

## Sanford Biggers: "Back to the Stars"

By Rebecca Memoli

In "Back to the Stars," his fourth solo exhibition at Monique Meloche, Sanford Biggers examines history through his use of materials. Works from two ongoing series, *Codex* and *Chimera*, were on view. The series *Codex* includes collage and sculptural works made from antique quilts. The layers and patterns of the quilts become intertwined with other materials creating designs that echo the layers and patterns of history. The sculptures from the *Chimera* series also reflect history via the use of a variety of sculptural raw materials. Cast marble, paint, wood, and textiles make up not just the form of these works, they also represent how those materials have been used throughout the history of art.



Stars are found throughout the works in the *Codex* series. Stars, stripes, and other patterned fabric from antique quilts are collaged with other textiles. The interwoven threads make a novel medium to record history. Quilts are traditionally handed down through generations and created from scraps and pieces of materials. Quilts are like coded messages to subsequent generations—like books written in a secret language. The collage elements add a painterly feeling to them. These elements come together to form a new narrative while still maintaining echoes of their previous forms.

*Promiscuous Platform*, 2023. Assorted textiles, mixed media, archival paper mounted on felt, 31 1/2 x 30 1/4 x 1 1/2 inches. (Right) *Oneroi (La Sirena)*, 2023. Assorted textiles, mixed media, archival paper mounted on felt, 24 1/2 x 25 x 1 1/2 inches. Photos: Monique Meloche Gallery.



Oneroi (Relic 2), 2023. Cast marble, assorted textiles, mixed media on custom cedar plinth, 36 x 22 x 19 inches; plinth: 30 x 22 x 26 inches. (Right) Oneroi (Relic 1), 2023. Cast marble, assorted textiles, mixed media, gold leaf on custom cedar plinth, 37 1/2 x 55 1/4 x 95 1/2 inches; plinth: 30 x 22 x 26 inches. Photos: Monique Meloche Gallery.

The quilted works have an aura that emanates from the layered materials. *Venus Sutra* offers a calm but powerful presence. The geometric structure of the entire piece mimics the geometric star pattern of the quilt. Each panel delicately displays the wear on the fabric from its original use. Although the quilt is cut up, it feels like each panel is preserving the materials and paying homage to the original quilt and the history it holds.

Two large sculptures from the *Chimera* series are included in this exhibition, *Oneroi (Relic 1)* and *Oneroi (Relic 2)*. Unlike classical Greco-Roman works, such as the *Venus de Milo* with its missing limbs and naked torso, these pieces are just the head—like a relic, a piece of a body, kept as holy in a sacred shrine.

The pair is made of cast marble; one is covered in gold, the other is painted a rich brown, like terracotta. Both are inverted atop a pedestal made of stacked wood pieces that resemble wooden pallets, giving the works an industrial quality.



Venus Sutra, 2023. (Left side, center view, right side) Antique quilts, birch plywood, gold leaf, 73 x 51 1/2 x 18 inches. Photos: Monique Meloche Gallery.

