THE NASHER

MATTHEW **RONAY** MIWON **KWON** CATHERINE **CAESAR** JESSICA **BELL BROWN** EVAN **MOFFITT** LISS **LAFLEUR** KRISTEN **COCHRAN**
NICOLE **EISENMAN** TANIA **BRUGUERA** HANS **HAACKE** FRED **WILSON** MASSIMILIANO **GIONI** KATE **PEEBLES** JOHN **POMARA**

THE NASHER | FALL 2022
BODY ISSUE

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Nasher Sculpture Center

COVER:
Matthew Ronay, *The Crack, the Swell, an Earth, an Ode* (detail), 2022. Basswood, dye, gouache, flocking, plastic, steel, cotton, epoxy, 37 3/4 x 284 x 13 in. (95.9 x 721.4 x 33 cm). © Matthew Ronay. Courtesy of the artist and Casey Kaplan, New York.

INSIDE:
Pedro Reyes, *Mitla Chair,* 2019. Tinted pink concrete, 17 7/10 x 21 3/10 x 31 1/2 in. (45 x 54 x 80 cm). Mexico City: Collective/Collectible at MASA. Photo: Genevieve Lutkin, courtesy of MASA.

Liss LaFleur, "*Birth fringe (yellow),*" 2022. Fringe and metal, dimensions variable. Installation view of Nasher Public: *The Queer Birth Project*, May 7 – July 17, 2022. Photo: Kevin Todora.

BACK INSIDE:
Words selected from Matthew Ronay article "Water-filled Space Suits for Our Skins."

BACK COVER:
Kristen Cochran, *Touchscreen Monuments (for Ukraine),* 2022. Image courtesy of the artist.

BODY OBJECT

Intuitively, sculpture may seem the most physical of visual arts. Through carving, welding, assembling, and more, the body acts upon substance. And resulting from physical activity, sculpture in turn acts upon the body, rewarding if not requiring physical engagement from its viewers, inviting us to move around to see from multiple vantages, and making us more aware of our own bodies in relation to objects and the space we occupy. This is true even of sound sculpture, which attends to the ways in which sounds impact our bodies and heighten our awareness of our position in space.

Emerging from the body, and acting upon our bodies, it's not surprising that a principal concern of sculpture, over millennia and across cultures, has been the human form. The earliest known sculptural representation—the Löwenmensch figurine (35,000-40,000 years old) is a human-animal hybrid, and sculptors today continue to find inspiration in the human form.

That ongoing sculptural fascination with the body in turn inspires this issue of *The Nasher*. Taking off from the work of two of our fall exhibition artists, Nairy Baghramian and Matthew Ronay, the articles featured here consider multiple ways in which the body—its power, its frailty, its independence, its contingency—remains an essential source for artistic expression and innovation.

Importantly, neither Baghramian nor Ronay would be identified as figurative sculptors (nor would they identify themselves that way). Precedent for their very different work falls principally within the history of abstraction. Baghramian's abstraction, however, is deeply informed by a sense of the human figure in relation to architecture and to space (reflecting, perhaps, her experience as a dancer)—how it feels to be supported and enclosed, to stand alone and exposed. Baghramian's work shows, too, an acute awareness of how parts of the body work, strain, and fail; the actions of joints and muscles, and the ways in which prosthetics can substitute, support, and constrain.

Ronay's concerns, described in this issue by the artist himself, are more broadly biological than with the human body per se. Underpinning his work is an abiding fascination with systems of propagation and growth, decay and death, that exist at the cellular level and extend through the largest, most complex organisms. Often, elements of his sculptures suggest internal organs, and his works are rife with suggestions of consumption and reproduction, offering tableaux of biological interdependence.

Beyond features on Baghramian and Ronay, this issue of *The Nasher* includes articles heralding exhibitions of Mark di Suvero and Thaddeus Mosley coming to the Nasher Sculpture Center in winter/spring 2023, and a piece titled *Go Figure* by Chief Curator Jed Morse highlighting additions to the Nasher's collection by artist Matthew Monahan. Also included are articles by a remarkable array of artists, poets, art historians, curators, and critics who address a variety of topics which consider the body in sculpture from multiple perspectives, others that examine artists and themes less tied to the body, but still of particular relevance to sculpture today and, by consequence, to the Nasher Sculpture Center.

In reading this issue of *The Nasher*, your body might be still, with only your eyes shifting as they cross back and forth across the page. Yet we hope the multiple voices and perspectives contained herein allow your mind and your imagination to roam, in ways analogous to the movement of your bodies as you circle around, examining a sculpture from multiple perspectives, whether in our galleries or anywhere else you might encounter one.

Wishing you all the best,

Jeremy Strick
Director

CONTRIBUTORS

JESSICA BELL BROWN

Jessica Bell Brown is the curator and department head for contemporary art at the Baltimore Museum of Art. Her recent exhibition projects include *How Do We Know The World?, Thaddeus Mosley: Forest, Stephanie Syjuco: Vanishing Point (Overlay), and A Movement In Every Direction: Legacies of the Great Migration* co-organized with the Mississippi Museum of Art. Prior to the BMA, she was the consulting curator at Gracie Mansion Conservancy in New York, where she curated *She Persists: A Century of Women Artists in New York*, 1919-2019 with First Lady Chirlane McCray. Previously, she held roles at the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Brooklyn Academy of Music; and Creative Time. Her writing has been featured in several artist monographs and catalogues, including Janiva Ellis, Thaddeus Mosley, Baldwin Lee, Lubaina Himid, Matthew Angelo Harrison, as well as *Flash Art, Artforum, Art Papers, Hyperallergic,* and *The Brooklyn Rail.*

CATHERINE CAESAR, PH.D.

Catherine Caesar, Ph.D., is assistant professor and chair of art history at the University of Dallas, where she teaches in both Irving, Texas, and Rome, Italy. The focus of her research is on modern and contemporary art, with specialization in feminist art of the 1960s and '70s, the work of Robert Smithson at Dallas-Fort Worth Airport, and performance art of the late 20th and 21st century.

KRISTEN COCHRAN

Kristen Cochran is an artist living and working in Dallas, Texas. Her interdisciplinary work materializes via acts of meandering, noticing, collecting, decontextualizing, and reconfiguring utilitarian objects toward poetic ends. Through sculpture, installation, video, and print, Cochran's practice brings attention to the traces and residues of humans' best efforts, the tragi-comic nature of human handiwork, and the passage of time.

MIWON KWON

Miwon Kwon is the Walter Hopps chair in modern and contemporary art, Department of Art History, University of California, Los Angeles. Her research and writings have engaged several disciplines including contemporary art, architecture, public art, and urban studies. She was a founding co-editor and publisher of *Documents*, a journal of art, culture, and criticism (1992–2004), and serves on the advisory board of *October* magazine. She is the author of *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*, as well as lengthy essays on the work of many contemporary artists. Kwon co-organized the 2012 major exhibition, *Ends of the Earth: Land Art to 1974*, which was on view at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles and traveled to Haus der Kunst in Münich, Germany.

LISS LAFLEUR

Liss LaFleur is an interdisciplinary artist with a studio based in Texas, where she is also an associate professor of new media art and faculty affiliate in women's and gender studies at the University of North Texas and represented by Galleri Urbane Marfa + Dallas. LaFleur's practice spans moving image, performance, queer and feminist politics, and installation art. LaFleur received her MFA as a media art fellow at Emerson College in Boston, where she was also an affiliated researcher at the MIT Media Lab.

EVAN MOFFITT

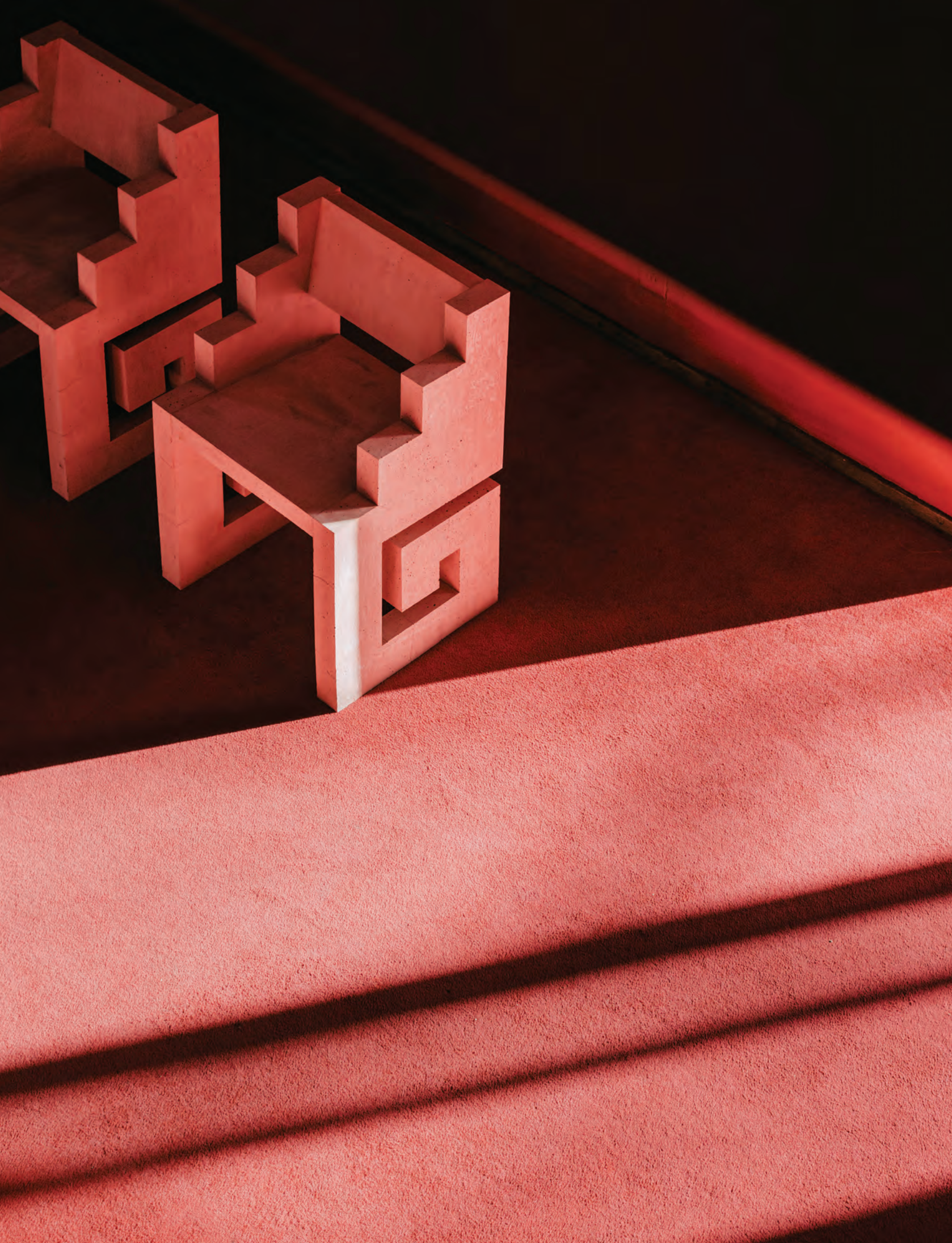
Evan Moffitt is a writer based in New York. He is the creator and host of *Precious Cargo*, a podcast about the journeys of works of art. His work appears often in *frieze*, where he was formerly senior editor, and has been featured in various other publications, including *Aperture, Artforum, Art in America, Art Review, 4 Columns,* and *The White Review*.

KATE PEEBLES

Kate Peebles is a poet, freelance curator, and aspiring farmer from Dallas. She received her M.Sc. in history, curating, and criticism of modern and contemporary art and her BA in history of art and English literature from the University of Edinburgh. She served as the curatorial intern for the Nasher Sculpture Center in 2016. Her writing has previously appeared in *D Magazine* and *Tabloid Art History Zine*. She currently lives and works in Washington, D.C.

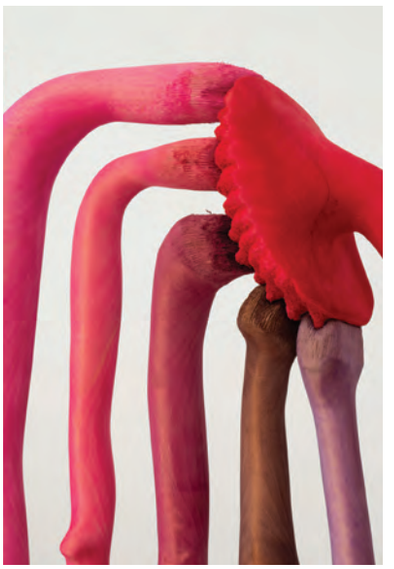
MATTHEW RONAY

Artist Matthew Ronay studied at the Maryland Institute College of Art before earning his MFA from Yale University in 2000. Ronay has exhibited at institutions including Kunsthalle Lingen, Germany; University of Louisville, Kentucky; Artspace, San Antonio, Texas; Serpentine Gallery, London; Sculpture Center, New York; Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, New York; Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas; Kentucky Museum of Art and Craft, Louisville, Kentucky; and Parasol Unit Foundation for Contemporary Art, London. Ronay participated in the 2013 Lyon Biennale, curated by Gunnar Kvaran, and the 2004 Whitney Biennial. In 2016, his work was the subject of solo presentations at the Blaffer Art Museum, Houston, Texas, and the Pérez Art Museum Miami, Florida.



