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"He + She" The Ceramics of Sergei Isupov

by [Bobbie Leigh](#) ([RSS feed](#))
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You can't just look casually at Sergei Isupov's stoneware ceramics at his show at the Barry Friedman Ltd. Gallery in Chelsea. They are spellbinding. In fact, they are so cryptic, so dreamlike, so unlike anything you have ever seen, you feel compelled to keep staring.



Each of the mostly androgynous pieces in this intriguing show are placed on pedestals with mirrors at their base so you can see the painted narratives on the bottom surface of each work. "HE + SHE" is a collaboration between Barry Friedman Ltd. in Chelsea and the Ferrin Gallery in Pittsfield Mass.



Isupov's work is totally ambiguous and to come up with any meaning for his dream-like vignettes you would have to plunge into the choppy waters of his memory and imagination. Isupov says he makes up a story while he is working, but by the time the piece is finished, he has forgotten it. His pieces seem to have a hidden narrative which has to do with instincts, sexual drive, and an uninhibited exploration of how [men](#) and women relate to each other in myth and in today's world.



Anatomically explicit and deeply anchored in Isupov's personal experience, they are illustrations of what one critic called the artist's id --- that is the part of his psyche that is anchored in his imagination, totally unfettered by convention. Isupov says that the essence of his work is not in the medium of porcelain or the creative process, but in human beings and their incredible diversity. "When I think of myself and my works, I'm not sure I create them, but they create me," he says.



Born in Ukraine in 1963, Isupov attended art [school](#) in Tallinn, Estonia, and emigrated to this country in 1993. Gallery owner Leslie Ferrin recognized his talent early on and helped him gain recognition and establish his [career](#) in the U.S. She has consistently shown his work at her gallery and at various [art](#) shows in [Palm](#) Beach, Miami, New York, and Chicago. Today Isupov is represented in numerous public and private collections.



Isupov's technique starts out in a similar [fashion](#) as other ceramic artists in that he rolls out the clay in very thin layers and then creates the form. Where he differs is in the next stage. Almost all the work -- painted images, surface color and texture --- is done before the first firing. He then fires a second time at 2300 degree F. The end result is an idiosyncratic [sculpture](#) with illustrative details that practically no one can figure out except the artist. But judging from his growing reputation, ambiguity does not stand in the way of admiration. The show will be on view in Chelsea through February. Barry Friedman Ltd., 515 West 26th Street, NYC; www.barryfriedmanltd.com; Ferrin Gallery, 437 North Street, Pittsfield Mass;

www.ferringallery.com



