

ARTILLERY



Kelly Akashi, "Figure Shifter," 2019, Installation view. François Ghebaly, Los Angeles. Courtesy of the Artist and François Ghebaly, Los Angeles. Photo: Marten Elder.

FRANÇOIS GHEBALY:

KELLY AKASHI

by Annabel Osberg ·

Drawing parallels between seashells, glass and the human body, Kelly Akashi's exhibition, "Figure Shifter," is a mystical mise-en-scène whose cryptic press release reads as a brief fairytale written in the first person by some mythical spiritual entity. This dimly lit installation brims with the feeling that something uncanny is on the verge of occurring.



Kelly Akashi, *Ripple* (2019). Stainless steel, hand-blown glass. 55.5 x 13.5 x 13.5 inches. Courtesy the Artist and François Ghebaly, Los Angeles. Photo: Robert Wedemeyer.

Anyone who has ever lingered in a glassblowing studio will relate to Akashi's encapsulations of the medium's sheer physical wonder. Small sculptures such as *Ripple* (all works 2019) and *Swell* proffer meditations on the tactile changeability of glass as it relates to the human body. Molten glass appears as a sluggish organic entity; yet no matter how much one desires to touch it, one can never come close without getting burned. Akashi's sculptures reverse this paradigm, presenting elegantly disembodied stainless steel hands interacting with glass bubbles seemingly frozen in states of flux. Human skin that should be soft and warm is rendered in cold hard metal; while cold glass appears warm and pliable enough to be poked, clasped, and squeezed.



Kelly Akashi, *Ripple* (2019). Stainless steel, hand-blown glass. 55.5 x 13.5 x 13.5 inches. Courtesy the Artist and François Ghebaly, Los Angeles. Photo: Robert Wedemeyer.

Vitreous transformation from blazing ooze to clear crystal seems as magical as the mysteries of people's existence. Even after it cools and hardens, glass remains an amorphous solid, thought by some to be constantly moving at a rate so slow as to be undetectable. Organisms' skin is constantly being regenerated. In this respect, human flesh and glass are similar in their

protean nature. Flowing Figure features a hand holding a clear glass shell that squirts water as a vital fountain.



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In a hypnotic video projection titled *Shells*, molluscan exoskeletons morph, disintegrate and reintegrate. Beyond, a white tunnel leads to the installation's final chamber where photograms evoke diatoms and wooden shelves harbor curious specimens. At one shelf's bottom, transparent glass seashells align perfectly with anterior and posterior medical diagrams of a flayed human torso. Akashi's poetic visual metaphors bring to mind *Gift from the Sea*, Anne Morrow Lindbergh's book articulating seashells as symbols for human experiences. Completing the effect, the exhibition checklist is diagrammed in the curvy abstract form of a snail or a cranium, suggesting the gallery space as a calcareous shell for plastic beings.

Kelly Akashi, "Figure Shifter," February 2 – March 10, 2019, at François Ghebaly, 2245 E. Washington Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90021. ghebaly.com