COLUMNS

FEATURES



VOICES

COLUMNS

COLLECTION HIGHLIGHT
NOTES FROM THE LAB
LOOKING FORWARD
DISPATCH FROM GLENSTONE

FALL 2022

GO FIGURE

A large group of sculptures and drawings by Los Angeles–based artist ***Matthew Monahan*** *joins the ranks of figurative works in the Nasher collection.*

JED MORSE

Los Angeles-based artist Matthew Monahan (American, born 1972) works in a variety of media, including drawing, painting, printmaking, and sculpture, often assembling all of these media and modes into singular three-dimensional works of art. A product of Cooper Union School of Art in New York and the intensive independent artist training program, De Ateliers, in Amsterdam, Monahan has been an integral part of a prominent new generation of artists living and working in Los Angeles that includes Aaron Curry, Thomas Houseago, Elliott Hundley, and Lara Schnitger among its cohort. His work, which is exhibited and collected by museums around the world, is widely recognized for having reimagined and revivified the genre of figurative sculpture, often suggesting ancient sources from the art historical and literary past yet contending with Modernism and speaking to the present human condition.

Monahan's work is not new to the Nasher Sculpture Center. His first bronze sculpture, *Nation Builder*, played a prominent role in the *Statuesque* exhibition that was organized by the Public Art Fund of New York and presented in the Nasher Garden in 2011. Last year, however, the Nasher received an extraordinary windfall of important work by Monahan donated by several collectors across the country. Such impressive largesse was due in part to the Nasher's reputation as a leading museum uniquely dedicated to modern and contemporary sculpture, but also to Director Jeremy Strick's early support of Monahan's career: the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (MOCA LA), mounted Monahan's first solo museum presentation when Strick was director there. Comprising five sculptures and one drawing, the gifts represent different phases in the artist's career, from important early breakthroughs to large-scale assemblages to more recent constructions in curved bronze sheets. Each of the works connects with the others and with numerous objects in the Raymond and Patsy Nasher collection.

Sir Young Husbands Expedition or Museum of Anti-British

Sir Young Husbands Expedition or Museum of Anti-British dates from a crucial early period of Monahan's development which precipitated the innovation of repurposing work he made from the previous decade. In these works, Monahan incorporated drawings and sculptures he had made since 1994 into assemblage sculptures, folding or crumpling works on paper to make them three-dimensional sculptural elements. They share the space of the sculpture with a variety of made, found, and collected objects, including a brightly painted bust of a woman on its side, reminiscent of Hindu shrine sculptures. The arrangement of objects seems simultaneously haphazard and deeply considered. The result suggests both an archaeological display in disrepair and fragments from some future civilization, a ruin as well as an object of reverence.

The works from this period also reconsider traditional elements of museum presentation as evocative aspects of the work of art. As in the work of Brancusi, the pedestal here, handmade of drywall over a wood frame, is an integral part of the work of art. The assemblage is divided into a series of glass vitrines stacked on one another, some upright, some on their sides. The uppermost vitrine is open at the top, serving as the pedestal for the sculpted head clad in cloak and hat made of folded paper and metal brads. Monahan's use of vitrines here both underscores and subverts its usual function as a protective device, foregrounding the inherent fragility of culture and the sometimes shaky ground of cultural interpretation.

The work expands upon the lineages of both figuration and abstract assemblage in the Nasher collection, which tend to be represented by works in more traditional materials such as plaster, bronze, and steel. The carved foam and sculpted paper heads add to the list of materials for figurative works in the collection and suggest the generalized antiquity found in works by Paul Gauguin and Joseph Beuys. The assemblage engages the carefully composed, bric-a-brac edge of sculptural construction found in examples by Ivan Puni, Jim Love, and David McManaway, while the organization of the composition as a series of boxes slyly recalls the work of Donald Judd while subverting its precision.

Matthew Monahan, *Sir Young Husbands Expedition or Museum of Anti-British,* 1994/2005. Floral foam, bees' wax, pigment, encaustic, charcoal, paper, transfer drawing, wood, glass, and drywall, 79 x 17 x 17 in. (200.7 x 43.2 x 43.2 cm). Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas, Gift of Martin and Rebecca Eisenberg. Photo: Kevin Todora.

Incubus

Incubus was included in Monahan's first solo US museum presentation at MOCA LA and continues the evocative exploration of figurative sculpture presentation first explored in works like *Sir Young Husbands Expedition*. A female figure emerges from a carved foam block, tinted in graphite and pigment that suggests the patina of age. The dynamic composition seems to swirl around the figure, whose wind-blown hair is suggested by carved striations. It is unclear if the figure escapes from or is consumed by the maelstrom. The figure encased in the block of material derives from numerous ancient fragments, as well as Renaissance monuments like Michelangelo's *Dying Slave*, and is a motif that Monahan would continue to explore for the next decade. The offset placement of the block on the handmade pedestal underlines the difference between artistic and museum presentations: the former evocative, the latter prosaic. The cord (from a museum

Matthew Monahan, *Incubus,* 2007. Foam, wax, graphite, pigment, cord, ink, and drywall,90 1/2 x 22 1/2 x 13 1/2 in. (229.9 x 57.2 x 39.3 cm). Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas, Gift of Sherry and Stuart Christhilf. Photo: Kevin Todora.

stanchion, perhaps) gently draped over the figure further calls attention to this disparity while visually tying the carved form to its painted drywall base.

The drama of the figure echoes late-19th century sculptures from the Nasher collection such as Auguste Rodin's *Eve* and Boleslaw Biegas's *The Tragedy of Life*, while the geometric pattern on the base and the angular blocks from which the figure emerges resonate with constructivist and cubist compositions by Jacques Lipchitz, Ivan Puni, and Pablo Picasso.

Mission + Midnight

Mission + Midnight dates from the period when Monahan began to expand the scope and ambition of his assemblage sculptures. The support for the folded paper figure, which holds another head, is likewise constructed of glass plates bound tightly to drywall- and foam-clad boxes by ratchet straps, a device that is structural, compositional, and metaphorical. The bound glass structure also gives a view to an extraordinary figurative drawing and a sculpted paper head at the composition's core. The broad striations of paint and graphite make the figures appear as if bathed in moonlight.

Monahan's mysterious paper figure resonates with a number of figurative works in the Nasher collection, including Gauguin's *Tahitian Girl* in its dreamlike vision, Henri Matisse's *Madeleine I* in its exaggerated contrapposto stance, and, in its geometric folds, even cubist figures, like Picasso's *Head of a Woman (Fernande)* and Lipchitz's *Seated Woman*. The work's construction also recalls constructivist collages such as Puni's Construction Relief and, as a container of mysterious, coded narrative, also echoes Jean-Michel Basquiat's Untitled box.

Safe Cracker

Safe Cracker dates from the period immediately following Monahan's first foray into bronze, *Nation Builder*, made in 2010 for the *Statuesque* exhibition shown at the Nasher in 2011. The work continues Monahan's exploration of the human figure juxtaposed with constructivist forms as modes of display. With its squared, blocky form, the figure resembles a caryatid, an architectural sculpture that served as a structural column. Its craggy surface and intentionally unfinished look also lend it an air of antiquity. The bronze is patinated, yet left rough after casting, maintaining the remnants of its production such as the seamlines from the piece mold. The squared pose of the figure complements and provides a counterpoint to the open, rectangular base and the square steel bars running through it.

The work provides a crucial link to the artist's initial experiments in bronze and more recent ones such as in *Fathom Fiver*, a promised gift also dedicated to the Nasher with this group. *Safe Cracker* resonates with a wide range of works in the Nasher collection, including figurative works from Auguste Rodin to Joseph Beuys, as well as constructivist assemblages from Ivan Puni to James Magee.

Matthew Monahan, *Safe Cracker,* 2012. Bronze and stainless steel, 88 x 22 x 22 1/4 in. (232.5 x 55.9 x 56.5 cm). Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas, Gift of Warren and Mitzi Eisenberg. Photo: Kevin Todora.

Matthew Monahan, *Mission + Midnight,* 2008. Polyurethane foam, wax, epoxy resin, photocopy and charcoal on paper, paint, pigment, glitter, glass, and ratchet straps, 84 x 14 x 24 in. (213.4 x 35.6 x 61 cm). Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas, Gift of Warren and Mitzi Eisenberg. Photo: Kevin Todora.

Matthew Monahan, *Bombette*, 2013–14. Charcoal, chine-collé, and pastel on paper, 64 1/2 x 40 in. (163.8 x 101.6 cm). Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas, Gift of Martin and Rebecca Eisenberg.

Matthew Monahan, *Fathom Fiver*, 2015. Copper and gold leaf on bronze, 67 x 34 in. (170.2 x 86.4 cm). Collection of Warren and Mitzi Eisenberg, Promised gift to the Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas.

Bombette

Bombette is a particularly impressive example of Monahan's work on paper. At over 5-feet-tall, it presents an enlarged detail of an expressive head, eyes shut tight, mouth open. Some of the facial features overlap others like a thin mask or second skin. The meaning of the expression is ambiguous, suggesting pain and pleasure in equal measures, an impression enhanced by the delicate, crimson tissue paper collaged over the charcoal and pastel drawing. Drawing has been integral to Monahan's practice from the outset of his career, informing or even being physically incorporated into many of his sculptural assemblages. The work provides an important touchstone in communicating the full practice of the artist and offers meaningful connections to other works on paper in the Nasher collection, in particular eroticized figurative drawings by Aristide Maillol, David Smith, and Manuel Neri.

Fathom Fiver

Fathom Fiver is a rare example of Monahan's more recent compositions of rolled and bent bronze sheet. Adorned with copper and gold leaf, the sculpture cuts the figure of a tin man or warrior, its hollow, plated anatomy reminiscent of Samurai armor. The face of the figure appears on the concave, golden interior of the head form. Its visage is stoic, almost beatific. The face is engraved in the gold leaf but has the naturalism and delicacy of the Shroud of Turin.

The construction of *Fathom Fiver* as a series of connected columnar volumes anticipates a series of grisaille paintings Monahan made in 2018 of similarly geometric, mechanical figures, recalling early 20th century paintings by Fernand Léger and Liubov Popova. Monahan's sculpture carries forward Naum Gabo's premise of suggesting volume through voids in his *Constructed Head No. 2* and also resonates with Antony Gormley's evocations of the interior space of the body.

CLAIRE **TAGGART**

QUANTIFYING AMBIENCE

UNDERSTANDING THE MUSEUM ENVIRONMENT

While I write this, the Dallas heat index is in the triple digits. Most of us manage our physical comfort in the summer months by seeking out air-conditioned spaces, or at the least, a little shade. If you are reading this, then it is likely you include the Nasher Sculpture Center on your list of temperate destinations.

Upon entering a museum in the summer, you likely notice immediate relief from the heat; however, this temperature is not principally selected with human comfort in mind. The gallery environment is a carefully considered combination of ideal temperature, stabilized relative humidity, and in some spaces, reduced light. The numerical value of each of these categories has been defined with the express purpose of protecting the artwork on view and is based on decades of international research and collaboration within the museum community. While issues like sustainability and climate change have initiated discussions aimed at adjusting the rigid environmental parameters museums uphold, the standard has long been to maintain a temperature of 70˚F (±2) and a relative humidity of 50% (±5). Light levels vary depending on the materials displayed. For example, if you have ever entered a gallery of prints and drawings with noticeably reduced lighting, it is because of these preservation efforts. At the Nasher, we try to show our most light-sensitive works in galleries with shades installed on our windows to block the sun, or in the Lower Level Gallery where ideal light levels can be achieved using artificial lighting.

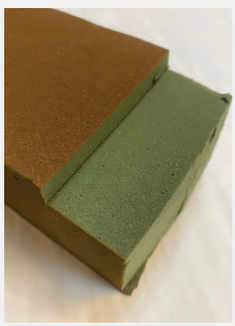
The need for more holistic artwork care came with the increase in artistic experimentation and the use of non-traditional media. Catalyzing this, in part, were the changes occurring to materials used by 20th century artists like Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner (early plastics), David Alfaro Siqueiros and Jackson Pollock (house paint), and Beverly Pepper and Richard Serra (industrial metals like weathering steel). The urgency to slow deterioration and preserve these materials–often used in atypical ways–expanded the field of art conservation.

