

# City of Dreams

**John Kuo**  
**Valeri Larko**

**March 15th - May 12th**

Thomas VanDyke Gallery  
434 39th Street, Brooklyn



**City of Dreams** brings together the work of Valeri Larko and John Kuo, two artists whose practices explore the urban environment through vastly different yet complementary perspectives. Larko's immersive, on-site paintings capture the shifting landscapes of New York's industrial edges; bridges, trestles, and abandoned structures; while Kuo's surreal, figurative sculptures navigate the transient experience of city life, shaped by memory, migration, and the search for belonging.

For Larko, the city is a living history, its forgotten spaces revealing layers of change, decay, and resilience. Her meticulous plein-air paintings document these sites before they vanish, preserving the overlooked corners of an ever-evolving metropolis. Kuo, in contrast, approaches the city as a dreamlike aquarium, where people and places drift in and out of focus, their lives intersecting in fleeting, enigmatic moments. His sculptures merge urban elements with the human form, creating fragmented narratives that reflect both presence and absence, connection and isolation.

Together, their work forms a dialogue between permanence and impermanence, the remembered and the ephemeral. *City of Dreams* invites viewers to consider the layered, often unseen realities of urban life; the stories held within its walls, its windows, and the people who move through them.



**John “Chia Hsuan” Kuo** is a Taiwanese sculptor with a foundation in ceramics, transforming everyday observations into deeply evocative sculptures that capture fleeting moments of life. Kuo studied sculpture at the Art Students League of New York, where he now serves as a technical instructor in sculpture casting.

With extensive experience in ceramics, he has developed a practice that balances traditional craftsmanship with expressive, contemporary forms. His work has been exhibited at institutions such as the New Taipei City Yingge Ceramics Museum and various galleries in New York and Taiwan. Kuo has received numerous awards, including First Prize in the 19th Tokyo-New York Friendship Ceramic Competition, the Ann and Bruno Lucchesi Grant, and The National Sculpture Society Young Sculptors Grant.

Through sculpture, Kuo seeks to create a bridge between personal and collective experiences, portraying imagery infused with poetic thought.

John Kuo was born and raised in a city in the southern part of Taiwan before moving to New York. In this city of immigrants, he experienced a sense of drifting—an experience that led him to reflect on the concept of “home,” something he had once taken for granted. To him, the city feels like an aquarium, filled with constant movement and unexpected scenes that catch his eye. He draws inspiration from the people he encounters on his daily subway rides, the fleeting moments that unfold around him, and buildings lined with windows, each carrying a different story—fragments of lives, dreams, and aspirations.

As a foreigner, Kuo views these elements as both distant and intimate. He enjoys playing with imagery, constructing his sculptures as surreal collages that merge different elements into a single form. He incorporates windows into his figures and urban objects, using them as portals that reveal both presence and absence—a longing for connection while existing in a state of transition. These windows also allude to inner worlds, emotions, and memories, offering glimpses into the untold.

In this vast aquarium-like city, people drift through its currents, surrounded by countless lives unfolding in fragments of light and shadow. Both watching and being watched, they are all part of this ever-shifting landscape—an idea that remains central to Kuo’s artistic exploration.







**Valeri Larko** is best known for her densely painted landscapes of the urban fringe, all of which she paints on location. She is attracted to the decaying and abandoned structures that populated the outskirts of America's urban centers and the stories these places tell about contemporary life and culture. Larko is a visual storyteller and she likes to capture scenes of a changing America before these places are demolished and lost forever.

A large painting can take Larko up to three months to complete. The process of painting on location over a long period of time is crucial to her working method because it allows her to form a deeper connection to a particular place through careful observation and personal interaction with the people she meets there.

While talking to people on location, Larko learns a lot about the places she paints. She finds this interaction, both with people and the environment, makes the method by which she works as important as the final painting. For the past five years, Valeri has been focusing on painting New York City's bridges, train trestles and abandoned sites in the Bronx and surrounding areas. One of her most recent projects is painting on site at the abandoned Power Plant in Yonkers, NY. A historically important complex of three large brick buildings that have stunning architectural details and a lot of graffiti.

Valeri Larko grew up in Lake Parsippany and lived in Northern NJ most of her life surrounded by endless miles of industrial parks, highways and shopping malls all of which have contributed to her fascination with the built environment. She was educated at the Du Cret School of the Arts, Plainfield, NJ and the Arts Students League, New York City. In 2004, Valeri moved from northern New Jersey to an artist loft building in New Rochelle, New York where she lives with her husband and their pit bull Tula. She continues to explore the fringes of the Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens.





