



From left:
Jon Kessler
Kosmos
 1984
 Aluminum, Plexiglas, screenprint on cloth,
 drawings, mixed media with lights, and
 motor
 47 x 81 x 24 inches
 Collection of the Fisher Landau Center for Art

Jon Kessler
Doppelgänger
 1984
 Aluminum, Plexiglas, screenprint on cloth,
 drawings, mixed media with lights, and
 motor
 47 x 29 x 24 inches
 Collection of the Fisher Landau Center for Art

Below:
Jon Kessler
The Considerer
 1999
 Aluminum, stuffed bird, drawings, mixed
 media with lights, and motor
 77 x 72 x 62 inches
 Collection of the Fisher Landau Center for Art

JON KESSLER

BY MOLLY GOTTSCHALK

As he excitedly pulls artwork from crates laden with cobwebs and dust, Jon Kessler's face shines with an enthusiasm undoubtedly similar to what he felt nearly 30 years ago when he installed these same pieces in his very first show, which took place in the early eighties. Now, in the second decade of the new millennium, this retrospective highlights 12 sculptures that are united by their eighties and nineties origin but each involve a separate, founding element of his artistic chronology. According to Kessler, "Each one is an example of a kind of motif or idea that I was working through at the time."

Aside from the nostalgia that attends an exhibition aimed to honor an artist's earliest show, the allure of this installation lies in these primary pieces' unintentional yet succinct way of foreshadowing his later works. Aware of the countless premonitions of his eventual career, Kessler confides his interest in "how you grow as an artist, and how ideas stay with you." He adds, describing the earliest work, *Iron Curtain*: "It's interesting that we are showing this piece from 1983, because it has army men in it, and all of my new work, which is very political and all about the American military, now relates to my very first show — to the very beginning."

It would have been difficult to convince Kessler of the prolific course he would embark on as a newly arrived New Yorker in the early 1980s. His curiosity led him to Canal Street, which he says was, "at the time, a heaven for surplus electronics, motors, army and radio supplies." He included these parts in his work after wandering into shops and befriending store owners, inquiring about gadgets such as washing machine timers and

taking them back to his Williamsburg studio to experiment with. At that time he began using a process he describes as "pure assemblage." Through the incorporation of his newfound mechanics, he "learned more skills and the narratives became longer and more ambitious." He has continued to use these same principles in his work, "first expanding into the room, and now into the universe." The gallery director, Nicholas Arbatsky, adds that in his newer pieces, the original ideas Kessler expressed "are still there in little bits and pieces, but now [he] is just taking them even further."

The exhibition is on view at the Fisher Landau Center for Art through January 3, 2011. Ultimately, Kessler hopes it will convey "the quirkiness" of his early work, and the foundation of what then "exploded during the last ten years with [my] large installations." He adds that he does not regard the work as a rehearsal, but more "as laying the groundwork for everything that happened beyond." He shares a final thought, that one of the most fascinating elements of his show is how "everything — the world — has changed around the work, yet even back then my interest in the machine and looking behind the mechanism, revealing the spectacle and investigation, and insisting on the active participation of the viewer, remains dominant."

