

GRAY

David Klamen

Life Trophies

May 5 - Jun 24, 2022



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CHICAGO / Tuesday, April 18, 2022 – American artist David Klamen debuts a recent series of twelve ceramic sculptures in the solo exhibition *Life Trophies*. Constructed over the last several years, Klamen’s *Life Trophies* are an accumulation of visual fragments, mementos, and experiences that bring material reality to personal or forgotten history. *David Klamen: Life Trophies* opens at GRAY Chicago (2044 West Carroll Avenue) on Thursday, May 5, with a public reception for the artist from 5–7 PM, and closes June 24, 2022.

Celebrated for his semiotically complex, hyperrealistic paintings, David Klamen first began his *Life Trophies* in 2016 as a series of experimental compositional sketches. Klamen’s sketches envisioned mound-like forms comprising an array of intertwined objects, culminating with one clearly discernible item at the top. “I initially conceived of them as a heap of elements that reference our buried history of experiences and memories,” explains Klamen. “At the top is an item that commemorates this present moment.” Identifying ceramic as the medium that would best express this concept, Klamen acquired a large collection of unused plaster molds from which to cast his amalgams. The molds encompass many varied forms, from whimsical animals and sentimental figurines to utilitarian household objects.

Embracing chance and improvisation—a departure from his careful and controlled painting process—Klamen selects the final molds for each sculpture without knowing their interior forms in advance. Using the slip-casting method, Klamen fills each mold with clay slip. After the clay dries and the molds are opened one by one, only then is Klamen able to see the cast object for the first time. “I go out of my way during much of the process to make sure that I don’t focus on what the forms are,” explains Klamen. “We don’t look inside of the molds until we open them up and discover whatever was recorded by the clay. They are a surprise to me from beginning to end.” While gravity assists in shaping the final construction, Klamen’s physical process entails stacking, compressing, throwing, or pounding the objects directly onto the mound’s vessel base.

After each sculpture is constructed, it is treated with a uniform glaze thus synthesizing the array of objects as a single form. Unifying the composition in this way, Klamen's glazing technique asks viewers to slow down their encounter, delaying the discovery of each element in the work and encouraging a proliferation of associations between adjacent objects. "They are, in a sense, sculptures made of sculptures, as many of my paintings feel as if they're paintings made of paintings or meta-paintings," says Klamen. "Much like my paintings, they disclose themselves very slowly. You can't really see one of these quickly. They ask you to walk around them and discover imagery over time."

In each of Klamen's *Life Trophies*, the layered and fragmented components recall the countless experiences, ambitions, failures, and hazy memories that constitute one's sense of self. Klamen's fragments build a structure shaped by gravity, chance, and the nature of ceramic as medium. Together, they reveal contingent relationships, unexpected pairings and the echoes of buried past creations. "[These works] are compilations of the experiences of life, comprised in part by constant accumulation and exposure to stuff," Klamen describes. "A collection of memories, collapsed attempts, past ambitions, and tchotchkes, topped off with a present moment of optimism and hope. A complicated visual world that discloses itself slowly, asking us to reflect on our experiences and to celebrate the perplexity of knowing ourselves."

ABOUT DAVID KLAMEN

David Klamen (American, b. 1961) is a contemporary painter and sculptor whose work evolves in conjunction with his interests in literature and philosophy—interests that are centralized around the questions "How do we know what we know?" and "How do we come to know what we know?" In his practice, Klamen investigates epistemological strategies as diverse as Op Art, empiricisms, introspection, and others, utilizing modern and premodern art historical conventions as metaphors for our communal search for meaning. His meditative work engages with deep tonal values and extreme control, inviting the viewer to look more than once into the complexity of each piece.

Klamer earned his BFA at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and his MFA in painting at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Klamer's work has been exhibited in solo and group exhibitions across the United States, Europe, and Asia. His work can be found in numerous permanent museum collections including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Chazen Museum of Art, Madison, Wisconsin; Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley, California; Illinois State Museum, Springfield; National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul, South Korea; and McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, Texas.

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