Conservation training now includes coursework and specialization in the field of preventive conservation. Put simply, this area focuses on external factors that may impact an artwork in the short- and long-term. The primary factors are known as the 10 agents of deterioration and include: physical forces; thieves, vandals, and displacers; fire; water; pests; pollutants; light; incorrect temperature; incorrect relative humidity; custodial neglect and dissociation.

While not all agents are foreseeable, when an artwork is acquired by a museum it is assessed for potential risks that may arise when put on view. Whether an artwork is deemed vulnerable to physical forces or to degradation due to improper climate, collection staff do everything possible to mitigate damage while ensuring visitors can enjoy an exhibition.

ASSESSMENT FOR EXHIBITION CASE STUDY

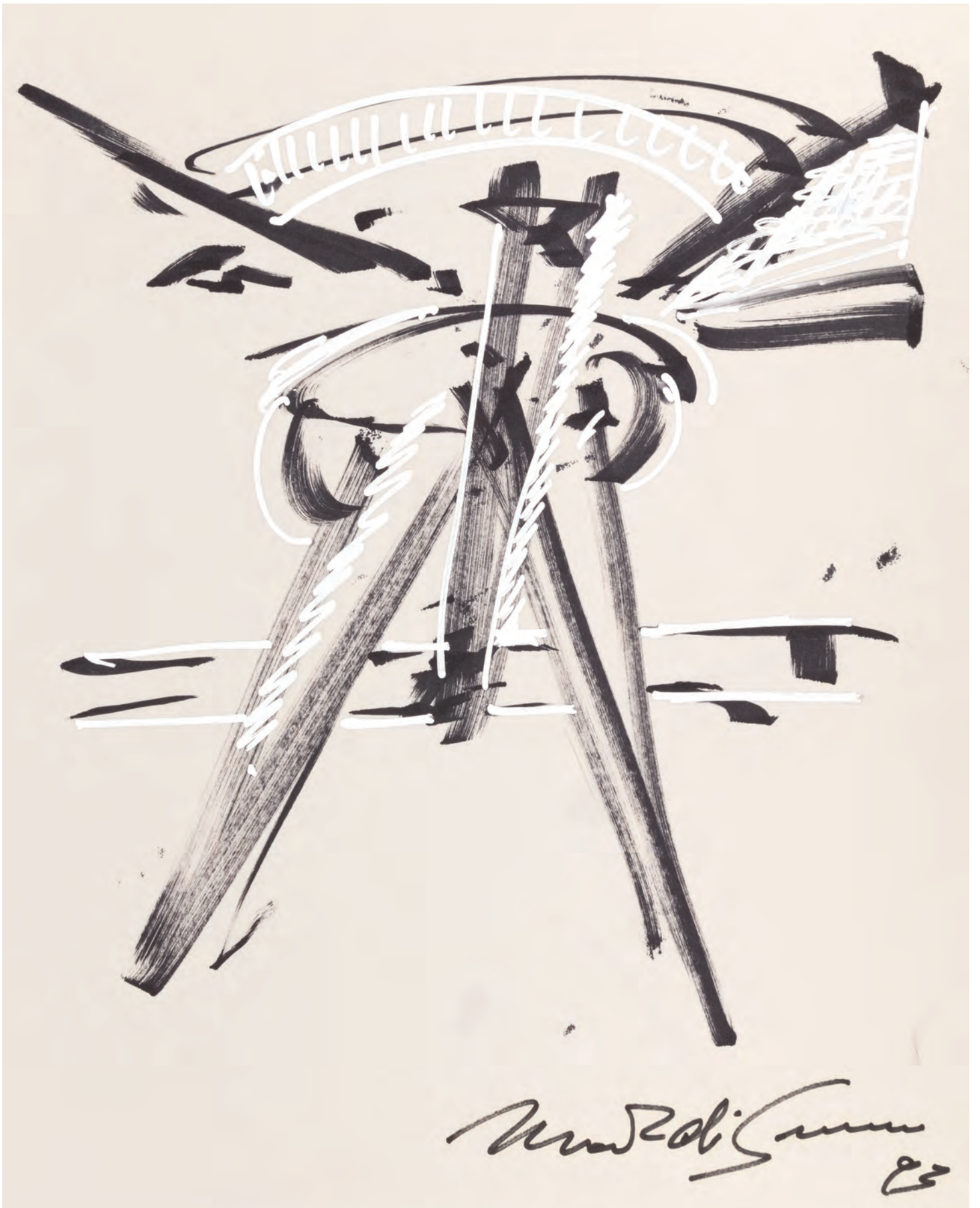
Matthew Monahan,
Sir Young Husbands Expedition or Museum of Anti-British, 1994/2005.
Floral foam, **bees' wax**, **pigment**, **encaustic**, **charcoal**, **paper**, **transfer drawing**, **wood**, **glass**, and **drywall**
79 x 17 x 17 in. (200.7 x 43.2 x 43.2 cm).
Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas,
Gift of Martin and Rebecca Eisenberg.
Photo: Kevin Todora.



Observing the color change of untreated floral foam in the conservation lab.

Consider this new acquisition by Matthew Monahan and its explicit medium description. Based on the materials included and the agents of deterioration listed above, what factors might affect this sculpture? Some are more straightforward and can be intuited with common knowledge. For example, elevated temperature will eventually soften wax, elevated relative humidity may cause deformation of the drywall (while a sharp decrease might stress the wood components), and mishandling could result in broken glass elements. The implementation of environmental monitoring and use of protective barriers like stanchions can help alleviate these potential issues.

I would advise additional constraints for display to protect the multi-colored papers from excess light exposure as some dyes, inks, and pigments can fade or discolor over time. These light-level restrictions will also slow oxidative degradation—a dynamic mechanism influenced by the confluence of light and temperature and/or relative humidity—in materials like the floral foam and adhesives.



Mark di Suvero, *Study for Algol,* 1993. Black and silver marker on paper, 17 x 13 3/4 in. (43.2 x 34.9 cm). Nasher Sculpture Center, Gift of Lisa Schachner in memory of Leonard Contino © Mark di Suvero. Photo: Kevin Todora.

Man of STEEL

***Mark di Suvero**, long a fixture of the Nasher collection, gets the limelight in the upcoming exhibition of his sculpture and drawing,* Steel Like Paper.

JED MORSE

From January 28 to April 23, 2023, the Nasher Sculpture Center will host *Mark di Suvero: Steel Like Paper*.

In 2008, not long after Nasher Sculpture Center founder Raymond Nasher passed away, I took a camera crew on an odyssey across the Northeast—from Boston to Maine to the boroughs of New York City—to interview artists, gallerists, and curators as part of an exhibition that looked more deeply into the close and meaningful relationships that Patsy and Raymond Nasher forged over their decades of collecting. One of the artists we interviewed was Mark di Suvero (American, born China, 1933), who had known the Nashers since the 1970s. One of the most significant sculptors of the past 50 years, renowned for monumental, abstract, steel constructions that grace urban plazas, bucolic sculpture parks, and public spaces throughout the world, Di Suvero greeted us in his Long Island City studio, which consisted of a couple of industrial warehouses on the waterfront overlooking Manhattan. The studio was massive—particularly by New York City studio standards—and outfitted with a crane for assembling enormous, welded steel constructions. It also had a few modest rooms where the ceilings were lower than the warehouse, the spaces cozier. These were either used as offices or as clean spaces to work on a smaller scale or photograph new works. Since these presented quiet places to have a conversation, we chose to conduct the interview in one. Inside were a few smaller sculptures, perhaps awaiting photography, and on the walls a few framed drawings. The works on paper were relatively new for me. I knew he made them, but museum exhibitions and publications to date rarely emphasized them.

Also in the space where we conducted the interview was a sculpture made of twisted aluminum tubing and leather suspended from the ceiling. The interview went extremely well. Mark is an animated speaker and, not surprisingly for such a lover of poetry, is no stranger to eloquence and poetic turns of phrase himself. Mark opened up, reveling in his memories of Patsy and Ray. When we were finishing, video director Judy Kelly asked him about the incredible objects in formation in his studio. "You walked into my dream cabinet," he responded. "Where the dream isn't finished," he continued, "the dream is still about to grow and you can't ask me what does it mean or why are you doing it or any of it." He then turned to the sculpture hanging next to us and, without missing a beat, asked Judy "…by the way, have you tried this?" Judy, unsure what to do, followed his instructions to climb on. Mark gave it a gentle push and Judy was in motion, swinging, turning, weightless.

That delightful experience of the studio stayed with me for years, and whenever I considered Mark's sculpture I would inevitably think back to that time in the studio and how it encapsulated the spirit of the artist and his work: powerful, weighty (in both senses of the word), yet playful and lyrical, in a word, poetic. I also found myself frequently thinking about the drawings I'd seen—beautiful, gestural expressions that carried on the page many of the same concerns as the sculptures but clearly independent of them—and what their relation to the sculptural work might be, if any. All of this reminded me of something else Mark had said in an earlier interview we recorded with him just before the opening of the Nasher Sculpture Center in 2003. When asked why he worked with steel, he waxed rhapsodic: "I see the steel as coming out of the mill—after it's been forged, after it's been rolled—and then I get it. And when I get it, it's like white paper." And with that, the connection was made. The statement suggests a facility, intimacy, malleability, and unlimited possibility rarely associated with his obdurate materials. Actual sheets of paper provide the artist with another kind of working space, another "dream cabinet," in which to pursue his playful, pensive, lyrical, poetic ideas without the need for heavy equipment.

Next spring, in recognition of the long friendship the artist shared with Nasher Sculpture Center founders Patsy and Raymond Nasher, the Nasher will mount *Mark di Suvero: Steel Like Paper* as part of the museum's celebration of its 20th year. The exhibition focuses on the artist's studio practice over the course of his more than six-decade career, surveying the more intimately- and modestly-scaled sculptures in parallel with his energetic and rarely seen drawings. The drawings exhibit a freedom and dynamism that is also present across his sculptural practice. The smaller scale works perch, balance, twirl, and unfold, evincing whimsy and wonder, precarity and stability, which also energize, perhaps at times more subtly, the monumental works and the artist's creative life. The sense of play apparent in the smaller works also harkens back to the artist's first forays into public sculpture, making interactive sculptures with moving elements rendered weightless that put into motion art patrons and neighborhood kids alike. Such egalitarianism is a core personal foundation for the artist that found expression not only in his public sculptures, but also in his lifelong dedication to social and political responsibility. Featuring nearly 30 sculptures ranging in size from hand-held to monumental and over 40 drawings, spanning the artist's career, *Mark di Suvero: Steel Like Paper* reveals the artist's intimate studio practice that yields the subtle power behind his monumental vision. The exhibition will be the first major museum investigation of the artist's studio practice and the most extensive survey of his work in over 30 years. It will also mark the first presentation of a recent gift to the Nasher Sculpture Center of five small sculptures, four drawings, and one screenprint from the collection of Lisa Schachner, former curator at Gemini G.E.L. and a friend of the artist.

THE FOREST

FROM THE TREES

*Artist **Thaddeus Mosley** uses scale, surface, and improvisation to turn old trees into radical sculptural forms.*

JESSICA BELL BROWN & CATHERINE CRAFT

Thaddeus Mosley, *Tatum Scales*, 2020. Walnut, Piece a: 92 × 37 × 24 in. (233.7 × 94 × 61 cm); Piece b: 12 × 12 × 18 in. (30.5 × 30.5 × 45.7 cm). The Baltimore Museum of Art: Art Fund established with exchange funds from gifts of Dr. and Mrs. Edgar F. Berman, Equitable Bank, N.A., Geoffrey Gates, Sandra O. Moose, National Endowment for the Arts, Lawrence Rubin, Philip M. Stern, and Alan J. Zakon, BMA 2022.10. Courtesy of the artist. Image courtesy of the artist and Karma, New York.

From February 11 to May 7, 2023, the Nasher Sculpture Center will host *Thaddeus Mosley: Forest*.

Born in 1926 in Pennsylvania, Thaddeus Mosley has been making carved and joined wooden sculpture since the late 1950s; his exhibition of recent sculptures at the Nasher will also include an installation of related works from the collection, by such artists as Constantin Brancusi, Melvin Edwards, Raoul Hague, Isamu Noguchi, and Martin Puryear. Nasher curator Catherine Craft spoke about this extraordinary artist with Jessica Bell Brown, who curated the exhibition for the Baltimore Museum of Art.

CATHERINE CRAFT: Jessica, we're excited to be hosting the Thaddeus Mosley show, *Forest*, at the Nasher early next year, and I just wanted to ask you how you first learned of Thad's work.

JESSICA BELL BROWN: I couldn't be more thrilled, Catherine, that this show is traveling to the Nasher. Thad is such an incredible, and yet, at the same time, undersung figure in the history of American abstraction and modern sculpture writ large. He's someone who I came across at the invitation of Karma Gallery in New York to write and think more deeply about his work. Thad has been working in Pittsburgh for several decades and came to sculpture as a practice that he would engage in after hours after work.

