



OKS: TOXIC VICE

September 21 – November 4, 2016

160 West Broadway, New York, NY

Opening Reception: Wednesday, September 21, 6-9 pm

Even when viewed in person, contemporary art is most often seen from afar. Under Plexiglass boxes, sitting on custom crafted easels, and handled with white cotton gloves, the objects themselves seem removed in pursuit of the perception of value. Since time immemorial, art has come with cachet and also served a function whether as a vessel to drink out of, an ivory comb to detangle locks of hair, an instrument to be played, or an illustration allowing a potential suitor to envision his future bride—not merely an artifact wedged in the back of a *Kunstkammer*.

The work of OKS (Oksana Todorova) integrates life and “art” with no frills, debunking the notion that art is so fragile it shouldn’t be handled. Hand crafted glazed ceramic morphs into bondage themed tea sets or Drano and Anti-Freeze vessels, each embodying a palpable toughness and toxicity that is simultaneously frightening and enticing, familiar objects with a sardonic twist. The element of deception so prevalent in the works that constitute *Toxic Vice* furthers the definitional problem of how “art” should be perceived. If a ceramic bowl ribbed with teeth is considered a work of “fine art,” dare we sip coffee out of it or do we fear a stain or a chip on a hand-made, non-editioned mug fired twice, colored and worked with sublime dexterity?

OKS’ modest workspace occupies alcoves throughout the apartment she shares with her daughter in the East Village – a table here, tools there, a small kiln in the corner of the living room. The nature of the space, undefined, parallels both her disposition and practice as seamless parts of her life as she drinks and eats out of home-crafted bowls, jugs, and plates every day. Nothing but the categorically useless is out of bounds. She suggests that no thing is so precious and no one so impervious to life’s seductions - neither the work itself or her own personal proclivities - and as a result her work has a resonating authenticity. In all its dark and twisted glory, each object becomes an unabashed physical manifestation of her own mischievous mind, and what sets it apart is its ability to retain visual simplicity while touching on a multitude of complex ideas, a feat that can only be generated by an artist who is unafraid to reveal aspects of themselves oft-hidden from the public and relegated to the shadows and margins of their lives.

OKS stretches the limits of her imagination, creating technically masterful objects that confront increasingly taboo subjects: the forlorn activity of gross consumption with her consumer products and cups, vice with sex toys and vaginal references, sex ‘n’ booze with bottles of liquor thrown around as social lubricant as much as anything else. Her works are proponents of a feminist perspective that is all at once sexual and fierce, a particularly potent combination that she presents without a hint of shame or reluctance.

She makes it clear that there is no pity or sacrifice in being a woman, only power. OKS fixates on the “Vagina Dentata” or legend of the toothed Vagina, a metaphor for entrapment and the inescapable fate of the male devoured or destroyed, humiliated and emasculated. This mythology adds gravitas to toothed bowls with a sickeningly seductive hint. In a similar vein, her denture necklaces playfully feature the degradation of human anatomy strung up on gold chains, whilst her jewelry holders present precious stones with a long sinewy hand, pale and pasty with bright red polish.

Her ability to easily access the forbidden in the depths of her own mind is realized in bondage objects, lewd sketches, Phillip Guston inspired cycloptic visions, surrealism, the tradition of Japanese tea ceremony, and everyday consumer products from Drano and Tide to Stoli, to a black Dildo coined “One Eyed Jack.”

This push-pull methodology, repulsive yet enticing germinates from the work of Phillip Guston, a recklessly alcoholic genius whose single eyed smokers and odious images allude to certain perversions. OKS’ objects fight as weapons, agents of deadly poison and guilty pleasure. Literally and figuratively, she invokes a Clorox bottle, poisonous if consumed as a container to dole out another kind of poison amongst friends. This notion of irrational juxtaposition popularized by Surrealists in the early 20th century and visible in OKS’ domestic objects, harbors a distinctly dark and dangerous mystery, one that is distinctly female.

Why would a woman want to wear dentures around her neck or sip from a carafe of Tide? Would someone want to pluck his or her gold and silver rings out of a pasty hand or eat breakfast from a toothed vagina? Why not? These things are all part of the fabric of our lives. The objects exist as sculptures on display reflecting feminist attitudes or run through the dishwasher. OKS’ methods of fabrication exhibit accomplishment in the art of etching, coloration, form and allows the works to survive as they are, objects of utility based in conviction and fashioned by a humble but brilliant soul.

...

OKS (Oksana Todorova) was born in USSR to a father that worked as a propaganda artist. After finishing school, Oks went to Kherson State University where she concentrated in Russian language and literature. After the collapse of Soviet Union, OKS moved to New York and briefly attended FIT. OKS currently lives in the East Village with her daughter. This is her first solo exhibition.

Curated by Alexander Adler in conjunction with A+E Studios

Opening Reception: Wednesday September 21st

A+E STUDIOS | 160 West Broadway, New York, NY 10013

Tuesday-Saturday, 11am-6pm