

PERROTIN

Alma ALLEN

The Brooklyn Rail,

Alma Allen

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Alma Allen - The Brooklyn Rail

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Installation view: Alma Allen, Kasmin Gallery, New York, 2020. Photo: Diego Flores

[Kasmin Gallery](#)

Alma Allen

January 23 – March 4, 2020

Although originally based in Joshua Tree, self-taught artist Alma Allen now lives in Tepoztlán, Mexico, in circumstances large enough to accommodate a bronze foundry. The 12 works currently on view at Kasmin are mostly of outsize proportions, and accommodate bronze, stone, and wood as materials. The gallery is to be thanked for offering a show like this: sculptures greater than ten feet in height do not necessarily accord with the usual domestic decorations of those wealthy enough to buy such works!

The fluid, organic nature of Allen's work argues for a sense of sculpture that is biomorphic and process-oriented. His sculptures are hardly urban, belonging instead to woods and fields and ponds—this despite the monumental tenor of the work on hand. Kasmin's show, installed in a

high-ceilinged gallery space in Chelsea, argues for a distinct perception of form. No work is very much like another, but the organicism of the overall project ties the discrete sculptures together in ways that generate meaning, in terms both of the individual works and also the overall gestalt resulting from their placement.



Installation view: Alma Allen, Kasmin Gallery, New York, 2020. Photo: Diego Flores

If we regard the works individually, we are struck by the piece-by-piece autonomy of the art. Each of the works, which all receive the name *Not Yet Titled*, has its own reason for being, while their large scale invests them with an aura of self-reflexive importance. One particularly attractive example (2019), made of white and slate-blue marble, looks like a nautilus shell, its spiral ending in a tail extending from the body of the sculpture. A bit abstract, a bit figurative, the work underscores Allen's closeness to natural form. In particular, the color of the marble used lends the work its aura of inescapable beauty, which is a hallmark of the work we see in the show. Another piece (also 2019), a tall, nearly 7-foot-high bronze, looks uncannily like the body of a woman with a head supporting a bun of hair (both head and body are given a gold-colored surface treatment). Although one hesitates to assign influences to a body of work as self-sufficient and idiosyncratic as Allen's, Brâncuși hovers in the background as a precedent. Even if Brâncuși feels delicate when compared to Allen's efforts, there is a shared simplicity of form that unites the two artists.

A third piece from 2020, a large, bumpy pod with indentations and bulges suggesting individual seeds, makes an impression not only due to its large size and startlingly blue-green color, but because it demonstrates clearly the extent to which Allen bases his art on nature. Indeed, that

closeness is what animates all the work on display at Kasmin. Allen's abiding conviction is that an art drawing on natural form will only gain in gravitas through enlargement of size and the idiosyncratic process that allows him to rethink an original, natural shape in the final form of an artwork. Such transformations allow Allen to build works notable for their combination of grace and awkwardness. For example, a medium-sized wood sculpture boasts a burnished brown surface—elegant from a distance, but marked with cuts and holes. This defacement adds to the attractiveness of the work's form—something we experience regularly in the show. Allen thus mixes aesthetic values and materials in ways that make a distinct impact and stay with us for some time.