CRAFT: What was his job?

BELL BROWN: So, he worked for the postal service, and he also had a career as a journalist and jazz critic and had a family, a life that was not necessarily ensconced in art. But through the encounter with Scandinavian design, mid-century modern design, and also encountering the work of Brancusi and Noguchi and so many others, he developed a unique language around abstract sculpture. So, when I had the invitation to reflect on and write about Thad's work, I found it to be utterly riveting to think about the ways in which there can be such inventive, mind-blowing work happening in the most regionally specific circumstances that are also at the same time aligned with an incredibly universal language. And so, I knew that while I very much enjoyed considering the history of his work, I felt like audiences really needed to see the magisterial quality of his sculptures, and I had the opportunity to envision a small exhibition project. I was so grateful to be able to extend that dialogue into the gallery.

CRAFT: And one of the things that's so interesting about Thad's work is that he is almost completely self-taught, which belies, I think, the incredible sophistication and intellectual richness of the work. Do you have a sense of how he learned how to do what he does?

BELL BROWN: In speaking with Thad, he talks about that pivotal encounter with Scandinavian design, and being very taken with its craft and thinking, "Oh, I could do that. I could create something like this." And so, this sort of tinkering sensibility, I think, very much took over. Going to his studio was truly incredible because what it showed me was that sense of scale moving between the very small, intimate, hand-held scale—maquette scale—to these larger-than-life, towering sculptures. That's something he's been cultivating for a long period of time, and collecting and salvaging both materials and influences along the way to build this new language, this sculptural vocabulary.

CRAFT: He sources his material locally, and the wood comes from different sources, but from right around the Pittsburgh area. Is that right?

BELL BROWN: Yes, he worked with a local arborist in locating felled trees, and those would go to a regional or local sawmill. He'd then recuperate those felled trees and get them back to his studio, and he would mark up the surface with these chisel marks and then begin to work improvisationally and intuitively, not dissimilar to the way the jazz musicians that he admired worked, like Thelonious Monk and Archie Shepp and Art Tatum, folks whose names find their way into the titles of his works—Ornette Coleman, Coltrane, of course. So, the ways in which jazz improvisation is about every musician finding and responding to a chord or a note, finding a tune, finding a rhythm, and moving together. Musical composition coming into form, coming into being—that approach, I think, is deeply resonant with how he finds these different parts that seem to be dissimilar, and yet when they come together are quite harmonious. The musicality of his work, to me, really stems from finding that kind of rhythm through form.

CRAFT: You know, thinking about jazz improvisation … often the starting point may be a very familiar melody, and then the musicians kind of take off from there in variations upon it. And I'm thinking about the work of another sculptor that worked in wood—Raoul Hague, who worked in the Woodstock region and was a couple of generations older than Thad. One thing that strikes me about Hague's work is that a lot of the sculptures move out from the form of trees or the sources of wood that he had. He would also often get things from sawmills, say, a tree trunk that was forked or in some way was imperfect, so his sculpture would in some way draw upon the form of the original material. I'm wondering if Thad also responds to the kind of growth patterns of the woods that he's using or is that a different kind of process, do you think?

BELL BROWN: Absolutely. This embrace of imperfection, this embrace of gaps and fissures and even the life of the material, the life of this wood that used to be a tree that is now this kind of liminal art object. You can even see it in his approach to joinery–this kind of George Nakashima approach to using this joinery to call attention to those places that might necessarily, in the hands of a designer, be repaired or carved out. So, this sculpting organically, I think, is absolutely tied to responding to the form that emerges through this improvisation.

CRAFT: One of the things that's also remarkable about Thad's sculptures is the quality of surfaces. When I think of Scandinavian design, I think of organic forms that are very sleek and smooth. But Thad's work has very strong contour lines, and they also have these incredible surfaces of chisel marks that really catch the light.

BELL BROWN: Oh yeah, absolutely. Through his process of sculpting, you have the removal of the first layer of tree bark, but then there's this way that Thad goes back in and supplements that dissipation of the original surface quality. These chisel marks, these removals, become indexes of his hand and almost like a new skin. It's a strange term to use but I think there's some currency in thinking about that kind of surface or texture—the grooves, the chevrons. Sometimes the surface quality even looks like the way a painter might be taking their thumb and pushing or smudging it into paint. You can feel as much of the organic presence of the sculpture as that of an index

of Thad's own being, which makes it truly riveting and exciting for audiences because these works tell a story, and although there's no narrative that is legible, per se, it's a story about body, about presence, about relationality, about wonder, joy, cycles of life. It's truly beautiful and remarkable to me.

CRAFT: One of the other things that struck me seeing sculptures in person is that they can appear in images to be monoliths, but they're often—maybe more often than not—joined together or cantilevered together from different pieces of wood. Is that also an outcome of the way he works?

BELL BROWN: Some of these pieces are like 150-200 pounds, so what's happening is he's starting with some sense of integrity and then breaking that down into disparate parts and then bringing them back together again transformed, what he describes as "elevated planes." There was a period in the early aughts that Thad began to work on a series of sculptures that were all about elevated planes. So, this kind of cantilever effect—gravity, precarity, and modularity all come together to create this sense of wonder and almost impossibility, like how is this thing held together, you know? The solidity of the work in some certain places is juxtaposed with cavernous and precarious passages where different parts might kiss or meet or become enveloped in one another.

Installing the work is when you really, truly see the improvisation—the split second between uncertainty and an emphatic, balanced gesture, that sense of both wonder is really felt when you're trying to put these different modules of one sculpture together. It's a feat and Thad is incredible. Sam Gilliam described him as "the forest," which is ironic because he's such a solid guy, but he's also, I want to say, like five feet tall, so you can imagine these massive forms, monumental forms coming from him. I think Sam's poem, from which the title of this show is derived, quite perfectly and succinctly gets at the essence of not just who he is but also the ethos of his work. Full of surprises and wonder.

CRAFT: I love that you mention Sam Gilliam's nickname for Thad, and that gives me a chance to ask about Thad's connection with other artists. He's somewhat, what people in New York or Los Angeles or elsewhere might consider, off the beaten path in Pittsburgh—which is probably more their shortsightedness than anything else. But I have a sense that he also has this network of artist friends and colleagues and peers in the wider world. Is that something you've talked with him about or have seen evidenced?

BELL BROWN: If you go to his house, you walk in the door, and you see this incredible accumulation of the art and objects that have been with him throughout his life. Hanging above his fireplace is a work by Sam Gilliam. You're met also with dozens of African masks and art objects that he has collected over the years. Thad has been known among circles of Black abstractionists for a very long time, like Richard Hunt and Melvin Edwards. Really, we're taking about a history of postwar abstraction, yet he has not necessarily been canonized alongside those figures. So now, it's really amazing to see that there is a generation of art historians and curators and gallerists and stakeholders who want to see a more comprehensive understanding of artist collectivities. When I say collectivities, I think about communities and cohorts of artists who are a part of the same generation and maybe have been in greater or lesser degrees of dialogue but were all similarly working at the same sets of questions. So, I would say that Thad is right there in that generation of folks like Jack Whitten and Melvin Edwards and Richard Hunt and so many others, and Sam Gilliam, of course, was a longtime friend.

What I love about in reflecting on Thad's work is this sense of carrying on this torch of many different threads of important cultural and artistic discourse across centuries, across geographies, across cultures, and that he was doing that in Pittsburgh at the very same time that his friends and peers were approaching this question in other major city centers. And now, decades later, we can sit back and really think about the magnitude of his career and his legacy and just how much work there's left to do in putting pen to paper on it, so to speak.

CRAFT: I think that's also one of the exciting and actually somewhat unusual aspects of the show you've organized, and I should say here: Thad is now 96 and still working. When an artist of that generation is "rediscovered," often what people want to exhibit are certain historical works—this pivotal moment in the 1960s or the '70s or what have you. And one of the things that I love about this is that Thad comes before us in this presentation as a really contemporary artist. The works in the show are made within the last six or seven years.

BELL BROWN: Absolutely. That was deeply intentional. Thad was also adamant about showing his recent work. There was one piece that I was going to put in the show from 2008, and he was like, "I don't know if I really even like that work anymore, and if that's a direction you want to go in, ok fine, but let's look at these over here." It's exactly as you describe, Catherine. It's easy to sort of fixate on the historicity, and I have immense respect for it, and hopefully one day I will be able to support or someone else will come along and do that major retrospective project with his work. But I also really love that I can think about Thad's work in the context of someone like Hugh Hayden, an incredibly inventive, imaginative, and expansive contemporary sculptor who is of my generation. He's an artist's artist, so folks know who Thad is, and it's incredible to see his reach continue to be active and electrifying for emerging artists today. That's what really excites me, and I think it's palpable when you see these incredible sculptures installed together.

Thaddeus Mosley, *Katz Kurve*, 2021. Walnut, 60 x 36 x 18 in. (152 x 91 x 46 cm). Image courtesy of Karma, New York.

Dispatch from Glenstone:
Doris Salcedo

Poet and curator Kate Peebles sends word on a recent exhibition at Maryland's Glenstone by inaugural Nasher Prize Laureate ***Doris Salcedo****.*

KATE PEEBLES

A sculpture is not only its form, but its formlessness. The medium negotiates representation in space; what to disclose, what to occlude. In Doris Salcedo's work, the relationship between substance and void is urgent, moral, and exacting. "The only possible response I can give in the face of irreparable absence," the artist wrote of her practice in *A Work of Mourning*, "is to produce images capable of conveying incompleteness, lack, and emptiness." The absence Salcedo has probed for the last 30 years is the human cost of political violence, the victims and personhood it seeks to claim.

Salcedo was awarded the first Nasher Prize for her contributions to sculpture in 2016. To experience her most recent work, I visited her exhibition on display at Glenstone. 30 minutes northwest of D.C., the museum houses eminent modern and contemporary art amid 300 acres of subtropical wilderness and sleek architectural surrounds. In Room 2 of the Pavilions building, four connecting chambers separately display three earlier series by Salcedo and her new four-part sculpture, *Disremembered X*, which joins the existing Disremembered series. Walking through the show is a quietly painful pilgrimage through the gallery's severe white-cube space. Within the rooms' blankness, precise articulations of form contour the pain around victims' experiences of American gun violence and sexual abuse and murders connected to the Colombian civil war.

Salcedo aims to acknowledge victims' suffering without a repetition of violence. It's important that representation of their suffering is both personal and abstract. She and her team begin each series researching and interviewing victims of a particular violence in a process that can take years. Creation is equally meticulous: a team of 30 people spent five years developing the mechanics to shape the water beads that *Palimpsest* would form as water rose up from pores in the ground to reveal names of refugees who died in their journey to Europe.

In Untitled (1989-1990/2013) and Untitled (1990; 1992; 1998; 2006), a mutated, hostile domesticity pervades. Household furniture is amended in poetic and disturbing arrangements. In the former, steel cots wrapped in animal fiber connect to the political murders of banana plantation workers who were killed after being pulled out of bed. The psychological toll of the Colombian civil war is present in the latter series, too, in some of Salcedo's most well-known configurations: antique furniture is slathered in concrete, human warmth sealed out with airless rock. Any humanity in the work is present through strict absence, haunting the relationships between the unheimlich objects that once attended them. These are markers of our everyday reality; our joys and suffering are inscribed into them as our lives take shape. Without the bodies they belonged to, they can hint but never declare.

Suffering feels more corporeal in *Tabula Rasa* and *Disremembered X*. In the display of *Tabula Rasa*, created to recognize victims of sexual assault connected to the Colombian civil war, three medium-sized, hip-height wooden tables anchor the cavernous gallery space. They look old and sturdily constructed, but are besieged by incisions; the unfinished surfaces are wholly pockmarked. Sharp, white wall space shines through where the legs of the tables appear to have been eaten away or splintered off. As a metaphor for suffering, the tables are more literal than is often seen in Salcedo's work. In the context of the series' subject, the abrasive treatment to the tables, which by nature kneel rather than stand, evokes violation and degradation. Still, the objects remain poised between communication and silence. Some things are not said. For all their erosion, the tables stand unwavering and sizeable in the gallery space.

Something of the body exists, too, in *Disremembered*, for which Salcedo interviewed American mothers of children killed by gun violence. Like the other sculptures of the series, *Disremembered X* consists of shawls woven from raw silk and thousands of sewing needles. From afar, the objects look more like ephemeral couture garments, but up close, their barbed weave urges you to stay away. The four shawls hang loosely on the walls at shoulder height, appearing gauzy, yet spiky and substantial. Except for where they are most laden with needles, the shawls are totally transparent. They engage with the space with some amount of form, and it's all too easy to imagine the brutal texture draping a pair of shoulders. The relationship between pain and material is somewhat more opaque here, with the literal act of violence displaced from depiction. The shawls relate instead to the grief experienced by the mothers of the children killed. And yet, the interlaced needles make no question of how visceral and incalculable the pain of child bereavement is. The expanse of white wall swallows the delicate objects into quiet periphery, their gruesomeness only tangible at close viewing, and yet their sole presence and extreme material quality assert a need to be recognized.