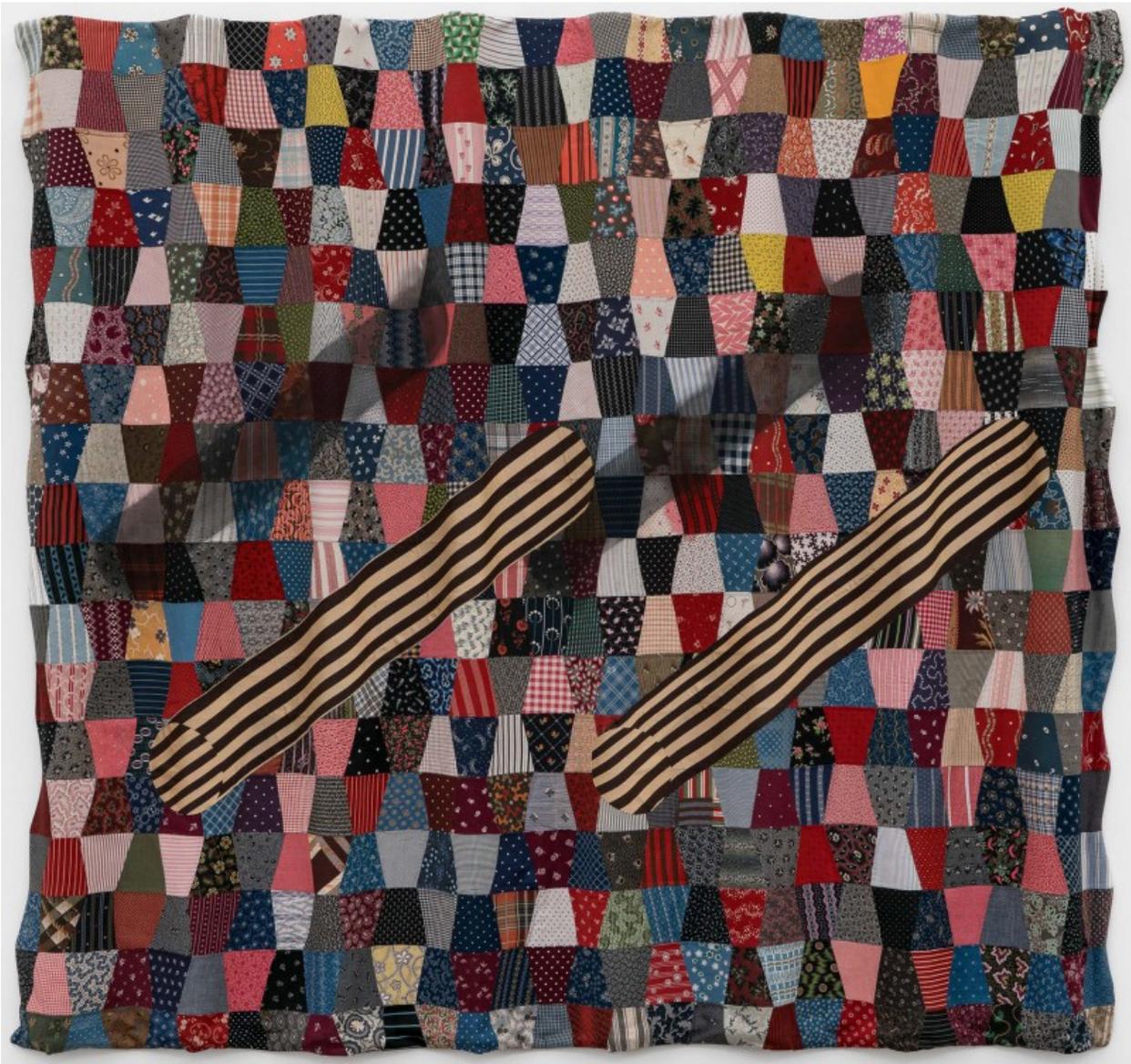


(Left) Voyage To Atlantis, 2023. Antique quilt, assorted textiles, mixed media mounted on felt, 42 x 41 3/4 x 1 3/8 inches. (Right) Untitled, 2023. Assorted textiles, mixed media, archival paper mounted on felt, 28 1/2 x 29 1/2 x 1 3/8 inches. Photos: Monique Meloche Gallery.

Although the base of the marble remains bare, the sculpture surfaces are painted and shrouded in textiles. The process is the reverse of the removal of paint and color from Greco-Roman statues to make them the pristine white that has become symbolic of classical beauty in European society. Fabric covers the eyes of both sculptures. The

gold of *Relic 1* is almost completely obscured, as it is wrapped up as though it were wearing a shawl.

Both series featured in this exhibition focus on materiality. The *Chimera* works are created out of mostly new materials, where those in the *Codex* series are structured mostly around found fabric. There are sculptural qualities to the works in *Codex*, but they still maintain their quilted nature. The *Chimera* series, in contrast, is colder, more academic, and thus a bit harder to decipher. Although those two sculptures are large, the volume of works from the *Codex* series dominate the exhibition.



Furrow, 2023. Antique quilts, assorted textiles, mixed media on fiberglass, 63 x 67 1/2 x 3 inches. Photo: Monique Meloche Gallery.

In terms of substance, everything and everyone is made of stardust. If we trace back our cosmic origins, we all share a history. Like a repurposed quilt, particles combine and become new things. With his use of found textiles, Biggers is examining the ways that materials can hold, as well as make reference to, history.

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