding artist's book that includes the collages and shares the title of my installation: "Inherited and Borrowed Types." Though the pieces themselves are independent, I'm excited to see how the formal, academic aspects of Washington High School create a different context to support them, and I have worked with the space to tease a distinct mood from the classroom/gallery.

The reference to classical iconography popped up in my work a few years ago. I was in Naples for a brief visit with friends, and we visited Pompeii, the formerly ash-buried Roman town-cum-tourist attraction. A controversy involving the colors of the frescoes captured our attention during our time there. Apparently "Pompeii Red," which is synonymous with our collective sense of this historical time and place--and a standard paint-chip color--may have been an archaeological mistake. Reports stated that the original color could have been oxidized through the heat of the fire and mutated to appear red. Meanwhile, the entire site has been restored with this color in mind, which is nuts. I love this subject, which exists primarily through the lens of contemporary historians and is therefore a constantly evolving and engaging fiction. The sculptures in this show play with authenticity and with how that quality is perceived, creates value, and can prompt an atmosphere of authority surrounding the object.

My basic process for this work is to jam together disparate parts to make a whole. I think of this as a hopeful, loving gesture: finding solutions (or a suitable repair) that will bring the figure out of crumbling, incomplete appendages. The sculptures are made to be viewed in the round: From one side, a classical figure is seen, while the opposite section gives off an abstract modernist vibe. The resulting sensation is that these works are referencing both ancient art history and sculpture of the twentieth century. My incorporation of shifting perspectives, varied art-historical references, gender combinations, and juxtapositions in scale encourages a sense of striving to make something work, even when one doesn't have all the appropriate resources at one's disposal. This activity feels like a metaphor for daily life.

The shifting line between common kitsch and singular originality is an element that interests me. On first glance, these ancient-seeming figures appear to be chiseled from marble. Looking closer, it's clear that they are constructed from contemporary art supplies and conflate iconography that spans different centuries and societies. On the one hand, elements of these works copy from recognized ideals of art history, and in this sense, they are tacky imitations. On the other hand, however, I aim to make the sculptures' presence feel elegant, convincing, and originally expressive.