Salcedo's invocation of paradox feels vital to playing our own part in the connective capacity of art that engages the suffering of others. To bring our own openness and empathy to artwork that invites us to bear witness to some of the most brutal forces in our society, however abstracted, feels both inadequate and necessary. Our collective experience of violence grows increasingly alienating, technological, commodified, and absurd, ever more enmeshed with systems that commit violence and showcase it for consumption. At its bleakest, the immensity of industrialized bloodshed and its attendant spectacle can feel irremediably prohibitive to our ability to move forward, much less with any globally directed sense of hope. Salcedo's work leverages our shared disconnection to invite in the possibility of healing amid an impossible landscape of suffering. Paradox, then, feels like a suitable, even optimistic mechanism of mourning; it grants that meaning is plural and emotive. That it is still present.

PREVIOUS: Doris Salcedo, Untitled (detail), 1989–1990/2013. Maryland: *Doris Salcedo* at Glenstone museum, 2022. © Doris Salcedo. Image courtesy of Glenstone museum.

LEFT: Doris Salcedo, *Disremembered X* (detail), 2020/2021. Sewing needles and silk thread. © Doris Salcedo. Photo: Oscar Monsalve.

Amphibia, Anura. Rana II.

Paul Pfurtscheller, *Amphibia. Anura. Rana. II*, c.a. 1912. From the collection of Università degli Studi di Padova.

FEATURES

FALL 2022

1.

SCULPTURE NOTWITHSTANDING:

ON NAIRY BAGHRAMIAN'S ARTISTIC POSE

BY

MIWON KWON

Art historian and curator **Miwon Kwon** *considers how the work of exhibition artist* **Nairy Baghramian** *is a location for sculptural respite.*

… SCULPTURE SHOULD HAVE THE CHANCE TO NOT FULFILL EXPECTATIONS.

NAIRY BAGHRAMIAN

More than 20 years into the 21st century, what expectations do we still have of sculpture today? Having surpassed the modernist paradigm of the first half of the 20th century and having explored the postmodernist countermodels of sculpture through the second half of the same century, it may sound anachronistic to raise such a question in 2021, and certainly in 2022. Are we not over sculpture, really? Or at least over the question about its identity or even its potential functions?

Yet, despite the extent to which sculpture has been absorbed or has itself absorbed and has become hybridized in so many different ways, generating new categories and potentially mediums, and the lazy word "installation" taking up the task of embracing it all, sculpture that is now intersecting with photography, architecture, landscape design, video performance, and film and perhaps dance as well. All of these pursuits since the 1960s could be seen as declaring sculpture's dispersal, deconstruction, expansion, and perhaps, even death; indeed, confirming the end of modernist sculpture and its values of autonomy, originality, universality, timelessness, etc. Despite all of that, sculpture most definitely persists.

This persistence—that is, sculpture's continuing viability as both a lever and an arena of critical artistic questioning—has been the terrain of much of Nairy Baghramian's practice over the past two decades. The artist's statement that I quoted here to start this essay, that sculpture should have the chance to not fulfill expectations, is to me very provocative. It is significant that Baghramian's words do not refuse expectations or somehow extol refutation of expectation as itself a goal. This might be the case for some artists attached to the idea of a critical vanguard to fight against or as an opposition to established mainstream. It is also significant that while the option of failing or disappointing expectations is posed as potentially desirable here, failure and disappointment are not necessarily positive critical values per se either. It's a rather ambiguous statement, in fact. Negation as a message or in a sculptural message, in particular, for our case is not necessarily Nairy Baghramian's operational mode. In order to better understand the stakes animating her practice, we might ask "what are the new expectations burdening sculpture today?" or more precisely, "what does the artist imagine to be the expectations burdening sculpture today?" from which, very importantly, she would like to find respite, to find rest that is, that may be or presumably would be in order to pursue sculpture further?

Now, very generally speaking (this is me doing a quick art history lesson here), since Minimalism, we expect sculpture to be more than a discrete, self-sufficient, three-dimensional object. Instead, we expect it to encompass a dynamic relay that coordinates between the art object, the viewing subject, and the spatial context of the object's public display. As such, we expect sculpture to have a relational, if not a choreographic sensibility, and to be attuned to the architectural conditions of the exhibition space, as well as the potential movement of the viewer's body and their perceptual experiences, if one could imagine that dimension—that we could imagine viewers engaging and moving through these spaces and objects in and through the space. Art historical discourse has also emphasized the extent to which such expanded rethinking of sculpture in the mid-20th century constructs a very different kind of self-reflexive viewer. No longer an abstract, disembodied monad grounded in a social, political, and historical matrix, the viewing subject's identity has come to matter more and more, even though it should be emphasized that Minimalism itself did not go very far in exploring this facet of the triadic scheme of object, subject, and space/context. In fact, the viewing subject's gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity, age, history, and race and how these factors may influence the experience of a work of art was not addressed by Minimalism at all.

2.

Even though it brought forward the very centrality of the human subject in the rethinking of sculpture, it may be a bit of a paradox, but of course the insistence on the specificity of the viewing subject's identity would move forward, move on, and build into identity politics as we've inherited today.

Since Minimalism, and then into Process art and Post-Minimalism, we expect sculpture to be divested of a commitment to any obvious formal integrity or stable objective form. Sculpture is now expected to be an anti-form or a non-form that dissolves the simplified hard geometries and repetitive serial organization of Minimalist objects, with a focus on process and behavior of materials instead, and prioritizing the performative aspects of making rather than the final result, thus foregrounding the body of the artist in action more as the sculpture moves toward the temporal register, incorporating techniques of improvisation and embracing conditions of ephemerality, the transitory, and non-permanence. Sculpture here is a residue of action. A key figure from this paradigm of Post-Minimalism is Richard Serra and his *Splashing [Gutter Corner Splash: Night Shift, 1969/1995]* in the collection of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (it's collectable, in case you didn't know), redone in '95, originally from '69. The sculpture here is a residue of actions and energy, impacting certain chosen materials in a given space, context, or situation, following certain procedures and parameters that may or may not be preplanned, or not preplanned in detail anyway, and that may or may not last into the future.

Following Post-Minimalism and this move of sculpture's redefinition, post-Institutional Critique—assuming that we accept the positioning of Institutional Critique as part of sculpture's postmodern trajectory—a work of art is more pointedly interested in the institutional condition (that could be architectural, economic, social, political, ideological) that constitutes an artwork's presentation context. With this move, we expect sculpture to encompass the context, to register its continuity, or invoke a relationship with it in some meaningful way to serve as a mechanism to bring into view the literal and the figurative, the visible and the invisible framing conditions around the artwork as the primary object of aesthetic consideration and critical attention. Notions of site specificity that emerge from Minimalism and developed through Post-Minimalist precedents coalesce in this path of sculpture's transformation, or at least that's the path that has been mapped out in contemporary art historical discourse on post-1960s sculpture and is now doxa more or less. I've learned from that doxa and have contributed to that doxa and in many ways I lean on it in order to enter Nairy's work, but I think it's up for questioning whether this sculpture trajectory into the "expanded field," borrowing Rosalind Krauss's term, should now be rethought, and maybe Nairy's work also provokes that kind of charged potential need for rethinking, in any case.

Like many of her generation, Nairy Baghramian has inherited this history, this discourse, and these expectations, and they determine to a large extent the ground against which artistic choices and innovations find their legibility. Critic André Rottmann, who has followed the artist most consistently over the past years, stated in 2008 that Baghramian's work recalled Minimalism, Post-Minimalism, and Institutional Critique of the 60s and 70s—this is why I wanted to rehearse these three—in order to "test their conventional limits and false promises," which is to say that Rottmann sees Baghramian as being engaged in a kind of critical review of these past sculptural paradigms and is questioning the inheritance.

To further elaborate, Rottmann is leaning heavily in his assessment of Baghramian in 2008 on the work of my colleague at UCLA, George Baker, who in assessing the works of artists such as Renée Green, Christian Philipp Müller, and Tom Burr, coined this phrase "metasculptural form," that is, sculptures that are about other sculptures. More recently than 2008, André Rottmann, in response to Baghramian's temporary outdoor sculpture called *Cold Shoulder* from 2014, extended his earlier thoughts and said: The artist [has] devised an even more radical synthesis of the fundamental parameters of her recent practice—a morphology derived from the body, an explicit involvement of the viewer, and a reflection on the exhibition situation—in a poignant allegory of contemporary sculpture.

And here let me just offer through Craig Owens's words: "a work qualifies as allegorical when it renders the circumstances of its own genesis, tangible in its appearance." These are rather large works, based on shoulder pads used in clothing in fashion. I just want to point out that the object that she is drawing this form from are supplemental or supportive structures to amplify the body, to exaggerate the shape of shoulders in order to "give it more strength."

So Rottmann sees Baghramian as this very important, critical artist incorporating and resynthesizing these aspects of earlier paradigms of sculpture—I would contend that beyond *Cold Shoulder*, his assessment can apply to almost all of Baghramian's recent series of works including *Big Valve* from 2016; *Scruff of the Neck*, a pretty spectacular work also from 2016; *Stay Downers* (I think maybe one of my favorites), and *Breathing Spell* from 2018, a work made out of glass and other resins and such. All of these works in some way,

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regardless of their differences in formal quality or material selections or the spatial disposition at the time of installation, present, or can be used as examples of what Rottmann means about radical synthesis of those three qualities that I quoted. Body parts that are attached to architecture that seem skin-like, epidermal, bone-like, in any case demonstrating a kind of mutual dependence, mutual supportive dynamic between work and given architecture, that too, this issue of supplemental structure or supportive dependence between element and context we will see again.

Scruff of the Neck, for example, is a suite of sculptures that take inspiration from dental prosthetics. They remind one of retainers or braces, bridges, and implants, etc. *Scruff of the Neck*, inspired by dental prosthetics and referencing the body in need of repair, support, or correction could be a prime example of what Rottmann was talking about as a radical synthesis. Comprised of bulbous tooth-like forms in white plaster, some parts covered in beeswax or rubber that are fastened to irregularly shaped and unevenly surfaced metal plates in polished cast aluminum, which are in turn part of an armature made of polished aluminum rods that attach to the wall or ceiling, many of the sculptures in this series look like very strangely decorated flying buttresses, energetically projecting off of the architecture of the gallery into the viewer's space. *Scruff of the Neck* alludes to the body and introduces humanized material; the effort of the hand is visible in the treatment of natural and industrial material throughout the work while simultaneously exposing the work's construction: the bolts, washers, clamps, etc. all remain visible, and activating the space of the work's presentation. All of these qualities combine to confirm Rottmann and other critics assessments that Baghramian's sculptural work recalls past generations to reveal their limits and to newly interrogate their sculptural aspirations, which is to say, Baghramian's art seems

to actually perfectly fulfill the art world's expectations of advanced sculptural practice today, which is the expectation of sculpture to invoke post-World War II legacies while critically revising, reversing, deferring, displacing, upending, or allegorizing these legacies for contemporary moments. So, she is actually fulfilling that expectation—recalling the legacy of that earlier work, but resetting it in some way, that is why Baghramian has been recognized for as being an excellent "radical synthesizer."

Challenging expectations in these ways propels Baghramian's ongoing engagement with sculpture as such the proposition that "... sculpture should have the chance to not fulfill expectations" is in fact to continuously question expectations, not only the kind that are shaped by entrenched traditions and dogma but also those that have emerged in opposition or resistance to them, by which I mean the kind of post-60s, postmodern sculptural practices as well. In some ways though, Baghramian's probing of expectations about sculpture goes even further to more fundamental beliefs that sustain sculpture as such. In a 2020 publicity video, which I've referred to already in relation to the Hugo Boss Prize, Baghramian speaks of sculpture through the language of dance. Exceeding the common association of sculptural objects with human bodies in search of an even deeper anthropomorphic insight she says:

This text has been adapted from the transcript of Miwon Kwon's keynote address presented virtually on January 21, 2022, for the Nasher Prize Graduate Symposium dedicated to Nairy Baghramian.

1. Nairy Baghramian. *Dwindlers,* 2018. Glass, zinc-coated metal, colored epoxy resin. Installation view of *Breathing Spell* at Crystal Palace, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, 2018. Photo: Timo Ohler.

2. Nairy Baghramian, *Scruff of the Neck (Stopgap),* 2016. Polished aluminium rods, polished aluminium components, 96 15/32 x 118 1/8 x 35 7/18 in. (245 x 300 x 90 cm). Inventory #NB375. Photo: Jens Ziehe, courtesy of the artist.

