

# ARTS & CULTURE

## Leila Heller Dubai hosts artist Mia Fonssagrives Solow's works



**DUBAI:** Leila Heller gallery, Dubai, is hosting the sculpture works of American contemporary artist Mia Fonssagrives Solow (opening Sept 22, on view for eight weeks).

Based in New York and Paris, Solow is internationally renowned for her refined and whimsical aesthetic, in both figurative and abstract forms. She uses a range of mediums, from polished bronze to gilded wood, to sleek enamel over fiberglass, examining the multitudes contained within the simplified framework of scale and movement, form and colour.

The curving surfaces of each piece draw the eye from one exquisite line to the next, as everyday objects, such as a sail or an apple, are refined to the clean, essential lines of their forms. What begins as a small lucite or wood maquette, evolves to a monumental fiberglass sculpture. For Solow, the negative space at the centre of each work echoes her upbringing in front of and behind the lens of a camera.

The negative spaces not only define the sculptures themselves, but also reframe the world beyond. Solow is the daughter of renowned French photographer Fernand Fonssagrives and Swedish supermodel Lisa Fonssagrives, and is the stepdaughter of esteemed photographer Irving Penn.

She worked as a fashion designer with couture designer Vicky Tiel during the high-flying '60s in Paris and is also a jewellery designer, whose creations can be found in locations around the world. She has exhibited in New York, London, Palm Beach, Paris and Shanghai. Her sculpture graces the pages of publications such as FT's How to Spend It, Vanity Fair, The New York Times, Vogue, Harper's Bazaar, Artnet, and Artsy.

Exquisite lines on curved surfaces are a feature of Mia Fonssagrives Solow's works.

Following her Dubai show, select pieces will be shown in other locales. Solow speaks to Gulf Today

**How have haute couture and jewellery designing influenced you as a sculptor?**

Once your interest in fashion begins, it never goes away and what you see people inventing on the street becomes inspirational. When you see people dressing in a different way, a breakaway look it is very inspiring. My jewellery designing came after I made a sculpture. It was always sculpture first then jewellery second; I guess I inspired myself.

**Have you had formal training in sculpting? (Genes and upbringing alone wouldn't have been enough for the work you do).**

Yes, I went to Parsons School of Design and School of Visual Arts; but I started sculpting when I was six, without having gone to school. I continued sculpting my whole life even when I was involved with fashion in Paris. As a child, I was given the opportunity to go to museums all over the world and be exposed to many different forms of art from many different regions. My eye was always stimulated by the people I lived with my mother and two fathers. I also had an enormous appreciation for nature from a very early age.

**What is the effect/s you wish to realise when you filter subjects through art?**

Because of my love for nature, I have been inspired by simple things like the formation of a bone, the negative space in a skeleton, apples, eggs, trees, tree limbs... all these things in nature are a source of inspiration for me.

**How is your art linked to the contemporary industrial age?**

Mia Fonssagrives Solow with an objet d'art.

I use industrial material to work with, such as fiber glass and bronze. For my fiberglass sculptures, I use extremely industrial paint: in fact I use car paint for all of my fiber glass pieces and finishing. The look I am trying to achieve is that of a Ferrari or Maserati or a beautiful ship. When I am asked how much one of my large pieces weighs, I reply as much as a row boat or shell of a car, without any interior.

**Why do you use negative spaces within sculptures?**

Negative space is very important to me. It is fascinating the way black matter in the universe is so important. Some of the spaces in my art represent what is gone from parts of my life as well as looking into the future for what might be coming.

**There is a both playful humour and high seriousness in your works. Comment.**

I adore humour: anything that can make me laugh is thrilling. When I work on my robots or animals, there is a humour in making them, because I giggle all the time and I hope people find humour in what I do because it is wonderful to laugh your head off. We have enough tragedy in the world today.

**Do your sculptures radiate myths and tech? If so, how have they impacted you?**

As children, we always read mythology, which was extremely fascinating to a young mind, and I loved the stories of minotaurs, centaurs and mythological creatures.

Technology and things like a computer motherboard, I find beautiful and has inspired a lot of the jewellery that I have done. The surface texture is so intricate and exquisite! It is complex in its simplicity. All of technology opens our mind to what could be.

**Who are the sculptors and people who have shaped your work?**

My love for other sculptors began with cave-men and the Venus of Willendorf. These were people that sculpted female survivors and the ones who brought life to their tribe. I love the simple forms of Cycladic art in 5,000 BCE. The simplicity of their forms is so appealing and so modern and always in the back of my mind.

I feel the father of modern-day sculpture is Henry Moore and a strong inspiration. There are so many painters Picasso, Miro and Matisse, to name a few. The colours and forms of Matisse are wonderful.

**Can we call your sculptures "stellart"?**

I am not sure of the word stellART, but if you are saying stellar, why not — I love the stars. One of the joys I look forward to when coming to Dubai is going to see the stars in the desert. I haven't seen them in 35 years!

**Have you finished making clothes for yourself and family members for your Middle East trip?**

I love making clothes; but my family members are very young and stubborn and set in their modern-day ways. So, I have put together clothes for myself and look forward to wearing them in Dubai.

Muhammad Yusuf, Features Writer