

KENSUKE YAMADA

"Huckleberry was cordially hated and dreaded by all the mothers of the town, because he was idle and lawless and vulgar and bad—and because all their children admired him so, and delighted in his forbidden society, and wished they dared to be like him. Tom was like the rest of the respectable boys, in that he envied Huckleberry his gaudy outcast condition, and was under strict orders not to play with him. So he played with him every time he got a chance." —Mark Twain

Kensuke Yamada's swimmers stand poised in childlike gestures that seem oblivious to the depths into which they will soon plunge. One diver picks her nose in defiance of the journey ahead, one spreads his arms above his head, he seems to sniff and relish the air he will soon abandon. His blue sandals are spotted white, their coloration foreshadows the skies into which he will soon throw his legs as he inverts himself midair in his dive. But for now his eyes are clenched half shut on his upturned face—he is already taking protective measures against the imminence of his new underwater environment. But his outstretched palms assure us, with childlike tenacity, that he knows exactly what he is doing.

The precipice of the child diver is the perfect lens through which to view Kensuke's work. For many years he has been obsessed with probing the dark play, abandon, thrill, and danger of the seemingly innocent trials through which children develop an individual sense of agency as they find their footing in the "adult world." On the surface, Kensuke's sculptures are joyous and celebratory. But their triumphant

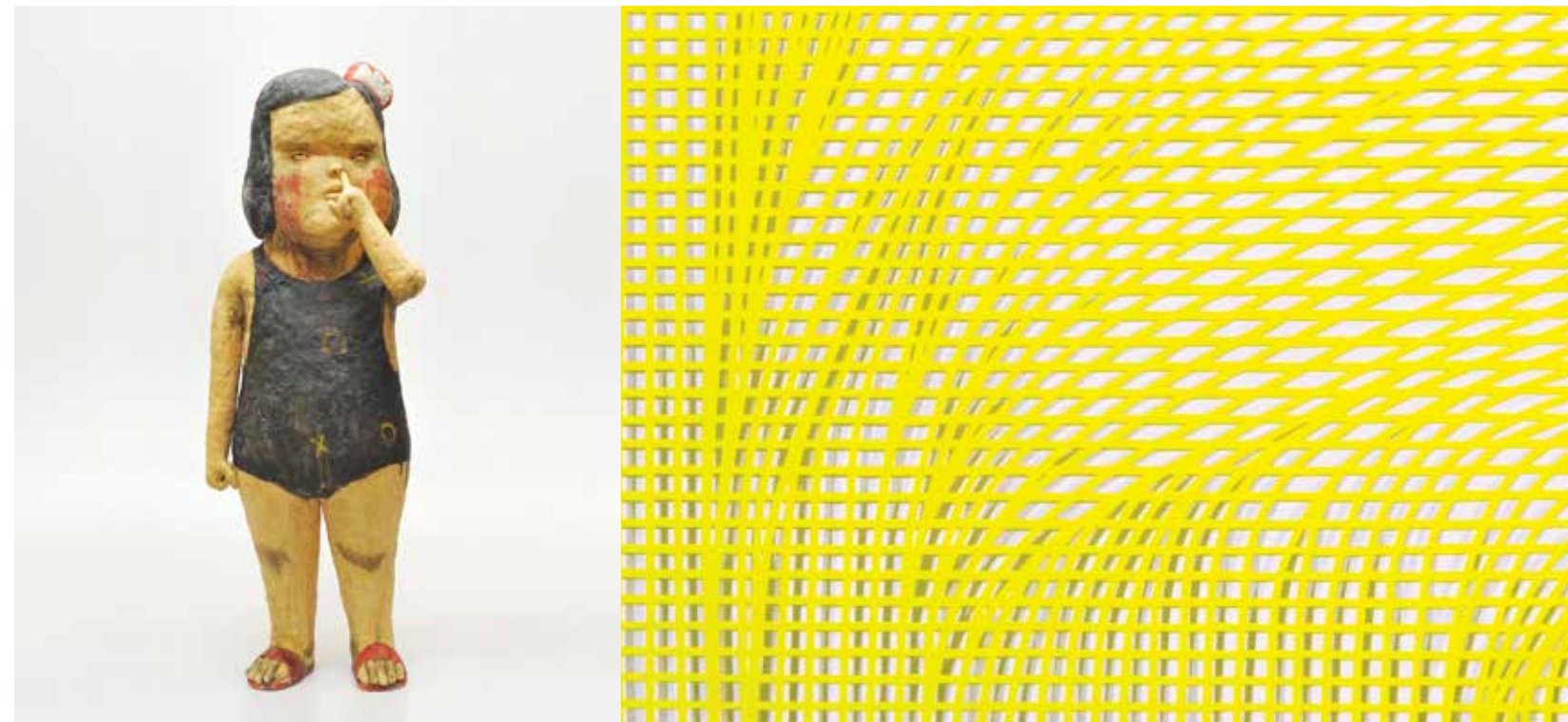
posturing and gleeful coloration is soon beguiled by deeper complexities. He juxtaposes innocence and experience as things dually inscribed in the formal constraints of building hollow clay figures: the fragile clay walls contain mysterious interior spaces while projecting forth in gesture and coloration. Kensuke's formal processes are intimately bound with his conceptual aims.