3. Nairy Baghramian, *Sitzengebliebene / Stay Downers,* 2017. Polyurethane, lacquered aluminum, silicone. Installation view: Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 2017. Photo: Timo Ohler.

4. Nairy Baghramian, *Beliebte Stellen / Privileged Points,* 2017. Bronze, paint, zinc-coated steel, rubber, 78 3/4 x 275 19/32 x 196 27/32 in. (200 x 700 x 500 cm). Photo: Bengamin Westoby, courtesy of the artist.

5. Nairy Baghramian, *Beliebte Stellen / Privileged Points,* 2017. Bronze, paint, zinc-coated steel, rubber, 59 1/16 x 236 7/32 x 157 15/32 in. (150 x 600 x 400 cm). Photo: Bengamin Westoby, courtesy of the artist.

> *To take a pose is in itself a temporary state that needs the act of releasing to be able to formulate or form the next pose. You need a rest. At least to release the joints. The act between the two poses, that uncertain moment of contemplation, captures my full attention … To get out of any kind of static mechanism and frozen poses and rethink our position seems to be an important part of thinking further about our societies in general. So the whole idea of the poses and releasing the poses is actually to re-question every time our position, and not to get stiff.*

We can perhaps recognize the term "pose" as likely alluding to sculpture in that quote as a static or frozen state of a body and the task of finding possibility of new poses to be able to formulate other or alternative forms is clearly imbued with socio-political significance for the artist also. But the artist says the pose is actually temporary and that the activity between poses is what captures her full attention—that is, the state of not posing, releasing the body, letting it rest; that is, let it have down time. One could also say this in-between-poses is trying not to hold the communicative position—that's another way one could think about the pose, as a communicative position. Baghramian is not only conceptualizing sculpture here within a temporal and performance framework in the language of movement or bodies in space or as a kind of passage, but in doing so, trying to redefine sculpture as the state in-between poses. That's a provocation that really kind of tweaks your brain, I think. In the same video, the artist puts it this way: "the moment of resting and taking the pressure off, or pressure up, it could happen through the making in sculpture." So, sculpture not as a pose but the recuperative state before and after the pose or poses because it's always in a continuum. Sculpture as the respite that allows for the upholding of temporary poses. Again, sculpture as not so much representing rest but as a state of rest. What could we expect from such a sculpture? I don't know, but one of the most recent works is Baghramian's *Knee and Elbow* at the Clark Art Institute and I think it is informed by the kind of thinking that I just shared.

Knee and Elbow, which is an outdoor sculpture made of marble that's been treated in a way that conjures pockmarks or skin or flesh of some kind and joints are made of steel that are visible and the parts are again disconnected and held together. I'm not sure if I want to propose that this is fulfilling this kind of sculpture that is not a pose, that is, a sculpture that is in a state of rest, but given that the artist has realized this work in the midst of all of these thoughts, it invites one to think about it in those terms. The support structures were always externalized in prior sculptures, but in this case, we're seeing them as internal to the sculpture. She makes that visible, so we understand that there's support inside, perhaps it's borrowing from the human body, the bone and flesh in combination, but in terms of a move within sculpture, I think that's an interesting point of departure, and I do think it's informed by her engagement with dance quite literally, and the work of Maria Hassabi, in particular.

To extrapolate further from the artist's words, one could imagine that such a sculpture—that is, one that is in-between poses—would be allowed to take a break from the effort and the pressure and the burden, maybe even pain, of maintaining an upright body. It would be allowed to refuse the state of being freestanding, in all senses of that term, understood materially, symbolically, and politically. (And I do want to forward that Baghramian's art, and certainly not just exclusive to her, but I do think art speaking in symbolic languages or abstract languages can very much be thought of as models of a political position, political outlook, even if it's not picturing a political content.)

Instead of having to insist on or to represent or to embody independence, detachment, singularity, isolation, even heroism, such sculpture would be allowed to admit to its many dependencies, and site-specificity could be rethought along these lines of dependencies. Such a sculpture would not need to hide its weaknesses, vulnerabilities, fatigue, or its need for support and supplementation. It would seek attachments and rely on connections. It will have a chance and the space to conceive its lack of wholeness and confess its need to be in relation with other things. It will be happy to lie down. All the while, accepting that nothing can be forever, rather than building on the notion of freestanding, which is a foundational attribute of inherited notions of sculpture, Baghramian's art proposes new expectations for sculpture. To stand...with. With...standing. Perhaps even not... standing. All understood materially, symbolically, and politically.

Nairy Baghramian: Modèle vivant **will be on view at the Nasher Sculpture Center from October 15, 2022 - January 8, 2023.**

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Water-filled Space Suits for our Skins

Nasher exhibition artist
Matthew Ronay
describes how flora, fauna
and systems of the human body
influence his colorful work.

In about 2014, I was asked by a prince and a princess—believe it or not—to do a residency in the south of Germany. Being a creature of habit, I assumed I would not do it, but, at the request of my wife, who said that I should absolutely take this opportunity to work in a castle, I went to Germany for about two months.

During my walks in Germany, I started to see a lot of things that I have never seen here in the US, such as beautifully colored slugs, some butterflies, all sorts of other botanical things that I was very excited about. Then I started to see a lot of mushrooms. Being a colorblind person, it's very difficult for me to see things on the forest floor, but I made it my goal every day to find some sort of species of fungus that inspired me in one way or another, which on some days would be very abundant, on other days not so. I took it upon myself to photograph most of the specimens that I found. Some days, I would come back and see that some of the mushrooms had died or become decrepit, and some days I'd see they were growing at a quick pace, and I found it extremely therapeutic. I started to see the influence in the works that I was making.

Botanical forms had always been there in my work, but I had never wanted to go along with such a pedestrian inspiration as nature. But I started to find that nature itself embodied a lot of things that I thought I had come up with or that were creations of mine, things that I thought were funny or strange. I was also completely blown away by the scale of everything. The palettes that I thought I was seeing. The way that the other animals ate things.

Germany was a real eye-opener for me in terms of what I could see, what was there right below my nose, but I hadn't ever really considered. So, as I returned to Brooklyn, feeling a phantom sense of something missing, I started to cruise all the Tumblrs and all the internet information that I could get, and realized that what I had seen in Germany was only the entry level of fungus and that there were incredible things that only an amazing futurist fashion designer could come up with. Things like the Stink Horn mushroom. I am, as you'll see in my own work, very dedicated to the phallus as a form, and so it was very natural that I'd be drawn to fungus.

From fungus, I started to think more of plant life in general and started to research all sorts of things that fell into my element of work, such as death, reproduction, disease, aging, sexual organs, orifices, peduncles, protuberances, mathematics, things of this sort. And I started to realize all these things that you think you invented, nature thought of them first. Beautiful textures and colors and divine geometries—just real brilliance of pattern, humor, theater, and a way in which nature embodies thoughts. If we look at nature as metaphor, we see it almost anthropomorphically different types of personality traits, different ways in which all sorts of things, that maybe we think of as human conditions, of creative residue, present themselves somehow in nature.

Then I started to also think that things in the animal kingdom also embodied lots of my interests, such as tubes or phalluses. I mean, there are so many different crazy aberrations of nature, marriages of botany and the animal kingdom. So, I also realized that I owe great homage to the deep sea and the microscopic diatoms of algae and their divine geometry, their Gaudí-esque-ness. In the very deepest depths of the sea are these creations, which I think could easily be surrealist, you know, Leonora Carrington's or something, something that you could not imagine on the strongest psychedelics. Maybe the deep sea is something that resonates with me the most, and I found this great Arthur C. Clarke quote:

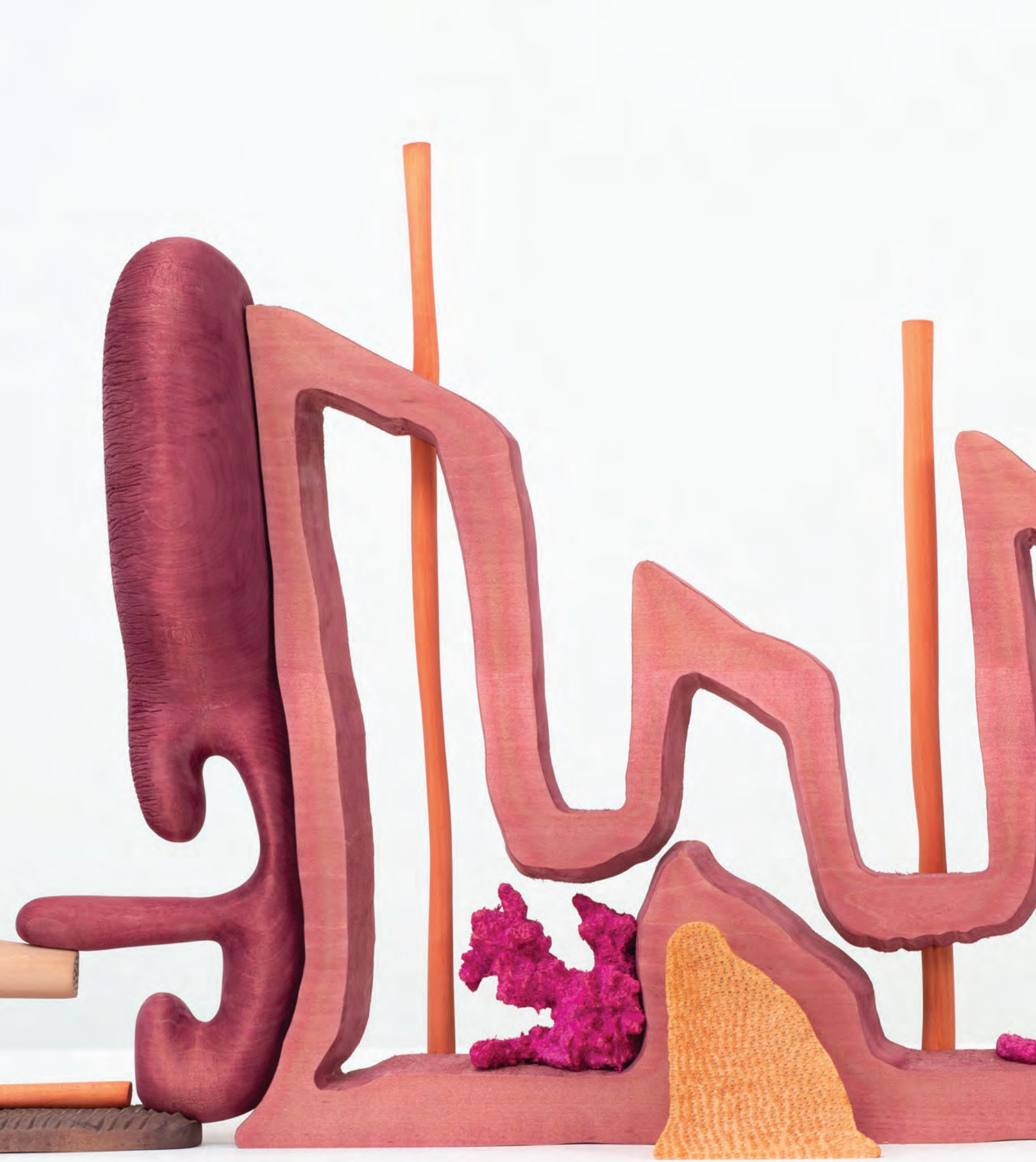
> *We seldom stop to think that we're still creatures of the sea, able to leave it only because from birth to death we wear the water-filled space suits of our skins.*

We seldom stop to think that we're still creatures of the sea, able to leave it only because from birth to death we wear the water-filled space suits of our skins. – ARTHUR C. CLARKE

I went from these kinds of things to do more research, looking inside of animals, inside of organs, to see other worlds inside those worlds, where you're starting to understand not only the way that things look but the way that things function. And it's on this level that I started to get very inspired. I found that the explanations for the way that proteins work and DNA or the way that the circulation system works or the homeostasis of the kidneys—that these things, for me, could also be read in terms of narrative spirituality or psychology. And that these systems of respiration or circulation held within them some sort of other logic that I think that painters and sculptors and dancers and people maybe subconsciously apply to their movements or their narratives, even the way that geology is formed. All these things tend to have a way of working themselves into artists' ideas and artists' narratives. There are all sorts of other deep, visual languages that resonate with artists.

Starting in the year 1790, there was a book of botany called the *Codex Liechtenstein* which took—it's 14 volumes—30 years to make. Some of Europe's foremost botanical artists made this book. It begins in this very strange, terribly perspectival amalgamation of classical thought and all these other things which I find extremely charming and almost surreal. But as botanical texts do, it goes into a very in-depth series of looking at the herbs from that area and then also other plants that they could grow in a hothouse on the premises. But for me, the way that I think I read this kind of material is in my wonderment of what nature creates and how absurd and sexualized and violent and gnarled and ugly and warty and mathematical it could get, so that something like this thing that looks like … I don't really know exactly what it is—it's part of a tree but it has all these appendages. I find it incredibly beautiful. The lusciousness of the flowers, the way that you feel that the artists painting it were actually experiencing some sort of erotic bliss from painting the leaves and all the innards and all the seeds, and that even though it's not pornographic, there's a hidden pleasure in the way that botanical artists drew this kind of stuff. So, I'm very fascinated by this, and a huge fan of looking, in general. I think it's a lost art and that a lot of artists are not able to have the patience to look at things, and so I feel like the botanical drawings are an area where you really, really feel that patience.

