

# THE UNIVERSAL BAROQUE

Baxter Koziol at YveYANG

Words by: Lydia Earthy September 6 - October 19, 2024

In a small chapel in Naples, two dark and withered carcasses are encased in jarringly baroque gilding. Shrivelled and parched with a phantom air of the calcified figures of nearby Pompeii, the pair are the famous circulatory system models by Giuseppe Salerno, known as The Anatomical Machines. Created in the second half of the eighteenth century, their richly mimetic detail led researchers to believe the figures were of natural origin, when in fact, they were models crafted from wire, wax, and silk to form intricate, human likenesses.

The figures' obvious horror and jarring realism inspire futurist, cross-genre comparison, looking not dissimilar to characters from classic, '80s slasher films: Freddy Krueger's twisted flesh; Leatherface's distinctive visage.

In *The Blood Vessel*, these kinds of a-historical resonances thrum throughout Baxter Koziol and Tura Oliveira's joint exhibition, which recognises a persistent Baroque sentiment in twentieth century film and aesthetics. Their work, spanning sculpture, assemblage, and wall-based presentations, explore an enduring fascination with the corporeal, the theatrical, and the repressed.



Baxter Koziol, 'BONE-YARD with accessories', 2024. New Dirt in green, orange, yarn, pine, wire. 45 x 45 x 78 in / 114.3 x 114.3 x 198.1 cm. Courtesy the artist and YveYANG Gallery

At the centre of the exhibition are three looming sculptures by Baxter Koziol: imagined villains, informed by the artist's interest in old Universal gothic horrors such as Frankenstein, Dracula, and The Wolf Man. Where Koziol has previously taken interest in costume design and wearable works, *The Blood Vessel* marks his first foray into standalone sculptures. Though discrete, the three works: *BONE-YARD* with accessories, *Invisible Man Security System*, and *The Non-Man Incubation Chamber*, share the same semiosphere, as if part of the same comic universe. Koziol's three figures staged dramatically throughout the gallery space recall a Renaissance fascination with figural composition and the charged symbolism of the period. So too, do these horrors belie highly symbolic themes, such as the repressed manifesting in Dr. Jekyll and Mr Hyde, or the Creature from the Black Lagoon as a symbol of sexual desire...

Much like Salerno's *Anatomical Machines*, Koziol's *Invisible Man Security System* takes the form of a suspended circulatory system, presenting a lurching, orange, wired silhouette above the frame of a house. With looming, orange eyeballs and loosely articulated limbs, the work condenses many of the invisible man archetypes, and also considers how monsters are always ciphers for larger, socio-political frameworks. Where the moral of *Invisible Man* narratives often accrete around how a lack of accountability through invisibility transforms into madness, Koziol's structure turns on modern invisible men on the internet such as online chat rooms that capitalise on anonymity, and the radicalism of white male rage.



Baxter Koziol, 'Invisible Man Security System', 2024. New Dirt in orange, scaffolding safety harness, yarn, pine, trim, nails, wire. 36 x 40 x 72 in. / 91.4 x 101.6 x 182.9 cm. Courtesy the artist and YveYANG Gallery



One of the central works in the exhibition is BONE-YARD with Accessories: a green, heaped mass, stitched together from accreted objects. Cast in various shades of green, the form implies a humanoid presence, pooling around a central erect figure. Like detritus washed ashore, or the web of freshly manufactured plastic toys, the sculpture combines fluidity and heterogeneity in one cohesive structure.

The work is inspired, in part, by the Swamp Thing – an antihero of the DC universe, made from organic matter and seeking to protect nature from threats of scientific and human origin. Mimicking this anthropomorphism, Koziol imagines BONE-YARD as the sentient, standing detritus of a typical American lawn, dragging all associated furniture with it. Whilst the imposing work recalls a Baroque penchant for the dramatic, the amalgamated sculpture also calls into mind questions of consumerism and identity: making the objects of mass production a sentient



Baxter Koziol, 'The Non-Man Incubation Chamber', 2024. Toy hide, coat liner, faux fur, yarn, wire, foam, Abominable Snowman, Grizzlor. 24 × 72 × 72 in / 61 × 182.9 × 182.9 cm. Courtesy the artist and YveYANG Gallery