Viewers of Kensuke's sculptures are thus cordially invited into this push and pull between interior and exterior. We become anxious at the child's naive abandon as we are simultaneously drawn back into the cozy, clean-slated voids contained by the thinly pinched walls from which the figures have been constructed.

Kensuke's real triumph, however, does not merely lie in the sculptures' synthesis of a wide range of emotional shades. The sculptures never resign themselves to sink or swim, they are always buoyed by an omnipresent optimism. Kensuke's ability to position his sculptures at this delicate precipice compels us to return to the works time and again. We enter as joyous viewers, we lapse into angsty interpretation, and soon become lovers of the dualities that the sculptures both project and hold safely within. We can only be ourselves as we lose ourselves in these works.

It has been nice diving with you.

—Maxwell Stolkin, 2016



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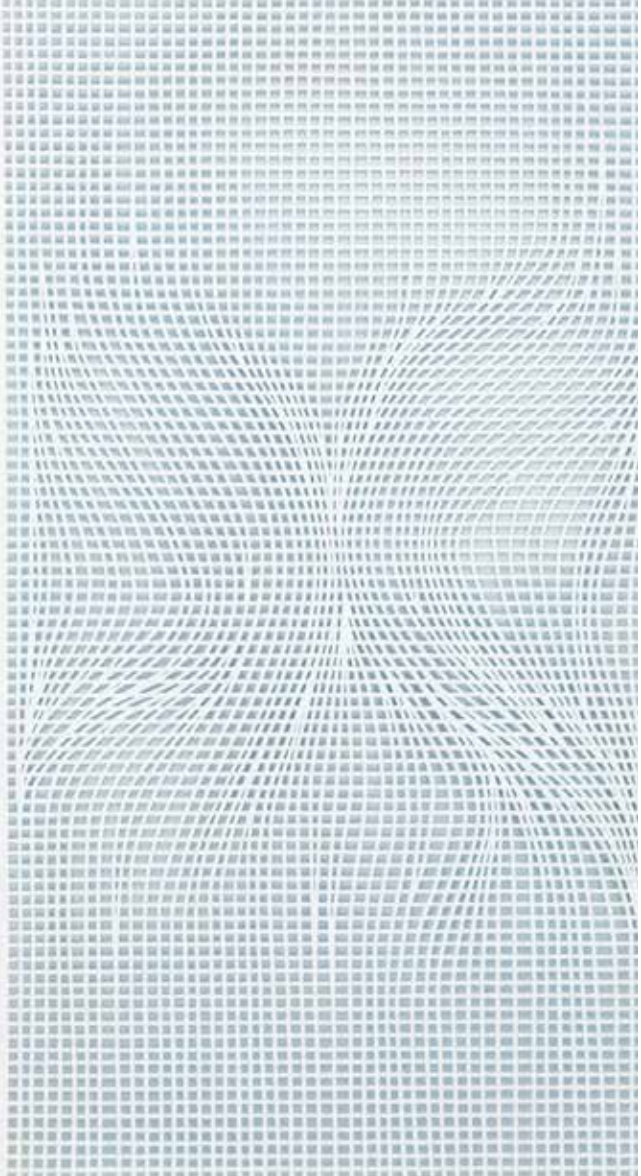
Front photos:

