

VAS VISUAL ART eNEWSLETTER

August 9, 2025

PRESENTED BY VISUAL ART SOURCE, THE DEMOCRACY CHAIN and FABRIK

Cecilia Z. Miguez, "A Thousand Years in One Night"

by Jody Zellen

Louis Stern, West Hollywood, CA, July 10 - September 6, 2025



Cecilia Z. Miguez, "Fantasy by Fire," 2025, bronze, gold leaf, glass microbeads and oil paint, 18 x 4 x 7"



Cecilia Z. Miguez, "The Golden Piece" 2025, bronze, wood, concrete, glass microbeads, gold leaf, and oil paint, 24 3/4 x 7"



Cecilia Z. Miguez, "The Smile is the Last Thing to Go," 2025, bronze, concrete, resin, gold leaf, glass microbeads, and oil paint, 39 1/2 x 10 10"

In her evocative exhibition "A Thousand Years in One Night," Cecilia Z. Miguez laments the loss of her Altadena home and studio in the Eaton fire. Like so many Los Angeles artists, Miguez was forced to confront the destruction of her home/studio and possessions. Because she had an upcoming exhibition, she needed to rebound quickly and got to work transforming objects not completely obliterated by the conflagration into new creations. Culling from the rubble, Miguez used fragments and remnants of sculptures made from bronze and wood as well as found objects as points of departure for a new direction. Her latest sculptures evoke survival and the courage to continue while overcoming devastating obstacles.

Miguez is a figurative sculptor whose career spans five decades. Her previous mixed-media pieces were celebrated for their intriguing depictions of the female form and the way she examined its beauty and associated mythologies. They were well crafted, intricate and seductive. In this new work, she embraces bodies with missing parts as well as the scars and the imperfections resulting from the flames. The new pieces have a rawness and vulnerability that distinguishes them from her prior sculptures.

"The Smile Is the Last Thing to Go" had a golden patina and modest scale before the fire. It portrayed a curvaceous woman with a gracefully posed arm and an elaborate headdress. In a pamphlet that accompanies the exhibition Miguez writes, "This sculpture's exquisite torso was the first piece to be salvaged from the ruins. As if she had attracted the real thing, a chaotic splash of melted bronze separated her feet, her legs, and one arm, which was never recovered. She is now kept frozen in time, witnessing her own inevitable destruction." The new work is missing an arm, so the hand is attached to the torso at the hip. The figure stares down at an awkwardly colored and positioned hand holding a pile of melted bronze as if to ask, what happened to me?

"Fantasy by Fire," just 18 inches high, features a standing female figure with its own missing arm. Surrounding the woman's head is a halo of fire. From the back, the gold plated amoeba-like shape grows from the base of the skull and branches up and out in multiple directions, its pockmarked surface dotted with red glass micro-beads. Seen from the front, this charred halo encircles the woman's head. The red beads that outline the shape allude to blazing flames.

Miguez refers to the waist-high sculpture "The Golden Piece" as a queen. When the upper portion of the body was retrieved after the fire, one arm was missing and the bronze head had melted. For the new work, Miguez attached another head that was similarly culled from the debris, painted her lips red and gave her expressive eyes. A disembodied hand was adhered to a wooden base that resembled a lectern or a column, yet functions as a body. Much of the original work's charred remains are covered in golden beads that transform ruin into newfound hope. A large bow covers the back of the work, effectively restoring glory to the queen.

Among the smaller pieces is "A Thousand Years in One Night." In the pamphlet, Miguez speaks of how the pre-burned sculpture had a face resembling a mask with painted blue eyes that peaked out from a mysterious wooden time machine covered with found gears and knobs. Now it is presented as a relic. The ruin of a head is now inset into a wooden frame and surrounded by empty glass bottles. Miguez describes the new sculpture as being entombed like a mummy "... buried not with material wealth but with the riches of imagination ...". "Daydream" is another, smaller work consisting of two heads fused to a dilapidated wooden support with a crackled surface, something at once complete and unfinished.

The female figures that populate this exhibition are mostly bald and initially have the appearance of undressed manikins. Yet as we take them in, they reveal themselves to be elegant, stoic and poised. They appear in different degrees of disrepair, missing limbs, hands and feet. That destruction imbues them with a haunting demeanor, and they assert their presence with a sense of determination.

Miguez wrote of wanting to guide her unfinished works down new paths after the fire struck, and of being forced to confront the unexpected. Rather than give in to despair she rose to the occasion to create evocative and meaningful new art. She gathered what she could find from what remained and lovingly gave them a new life. These sculptures have emerged from the cocoon of fire to become assertive forms that channel spirits of healing and hope.

Jody Zellen is a LA based writer and artist who creates interactive installations, mobile apps, net art, animations, drawings, paintings, photographs, public art, and artist's books. Zellen received a BA from Wesleyan University (1983), a MFA from CalArts (1989) and a MPS from NYU's Interactive Telecommunications Program (2009). She has exhibited nationally and internationally since 1989. For more information please visit www.jodyzellen.com