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Alice Mackler makes her glazed ceramic figures — like this untitled 2020 example — through a process of improvisation. Alice Mackler and Kerry Schuss Gallery

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Alice Mackler

Through June 19. Kerry Schuss Gallery, 73 Leonard Street, Manhattan. 212-219-9918; kerryschussgallery.com.

It took Alice Mackler six decades to break into the gallery scene. Born in 1931, she grew up in New York and New Jersey, studied at the Art Students League in the 1950s and later got a B.F.A. at the School of Visual Arts — because, as she recalls, a gallerist told her a degree would help her show. It didn't. But she kept at it, supporting herself with office jobs and painting and drawing on

nights and weekends. She mainly depicted the female form, drawing it with big, wiry loops surrounded by coronas of bright color.

In 1998, the year she retired, Mackler began making ceramics at Greenwich House Pottery, in the Village. There she also met the artist Joanne Greenbaum, who put her in a [group show at James Fuentes Gallery](#) and introduced her to Kerry Schuss, the gallerist who gave her a [long-overdue New York solo debut in 2013](#).

The work in [her latest outing](#) with the gallery, nine sculptures accompanied by three small paintings, is her largest and most confident yet. There are two slender figures, one with his arm outstretched, that bring to mind Giacometti, and two exceedingly strange ceramic dioramas. Half-open boxes with faces on every surface, they're like little theaters of emotional turmoil. And of course there are several of the gestural, improvised characters she's become known for. A supine mermaid lifts her tail in an aquatic yoga pose; a jaunty little rooster boy, perched on a speckled rock, leans down and extends his wings as if finishing a magic trick. Comic but insightful, they're like psychological portraits of Mackler's own passing fancies. WILL HEINRICH