In my own work, it may be important for people to understand, I didn't always work in abstract terms. I often worked in representation and as I went toward abstraction there were a lot of moments where I found it was almost impossible for me to talk about my work. I hadn't really developed a language in which to speak about abstraction, at least with any sort of confidence, and I came across this book called *The Science of The Dogon*.



Matthew Ronay, *The Crack, the Swell, an Earth, an Ode* (detail), 2022. Basswood, dye, gouache, flocking, plastic, steel, cotton, epoxy, 37 3/4 x 284 x 13 in. (95.9 x 721.4 x 33 cm)

The Dogon are a tribe from West Africa that, to the best of my knowledge, did not have a written language, but had an incredibly advanced creation mythology told through sculpture and architecture, and this guy, Laird Scranton, who's not an expert really on anything that I can tell—it's kind of a piece of guerrila scholarship, he's a computer guy—wrote a book that overlaid Egyptian creation mythology, the Dogon mythology, and contemporary quantum physics and found that there's this incredible way in which the Dogon, even without microscopes or without necessarily knowledge of the elements of matter, had this weird intuitive understanding of the elements of matter. There is a scene taken from a door of a granary of the Dogon creation mythology talking about one of the most elementary particles: the shape of an electron orbit. There is another example the Yala egg, which is also one of the ways that they explain the splitting of man and woman, that relates to our modern scientific understanding of a chromosome splitting. So, I started thinking to myself, of course! What if for humans, since we have evolved from microscopic sea creatures to multi-organism, walking, talking, conscious people, what if, even though it's impossible to prove this, that at each one of those stages, there is something stored in our DNA that we can access. We don't understand when we use abstraction necessarily that we're communicating something empirical, but what if it's possible that we have some sort of inherited memory? I really believe that's possible. I think you see it in Jean Arp's work. I think you see it in a lot of other artists.

Most of my work is what you could call biomorphic abstraction, but I often interpret it in terms of reproduction, death, disease, decomposition, sexuality, and then on top of that, I think, especially recently, there is a latent kind of cybernetic vibe, so that we're looking at nature but also nature as its aided by technology somehow. One of the things that's most important in my work is how the materials feel soft. You get the feeling that it's not wood, that it might be some sort of soft material, but almost all of this is made out of wood. I'm very dedicated to things that happen in nature that could be interpreted on a different level, so for example the title of this piece is *Trophallaxi*s. Trophallaxis is a scientific word that describes how one animal regurgitates food and transfers it to their offspring, like a mama bird to a baby bird. So, in my mind, there's a quality in this that's about a kiss or something that's very tender. But these are the ways in which I use nature in my work, where I create an image and then through sculpting the image and thinking about the image, I then go into some sort of scientific research about something like trophallaxis.

I'm very interested in tumors, the way that things grow, the terminology for these kinds of things. Sometimes growth is a positive thing, sometimes growth is a negative thing. I think it's interesting that that can happen.

I often work with the body, but I work in it in such a way that it's completely abstracted, and that often there's a part of my work that's very ritualistic and tied to mysticism or at least the illusion of that, and in which sometimes the body is a stand-in for a funeral or for a passing or an energy exchange.

I often work singularly on discrete sculptures, but the real passion of mine is to work with all the works in concert, where I'm presenting a series of objects in a kind of ordered procession in which somehow an idea builds upon itself as it exchanges and so as it changes from the front to the back of an installation, so for a body of work like this, I had always thought of this work as being about the gestation of any sort of organism from birth to death, and so you're starting out at the front with the beginning of an organism, the splitting of the chromosomes, the penetration of how it happened, the splitting of the eggs, the twinning, like all this kind of stuff that happens in nature. Of course, it's not didactic, so my reading is just an example of a possible reading, but I think that the building blocks of the language are there. The soft material, the way that things fit into each other, that they transmit an idea that has something to do with life cycle or the small circle of living matter. And I imagine that this work was organized as a model of a body, starting on the back wall as the kind of brain center and then working away from that into different areas that could be about respiration, digestion, homeostasis, gall bladders, appendices, antibodies, like these kinds of things. And at the same time, obviously there's often a performative or mystical quality.

This is a large installation, is about what happens to the body or the soul as it goes from the planet. The world of the living to whatever is next, whether that's nothingness or whether it's somethingness, that this is like a mythology that the Greeks investigated, the Egyptians investigated. It's the story of what happens to physicality once you leave the material world.

This text was excerpted and adapted from a lecture delivered on December 20, 2018, at the Nasher Sculpture Center as part of the 360 Speaker Series.

INTRO: Matthew Ronay, *Sprout Capsule Implantation*, 2017. Basswood, dye, cotton string, shellac-based primer, steel, plastic, flocking, gouache, 23 1/2 x 22 x 13 in. (59.7 x 55.9 x 33 cm). © Matthew Ronay, courtesy of the artist.

ABOVE: Joseph Anton Bauer (1756–1831), Ferdinand Lukas Bauer (1760–1826), Franz Andreas Bauer (1758–1840), Hortus Botanicus or Liber regni vegetabilis, plants assembled by Norbert Boccius, Prior of the Monastery of the Brothers of Merci in Feldsberg (Valtice), Volume V, 1780. Black ink, watercolour and gouache on paper, 200 folia, bound, half leather binding. LIECHTENSTEIN. The Princely Collections, Vaduz–Vienna. Inv. GR 527.5

RIGHT: Matthew Ronay, *Couplings*, 2017. Basswood, dye, gouache, flocking, plastic, steel, polycarbonate, 26 1/2 x 18 x 16 1/2 in. (67.3 x 45.7 x 41.9 cm). © Matthew Ronay, courtesy of the artist.

***Matthew Ronay: The Crack, the Swell, an Earth, an Ode* will be on view at the Nasher Sculpture Center from October 22, 2022 - January 15, 2023.**
















16th August, 8.03am 116lbs

17th August, 8.48am 115 ½ lbs

18th August, 8.16am 115 lbs

19th August, 8.30am 115 lbs

The Conceptual Female Body

The private life of women becomes public in seminal works from the 1970s by **Eleanor Antin** and **Martha Rosler**

By **Catherine Caesar**

In the 1960s and '70s, a number of female artists used their own bodies and personal items in sculpture, performance, and installation to address issues related to current cultural practice and also themes derived from second wave feminism, which, in general, refers to the era associated with various women's liberation movements post World War II. First wave feminism is associated with the early 20th-century Suffragette movement that worked to establish voting rights for women, while third wave feminism stems from a backlash against the Reagan era. Some describe the early 2000s as post-feminist, with women rivaling men in the workplace, as if struggling for the rights of women was no longer necessary. Now, in the wake of the "Me Too" movement and the overturning of Roe v. Wade, it becomes important to revisit the work of second wave feminist artists, who were creating and exhibiting during the 1973 Supreme Court trial that legalized abortion, and to understand how their art has impacted the roles of women, both in their personal lives and in society. Two works, one created by Eleanor Antin in 1972 titled *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* and Martha Rosler's *Monumental Garage Sale*, which has appeared in various manifestations but was first exhibited in 1973, best illustrate this particular moment in art history. These works and their significance show how the female body, reflected though self-portraiture, personal items, references to motherhood—some of the most intimate moments of women's lives—align with activist moments that would truly transform how American women exist in society in subsequent decades.

The work of Eleanor Antin and Martha Rosler has been explored separately, but rarely collectively, in a manner that examines the shared goals of these artists. Not only does their work exhibit strong similarities, but they both experienced a major transition in the late 1960s: they relocated from New York City to La Jolla, California. They had known each other well while living on the East Coast and continued their connection through their association with the University of California, San Diego. Antin and Rosler's works combine the influence of the deeply entrenched intellectual and cultural heritage of New York and the vibrant, rapidly growing artistic and political scene in California. Despite these influences, Antin and Rosler's work reacts against the practice of many of their conceptual and feminist contemporaries. Both artists critique artworks that ignore the social world, and instead represent only the machinations of the artist's own mind, preferring to oppose the notion of fixed identity and to make their work particularly relevant to the audience.

Feminist conceptualists, the term I use to describe Antin and Rosler, eschewed traditional media, including painting and sculpture, preferring to work with mass-reproducible techniques, especially photography, video, text work, and xerography. Much like other conceptual artists, their artworks often involve information systems, or an analysis of the way that knowledge is gathered and organized in our culture. The critique of these systems questions the ways in which women's identities have been formed and categorized by institutions and forms of knowledge, including medicine, psychology, the media, and educational systems. The emphasis on text in this work becomes a productive means for examining the role of language in the construction of sexual identities, while simultaneously giving women artists a voice within this linguistic analysis. Both artists strove to examine personal experience. They employed such conceptualist devices as maps, charts, and systems of measurement to make the personal, female experience comprehensible to a mass audience.

Antin's *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture*, consisting of 144 black and white photographs of the artist, documents the results of a "crash" diet—the artist's loss of over 10 pounds in 36 days, from July 15 to August 21, 1972.[1] She asked artist Phil Steinmetz to photograph her from each angle—front, both the left and right profiles, and back—and displayed the images so the weight loss from day-to-day can be read horizontally: the poses from each day are arranged vertically. The title for the work refers to Michelangelo's sculpture; she quotes the Renaissance artist in the accompanying essay: "non ho l'ottima artista alcun concetto che el marmo solo non in se circoscrive" (not even the greatest sculptor can make anything that isn't already inside the marble).[2] Thus Antin relates her diet, her shedding of pounds, to the sculptor's removal of excess marble to uncover the ideal form.[3]

Carving deliberately references a traditional art form—sculpture—yet is entirely conceptual; the photographs, which document a private performance, appear in a serial arrangement. Antin herself, before the work was publicly displayed, did not fully realize the political or personal implications of exhibiting so many photographs of her own naked body. *Carving* was first shown at a solo exhibition appropriately titled *Traditional Art: 'Painting' 'Sculpture' 'Drawing,'* at the Orlando Gallery in Sherman Oaks, California. Antin describes her reactions to the show:

> *But the thing that felt most political to me, in LA suddenly I realized, all of that naked flesh. Will it be taken seriously? I was shaking, I was horrified. . . . I had like an hour, I took a cigarette and I walked around the block, and then I felt fine. But that seemed to be the most political thing, to have my naked body out there. Concern with the ideal form. An artist putting herself out there. They make a big deal about it—like Hannah [Wilke] or Carolee [Schneemann]. I had no idea I would feel like that. Now, you have to understand, I still am an ardent feminist, but I was a passionate feminist while this was going on.*[4]

Here Antin suggests that she realized the true implications of crash diets or carving away her own flesh, and the prevalence of such extreme measures among American women, only months after she created the piece, when she was confronted with her nude form spread across 20 feet of wall space. She was unaware of the radicality of a female artist employing her own nude body in her work, exposing herself in front of the art community. Thus, some of the political ramifications of her work became clear to Antin only when confronted with the possibility of a public response.

