

Alien objects: Reuven Israel displays his new sculptures at Shulamit Nazarian



Stepping around Reuven Israel's new sculptures - now showing at Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles, it's as if you've seen them somewhere before. Pictured: Installation view

The Jerusalem-born, long-time Brooklyn-dwelling Israel has looked to many different areas for inspiration for his first solo appearance in the city, such as, 'various forms of spacecrafts, antennas, and ritualised structures and objects of the past - temples, pottery, instruments and weapons.' It's not the form of those things that is recognisable in the work, though. 'Often, when I work on sculptures I'm not thinking of specific places, objects, or events, but rather their implied cultural meanings,' the artist explains, as he unveiled the exhibition, titled 'As Above, So Below'.

To get too much into his specific references would spoil the fun, but he does reveal that Arkady and Boris Strugatsky's 1971 sci-fi novel, *Roadside Picnic*, an account of events after a visit by extraterrestrials that is only discovered thanks to the objects they left behind, was on his mind. 'I like for my sculptures to be encountered as autonomous objects, without being linked to a known source. I want them to hint to a utilitarian function, but one that is not specific or decoded,' Israel says. It explains the eerie familiarity his works have. 'Like the objects left by the aliens, with my sculptures the viewer is left to "reverse engineer" the object's implied purpose through form and geometry, all while its unhinged from a specific context.'

This is reflected in the way his sculptures are made, too. Though their polished surfaces appear to be industrially fabricated, with their mass-produced precision, they are in fact totally built by hand, using MDF that Israel cuts, glues, sands and shapes, before embarking on a process of coating with different layers of paints and lacquer, until he achieves their deceptive glossy finish. 'This creates a near perfect surface, which imitates the look of plastic, metal or porcelain.' When his labour intensive process is done, Israel looks forward to standing back and watching the audience react as they try to unravel what's in front of them - much like the scientists before the alien ephemera in the Strugatskys' book. 'I want the physicality of the individual pieces to deceive the viewer,' says Israel.