



Works by Alice Mackler and Derek Weisberg on view in a new show at Kerry Schuss Gallery. Photo: Courtesy of Kerry Schuss Gallery

Exhibitions

A Teacher-Student Relationship Leads to a Dual Show

After years in Derek Weisberg's class at Greenwich House Pottery, Alice Mackler invites him to join her latest show

By Hadley Keller

November 28, 2018

Alice Mackler, a ceramicist who at 87 has found late-in-life recognition for her colorful, anthropomorphic sculptures, had an unusual request for her latest show at Kerry Schuss: She wanted it to include her teacher. Schuss, who has been representing Mackler since her first gallery show in 2013, obliged and, on November 17, the Tribeca gallery opened "Alice Mackler & Derek Weisberg," Mackler's first dual show. The result is both a touching demonstration of the two artists' relationship and a unique opportunity for their works to play off of each other.

Mackler and Weisberg are a delightfully odd couple, she gray-haired and diminutive in stature at 87 and he tall, broad, and some 50 years her junior. The two met in 2011, when Weisberg moved from California to accept a resident technician job at Greenwich House, the nonprofit settlement house turned pottery studio. Soon, Weisberg was given his own class to teach, and Mackler was in it.

"We have a class every Friday from 10 A.M. to 1 P.M.," Weisberg tells me one day at the gallery, where he's met me with Mackler. "Class," in quotations, he specifies (with the accompanying gesticulation), "because Alice doesn't really need instruction. Some people need it; Alice comes, it's more a studio. She comes and makes her work, and I sort of facilitate, or guide."



Alice Mackler, left, and Derek Weisberg working at Greenwich House Pottery. Photo: Courtesy of Derek Weisberg

Mackler has been attending weekly ("I'd go every day if I could," she says, "but the weather is what makes it hard") classes at Greenwich House since 1999, but has been "doing artwork since high school."

Weisberg is also a lifelong creative. "I've been making things in ceramics since I was six years old," he says. He does work in a variety of media, but the sculptures he has on display at Kerry Schuss are, like Mackler's, figurative works in ceramic. While Mackler's figures beckon with colorful, almost sultry, glazed clothing and makeup, Weisberg's are more subtle in hue, relying on texture and materiality for depth.

"After working for so long with clay, knowing exactly how it would work, what it would do, that got really boring," Weisberg says of this group of work. "So I wanted to explore more what the material would do. It was almost like collaborating with the clay, letting the clay have a voice."



Mackler's latest sculptures feature figures resting on a kind of stage backdrop. Photo: Courtesy of Kerry Schuss Gallery

"In that way, we work kind of similarly," he says. "It's not preplanned; it's very intuitive and spontaneous. Now that I think about it, the idea of play crosses over in both of our works, too, even though it takes the form of a different visual work. Alice's is very playful. In mine, although the works are sort of serious, they're made in a kind of playful, free-form, more intuitive way."

"I just do what comes to my mind," Mackler agrees. "I try to copy things, but I can't!"

Sometimes, Weisberg assists her in executing that vision. "He does this for me," Mackler says, gesturing to one of her newer works, a colorfully glazed figure against a curved backdrop. "I gather the clay," says Weisberg. "She has this idea and I'll help her construct it. Just the technical things. For this one, she said, 'I have this idea, for a sort of stage shape,' so I helped her gather the clay and form that."



Weisberg's statues rest on plinths he designed and constructed. Photo: Courtesy of Kerry Schuss Gallery

Interestingly, Weisberg's works also have stages, of sorts: He has constructed custom wood plinths for each work, which replace the typical gallery display. Though Weisberg's pieces are situated at the front of the gallery and Mackler's at the rear, the relatively small, open space allows a sense of interaction.

"They play well together, but in different ways," Weisberg says, looking around. Proposing a description of Mackler's work, he turns to her. "Colorful, small, women?"

"Yes," says Mackler. "I don't do men."

Weisberg laughs. "You know, I don't really think of gender when I'm making them, but I'd say mine are male. I feel that because I'm a male, I make males."

"It's the same for me," Mackler says. "I do what I know."

When asked what she'll explore next, Mackler shrugs. "I don't know. I have to wait and see. All I do know is that I'm hoping to get better with old age."

Alice Mackler & Derek Weisberg is on view through January 12 at Kerry Schuss, 73 Leonard Street, New York. kerryschuss.com