

Extra-Human: The Art of Michael Ferris

Guest curator: Suzanne Ramljak

The larger-than-life figurative sculptures of Michael Ferris embody a rich fusion of cultural and artistic traditions. Trained as a painter, Ferris embraced sculpture twenty-five years ago and developed an inlay technique inspired by intarsia woodworking from his Middle-Eastern heritage. Ferris's unique approach to this historical process involves the reclaiming of discarded wood, a method informed by his environmental concerns. He further expands this traditional practice through the use of pigmented grout, which yields a color palette beyond wood's natural hues. The resulting inlaid patterns evoke Maori tattoos or the elaborate ornamentation of folk art.

Ferris enlists his self-invented mosaic technique to enliven finely carved portraits of family and friends. With a draftsman's eye, he portrays his sitter's three-dimensional likeness rendered in oversized scale. Moving beyond physical verisimilitude, Ferris also strives to capture the subject's inner life through subtly choreographed patterning. This merger of realism and decorative splendor fulfills the artist's stated aim of "creating both a vibrating and stoic humanistic presence, that is intended to imply the psychological and spiritual complexity within."

As prime inspiration for his sculptures, Ferris cites mythic Chinese "immortals" and the saints of his Catholic Maronite upbringing. While assuming human form, these spiritual beings straddle the divine and mortal spheres. Ferris's grand figures, although unsung and comprised of abandoned wood scraps, likewise transcend our pedestrian realm. The exhibition *Extra-Human: The Art of Michael Ferris* will unite a dozen of Ferris's distinctive wood sculptures along with related drawings and painted portraits set in intricate inlaid frames.

Artist Bio:

Michael Ferris was born in Chicago and currently lives and works in Bronx, New York. He received his B.F.A. from the Kansas City Art Institute, and an M.F.A. from Indiana University Bloomington. His work has been the subject of several one-person gallery shows and exhibited widely in museums across the country. Exhibitions include, The Center for Art in Wood, Philadelphia, PA; Elmhurst Art Museum, Elmhurst, IL; George Adams Gallery, NYC; C24 Gallery NYC; Bronx Museum, Bronx NY; Brattleboro Museum, Brattleboro, VT and Bradbury Art Museum, Jonesboro, AK; and Ferris is the recipient of awards and fellowships from numerous organizations, among them The New York Foundation for the Arts, the American Craft Council, and The Sharpe-Walentas Studio Program. His work can be found in the public collections of Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, the Illinois State Museum, and the De Young Museum, San Francisco.