

Lowell Miller  
Fletcher Gallery

Lowell Miller, a longtime student of sculpture, recently exhibited his linearly figurative work in a seemingly far-too-early career retrospective. The show offered Miller's take on story-telling and craft, mapping that take on the body, naked and elemental. Venus presided here, cloaked in 11 her guises. The prehistoric, the erotic, the nymphaeaic, and the yonic were made manifest in material.

Miller works in a spacious studio next to his home, off the main road to and from Woodstock. He works in metal, primarily bronze, and ceramics, creating classical things that mostly overlook the widely shared view that contemporary sculpture traces its lineage only from David Smith. Miller's hand is present in all of his pieces, even those cast in the same Hudson Valley foundry that fabricates works by Jeff Koons and Martin Puryear. Miller told me—and it shows—that his works are completed with bespoke finishes that return the objects to a hand-made status.

During a quick studio tour before the show, Miller showed me his work carefully arrayed in a number of well-lit spaces. Venus—as goddess of sex and love, as mother, as fair nurturer, and, finally, as the cause célèbre of the forsaken and the fount of new foundations and new stories—owned her regal station. The bronze Speedo, an apparent suit of armor surely hiding the female form, as well as a Speedo, suggested hand-hammered construct, burial cache, and found object. Here was Venus, lost and found. Miller's

engagement with art beyond the classical (call it the neo-prehistoric) was at its best in a splendid painted bronze Venus. Though monumentally shaped, the work is modest; it owes much to the Venus of Willendorf, adding its own robust, vulval sexuality. Other works traced similar paths to representation, the always-contested dialogue between narrative and (stylized) human form. Businessman, in ceramic and rope, was not the only male member in Miller's studio. The gallery show opened with Lemon Squeeze, one of the few pieces that marries David Smith's lineage, through Mark di Suvero, with Miller's own concerns. This statuesque ensemble of yellow metal legs squeezing a cement torso-like form rang out humorous.

Upstairs, Mr. Lyme, a recent painted bronze, felt the most accomplished and elegant, its dress-like plates suggesting Venus entrapped. Miller's other works succeeded through a similar embroidery of humor, sex, and pathos. With various subjects and just as varying tones, the works competed for my attention, a kind of sculptural casting call, each seeking in its own way to turn myth into form. -Faheem Haider



Above: Lowell Miller, Lemon Squeeze, 2014. Metal, wood, and proprietary cement, 15 x 63.30 x 15 in. Above right: Lowell Miller, Venus, 2012–14. Painted bronze, 15 x 15.5 x 17 in.

