

OCTOBER 22, 2013, 4:46 PM

## Art Matters | Two Artists, a Chevy Astro Van and a Statue of Michael Jackson

By [NOAH DILLON](#)

The Queens neighborhood of Long Island City has become progressively hipper in the past decade, but it's still a local center of light industry. With creative types moving there in greater numbers, some of that industry now involves a fair amount of art. One of those artists with a studio squirreled among the warehouses and factories is [Fawn Krieger](#), a sculptor whose previous work has included small clay architectural pieces and wonky reproductions of consumer goods like pizza and Louis Vuitton clutches, but never anything figurative.

On a recent Tuesday, she and an art handler carted a statue into the freight elevator of her building. Shortly afterward, the performance artist [Neal Medlyn](#) arrived, driving a 1998 Chevy Astro van. The three were about to move a piece of history — or, more accurately, a piece partly based on “HIStory,” the 1995 Michael Jackson album — to the [Kitchen](#), the venerable nonprofit art space in Chelsea. Medlyn had commissioned Krieger to execute his portrait as Michael Jackson for the finale of his eight-year-long Pop Star Series, in which he reinterprets the work of stars like Prince and Britney Spears. It will stand guard in the lobby during the four-night run of Medlyn's show, “King,” which opens tomorrow.

The sculpture took four months to build and is about nine feet tall, and it consists of carved pink insulation foam that has been spray-painted silver. Once the van pulled up to the Kitchen, a small scrum of curators, artists and theater techs quickly formed. After a quick coffee break, the techs trundled the sculpture inside and laid it gently on the floor. Placing the statue was tricky, and as the handlers scooted it gently into place, Krieger spent part of the time hugging it to provide extra support, gripping it by what she affectionately called its “tushie.” A discussion ensued about what placement of two Fender amps would make for a better presentation of the King of Pop's “Little Susie.”

Around noon, they drilled one last hole into the base for electrical wires and an audio feed. As Medlyn watched and fidgeted, he repeatedly, unconsciously struck the same wide, cross-legged pose as his oversize effigy. He checked the sound while the lights were dimmed to cast the right ambience, and everything was ready. Krieger stepped back, removed the blue surgical gloves she'd been wearing to avoid getting fingerprints on the pristine silver paint and walked around to look at the piece from every angle. It was big and shiny and a little funny. And it sang.

*“King” by Neal Medlyn has performances nightly from Oct. 23 through Oct. 26 at 8 p.m at the Kitchen, 512 West 19th Street. For more information and tickets, go to [thekitchen.org](#).*