Kensuke Yamada
Swimmer, 2016
Stoneware, 43 x 15 x 11 inches
Photo by the artist

Leigh Suggs
Double Shadow (detail), 2016
Hand-cut acrylic on Yupo
Full piece: 60 x 60 inches
Photo by Taylor Dabney

CONVERSATION | UNSPOKEN LANGUAGE

Kensuke Yamada + Leigh Suggs • May 17–June 26



The unusual pairing of work by Kensuke Yamada and Leigh Suggs in this exhibition creates an opportunity for a deeper understanding of each artist's work—a view made possible by this context. We, the viewers, are part of the wholly visual conversation. We react and respond instantly to the intense color, the reflected light, the fluid movement, and the human gestures. Without a single word or sound, visual art is capable of eliciting our participation in the exchange of ideas.

Kathryn Gremley | Penland Gallery Director

Leigh Suggs
Pushing Corners (detail), 2015
Hand-cut acrylic on Yupo
Full piece: 21½ x 38½ inches
Photo by Taylor Dabney



Kensuke Yamada
Swimmer, 2016
Stoneware, 41 x 22 x 13 inches
Photo by artist

LEIGH SUGGS

Leigh Suggs's work challenges the limits of the visual field. A native of Boone, North Carolina, the artist, who holds an MFA in craft and material studies from Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia, uses craft-based materials and processes to critically engage the disciplines of painting and sculpture. Intentionally drawing the viewer's attention to the perception of sight, Suggs makes paper collages and cutouts—on painted Yupo, abaca, and hand-made paper or silver mylar emergency blankets—that probe such disparate themes as the Modernist grid, the neurological phenomenon of sight, and the semiotics of color. The final product, which is both an object and an investigation of a material, encourages unique, phenomenological encounters for the viewer who accepts the difficult task of deep looking.

At first glance, Suggs's work is straightforward. Flat, two-dimensional, square and rectangular sheets of either saturated fields or simplified shapes of bright neon color and reflective tape hang one after another. Upon closer inspection, however, the persistent viewer encounters complex works that oscillate as two-dimensional sheets of paper, three-dimensional objects, and permeating fields of colored phenomena.

The sixty-inch, unframed, square *Double Shadow* (2016) is painted on one side a jarringly-fluorescent yellow. While it looks flat, it is three-dimensional: the twisting lines of cut squares combine together to form an undulating series of waves that ripple across the paper. Although it appears fragile, the Yupo plastic is resilient and durable. Instead, ephemerality enters into the equation as the viewer stares at the object over a long period of time. As time multiplies, the neon square emits a soft lavender glow that expands past the dimensions of the physical sheet of paper to become, what Suggs calls, an "aura of color,

or a reflection of color where you are not looking at the color neon yellow but rather the shadow of neon yellow."¹

Another, *Reticulating Lines* (2016) at thirty inches square, undermines the grid entirely by substituting organic curves for angular lines. Working from back to front, Suggs painted the verso red while covering the front with a frieze of silver mylar tape, a surface that Suggs calls, "the absence of color." By hanging the reflective *Reticulating Lines* next to *Double Shadow* or *The Ease of Seeing* (2015), both the painted neon color and "aura of color" emitted from the neon pieces together dance across the mirror field and other surfaces in the gallery. These types of pairings place the viewer in situations where the visual perspective is in a constant state of flux. In turn, this shifting perspective becomes a stand-in for communication, as Suggs suggests, "There is a certain element of coding and language involved around the difficulty that language can propose for communicating with another. Words don't necessarily explain what we're seeing."

Like the title of another piece, *You See In When You Look Out* (2015), two interlocking concentric silver Mylar rings on abaca paper, Suggs's work inverts the viewer's expectations of sight and color. As optical illusions that surpass their visually, Suggs's paper cutouts and collages foster commentaries on communication itself.

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¹ All quotations attributed to the artist derive from conversations with the author on March 24 and 29, 2016.