One of Martha Rosler's earliest installations at UCSD consisted of a performance/installation titled *Monumental Garage Sale* (1973). The work mimicked a traditional garage sale in many ways: the viewer entered the gallery to find used goods displayed on tables and hung from racks. This merchandise consisted of clothing, shoes, magazines, letters, and various domestic items, each priced with a prominently displayed sales tag. Rosler advertised the installation with a handwritten sign, a typical garage sale flyer, yet she directed the audience to the UCSD gallery rather than a private home. When entering the space, the viewer first encountered a partition painted to resemble a garage wall. Passing beyond this structure, the "nicest things," or the most expensive items that remained in the best condition, were displayed under a bright light. In the middle area of the gallery, which was more dimly lit, Rosler arranged the more worn items, and "things with some relationship to erotica."[5] In the back, the darkest section of the space, she grouped the most private merchandise: the letters, photographs, and children's clothing, as well as empty welfare cartons and copies of *Playboy*. On one gallery wall, Rosler projected slides of family photographs. Finally, at the very back of the gallery, she placed a blackboard inscribed with the phrase: "Is the garage sale a metaphor for the mind?" Throughout the whole area, an audio-tape broadcasted a narrative that examined relationships between the self, society, and economics:

> *I paid money for these things—is there a chance to recuperate some of my investment by selling them to you? . . . Why not give it all away? [quoting Marx)] 'A commodity appears, at first sight, a very trivial thing, and easily understood. Its analysis shows that it is, in reality, a very queer thing. . . in it the social character of a person's labor appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labor.' . . . She wonders, is it a sacrilege to sell the shoes her baby wore? . . . She wonders . . . Will you judge me by the things I'm selling?*[6]

As Alexander Alberro has observed, this is the first work into which Rosler directly inserts herself: she is the performer, she is the proprietor of the sale; she is "Martha," the recipient of some of the correspondence; and she is the narrator on the audio-tape.[7] Yet she also takes great pains to separate herself from the installation and to highlight its fictional, or artificial, elements. For example, the items for purchase were so varied that they could not belong to a single family. The women's shoes and clothing, for instance, are of many different sizes; Rosler recalls viewers asking if all the items were really hers.[8] Moreover, she consciously slips between the first and third person in the voice track and intersperses slides of her own family with those of anonymous families in the projection area of the installation. Rosler viewed the performance as a "suburban" portrait of a woman not unlike herself: "The persona I chose to inhabit this space was a sort of hippie with a child."[9]


CH
sugar
granulated

Thus, in the *Monumental Garage Sale*, Rosler highlights the tensions between her fictional character and herself, between portraiture and self-portraiture, while struggling to reveal the political dimension of aspects of our lives that we consider to be the most personal. The title of the installation connects the notion of the monument, a public art object often associated with a major commemorative event, with a small, local auction. The garage sale itself embodies these same dichotomies since the most private items, made even more personal with use, are made available for sale. The typical setting of a garage sale, the garage, is part of the domestic space—the patron invites strangers into the home to peruse her private objects. Rosler emphasizes this inextricability of public and private realms by bringing the garage sale into the gallery, which is both a public space and marketplace, and by clouding the distinctions between her identity and that of a fictional persona. In addition, she consistently highlights issues of interest to women by creating a specifically female character and by alluding to the inseparability of private and public realms in women's lives in particular. In *Monumental Garage Sale* issues of class also arise; Rosler portrays a low-income single mother who is forced to sell off personal items, a situation underlined by Rosler's audio track, in which she cites Marx's notion of commodity fetishism, and, in character, questions the public disdain for selling used personal items.

So, what can we take from the juxtaposition of these two works? For me, it is a co-existence of both intimacy and distance. Antin commented on her perception of *Carving* when she first viewed it displayed in a public exhibition space—she was stunned by the display of her nude body, available for view to all visitors. But at the same time, her body is displayed in a systemic, formulaic manner that belies the intimacy of her body. Similarly, Rosler exhibits personal items in her garage sale, creates a personal audio narrative, but also sells items that belong to a wide community. Personally, these artworks are examples of two major themes. First, as important as it is for the works to relate to female identity, this identity is fluid and changeable: whether through self-inflicted starvation or combining one's own shoes with those belonging to others. Second, the works embody a primary mantra of second wave feminism: the personal is political. These works begin with personal meaning and significance, but by their means of construction and their public exhibition, are meant to take the intimate to the societal level and to have actual political impact.

In 2002, when I first began working on Antin and Rosler's work, I was quite interested in a binary distinction that was made in second wave feminist visual art: between essentialist feminist artworks and conceptual. To describe it generally, critics juxtaposed "essentialist" artwork that was focused on the body, on vaginal or what we term central core imagery, and the connection between female creativity and female sexuality. This work is often associated with the Feminist Art Program initiated by Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro in 1970. In contrast, artists including Antin and Rosler tried to both deflect from and reveal the body through conceptual techniques and vocabulary, so that their work reflects how women exist in their private lives but also how they are manipulated by political mechanizations.

Now, in 2022, I find these divisions between essentialism and feminist conceptual work to be much less relevant. These were all works created by women to address issues of body image, of objectification, of the freedom to decide the governmental and moral restrictions on women's bodies and lives. Antin focuses on the actual carving away of the female body, referencing the media's perception of the ideal female form through a starvation diet. Rosler includes herself in her garage sale through the audio sound track, through some of her personal items, but also incorporates a generalized experience that pertains to a larger community. She becomes any single mother selling items to earn money. Antin and Rosler both embrace and deflect their own bodies—Antin through the dry serial format she employs, and Rosler through the hodge-podge of mixed items that are both personal and donated—to make this connection between the self and the whole. Every aspect of women's lives, they suggest, is both personal and political, one's body size, household items, sexuality, reproductive rights, protection against sexual assault, any political issue that affects women. Every pointed action that these artists make is meant to have political resonance, whether it is the view of the female body in the media in Antin's work or the commodification of the female body in Rosler's work. Not only does the personal become political, but we realize that the social structures in place control lives and images of ourselves.

"Is the personal political?" (a question asked by curator Lucy Lippard).

"Yes, if it is understood to be so," replied Rosler, "and if one brings the consciousness of a larger, collective struggle to bear on questions of personal life, regarding the two spheres as both dialectically opposed and unitary. No, if one simply insists on protecting one's right to autonomy and regards this triumph of personal politics as a publicly emancipatory act."[10]

1. In the artist's statement that accompanied *Carving*, Antin humorously notes, in the third person, that she originally intended to supplement the diet with an exercise regimen, but ultimately "this proved unacceptable, in practice, to the artist who appears to have lost her former skills at this technique." See "Carving: A Traditional Sculpture," published in *Tri-quarterly* 32 (Winter 1975), n.p.

2. Antin (paraphrasing Michelangelo), in "Carving: A Traditional Sculpture," n.p. Also reproduced in "The Autobiography of the Artist as Autobiographer," 18; and in Henry M. Sayre, *The Object of Performance: The American Avant-Garde since 1970* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 77-78.

3. Antin planned the work in response to a query from the Whitney Museum curators, who wanted to know what Antin would place in their next Annual exhibition, devoted to sculpture. Antin, in interview with Cindy Nemser, *Art Talk: Conversations with 12 Women Artists* (Scribner, 1975), 281.

4. Antin, in interview with the author.

5. Rosler, in interview with Craig Owens, "Art and Artists" Profile (School of the Art Institute of Chicago: Video Data Bank) 5:2 (1986), 16.

6. Text for "Traveling Garage Sale," San Francisco, California, October 1 and 2, 1977, reprinted in *Martha Rosler: Positions in the Life World*, ed. Catherine de Zegher (Birmingham, England: Ikon Gallery, Vienna: Generali Foundation and Cambridge, Mass., and London: MIT Press, 1998), n.p.

7. Alexander Alberro, "reconsidering conceptual art, 1966-1977," in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, eds. Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 84.

8. Rosler, in Owens 14-16.

9. Ibid.

10. Martha Rosler, from unpublished text in Lucy Lippard's papers, Archives of American Art. Written in response to a question asked at a symposium in a show Lippard curated in 1980 at the Institute of Contemporary Art, London titled "Social Strategies by Women Artists."

TOP: Eleanor Antin, *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture,* 1972 (detail). 148 black and white photographs with text, four images per day, 7 x 5 inches each, From the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago, © Eleanor Antin, courtesy of the artist and Ronald Feldman Gallery.

PREVIOUS: Martha Rosler, *Monumental Garage Sale*, San Diego, 1973. Multimedia installations and performance with secondhand clothes and other objects, texts, audio, and slide projections. Courtesy of the artist.

RIGHT: Martha Rosler, *Meta Monumental Garage Sale,* Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2012. Photo: Werner Kaligofsky. Courtesy of the artist.

Speak, Goddess

The host of the new podcast Precious Cargo *highlights the historians working to give voice to sculptural artifacts that, like human bodies, have suffered from colonial violence.*

By **Evan Moffitt**

Edo Artist, *Queen Mother Pendant Mask: Iyoba,* 16th century. Ivory, iron, copper, 9 3/8 x 5 x 2 1/2 in. (23.8 x 12.7 x 6.4 cm). The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Gift of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1972. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

On the morning of June 12, 2020, a man dressed in a long black tunic and cap entered the Musee du Quai Branly, a museum in the middle of Paris, and pulled a sculpture off its base. As he headed for the door, he spoke to the mostly empty galleries: "I'm taking back to Africa everything that was pillaged while African blood was being shed," he said. The man, Mwazulu Diyabanza, is a Congolese artist and activist, and the sculpture he took was a carved wooden funeral pole from Central Africa, about three and a half feet high. Like a headstone, funeral poles are still used widely across the continent to connect the bodies of the deceased with the land of the living. Diyabanza didn't make it out the front door before the police arrived, but when they did, he asked for their help in finding the real thief: their employer, the French government, who stole the many thousands of objects at Quai Branly over 130 years of colonial rule. For Diyabanza, the funeral pole was a spoil of war. It was also just one of an estimated half a million objects taken from Africa during the colonial era, scattered across public collections in Europe.

If works of art could speak, what kinds of stories would they tell us? This isn't a rhetorical question. Earlier this year, while developing *Precious Cargo*, a podcast series about the journeys of works of art, I began conducting research on the provenance, or origins, of art in various public collections. What I learned has been ringing in my ears ever since. So many of the objects taken by colonial violence are still on display in European and American museums, crying to be set free. Their cultural significance has been overdetermined by the traumatic circumstances of their plunder.

On a recent visit to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, I found myself in the Khmer galleries looking at a regal, life-size sculpture of a female deity from Angkor. Carved in reddish stone sometime in the 10th century, it is among the finest examples of ancient Cambodian sculpture, so influential to the region, that I had ever seen. The goddess is missing her hands and feet—a common feature of ancient sculptures I might have ignored, had I not already known that she was donated to the museum in 2003 by Doris Weiner, a disgraced dealer who acquired the sculpture through an international trafficking ring of looted antiquities. The deeply gouged ankles were almost surely where this goddess was hacked off her base in a Cambodian temple. Many of the Khmer artworks in museums like the Met and the British Museum were violently extracted from temples under the Khmer Rouge, whose genocidal reign in the late 1970s resulted in the deaths of an estimated 2 million people. In some cases, the black market in antiquities helped fund the military junta. Studying the wounded goddess, it was hard not to think of the bodies the Khmer Rouge maimed as a kind of collateral damage. How many of the families on their Sunday stroll through the Met galleries could sense her pain?

"Trauma travels in the body, it travels in space, and it travels in objects," the artist Rayyane Tabet told me during an interview for *Precious Cargo*. We were discussing his 2019 exhibition *Alien Property*, which investigated the provenance of several ancient tablets from Tell Halaf, Syria, in the Met's collection. The tablets had been seized by the US government during World War II while dry-docked in New York, where they were being stored by a German archaeologist, and declared "alien property" (that is, belonging to an agent of the Nazis). The tablets, of course, didn't belong to Germany any more than they did to the US, and Tabet, a Lebanese national whose great-grandfather had worked on the dig that excavated them, was interested in asking questions about provenance and ownership that might complicate our encounters in the gallery. As war raged in Syria, the exhibition reminded viewers that violence in the Middle East hasn't always begun (or ended) there. Western institutions were directly implicated.

Through very different means, Diyabanza and Tabet were both pointing to the ways that sculptures have historically been treated like people—that is, like property. The legal structures that permit or prevent the movement of works of art are not dissimilar to ones that impede, allow, or force human beings to cross borders. Understanding these similarities and learning to spot them in the spaces where we look at art might help us create more equitable systems to govern shared culture, and ultimately, shared humanity.

This is the beginning of what Bénédicte Savoy has called "a new relational ethics." When we met in New York last April, the art historian and activist had just published *Africa's Struggle for its Art*, an account of the research she conducted at the behest of French President Emmanuel Macron. During a November 2017 speech in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, Macron proposed that his country find a way to return the art they had stolen during the colonial era. "I want over the next five years to bring together the conditions to temporarily, or permanently, enable the relocation of African heritage to Africa," he said. A commission was formed, led by Savoy and the Senegalese scholar Felwine Saar. Over the course of a year, they completed an exhaustive study of all the African objects in French public collections, and in November 2018, released a landmark, 252-page report that, in addition to a comprehensive inventory, argued for their full restitution.

There are passages of the report that read like poetry. "To fall under the spell of an object," Saar and Savoy write, "to be touched by it, moved emotionally by a piece of art in a museum, brought to tears of joy, to admire its forms of ingenuity, to like the artworks' colors, to take a photo of it, to let oneself be transformed by it: all these experiences—which are also forms of access to knowledge—cannot simply be reserved to the inheritors of an asymmetrical history, to the benefactors of an excess of privilege and

mobility." If art really is shared culture, it must be accessible to all. That means it can't live solely in places where young Africans won't be able to see it. It also means that the stories we tell about art can't be asymmetrical either.

Savoy was hired by Macron's government because she had distinguished herself as one of the leading European provenance experts while on the board of the Humboldt Forum, a museum in a reconstructed Prussian palace in the center of Berlin. In July 2017, she abruptly resigned from the board, comparing the museum to Chernobyl and telling *Süddeutsche Zeitung* that the origin stories of the African objects in the museum had been sealed up "under a lead roof like nuclear waste." Even now, the provenance information that exists on the museum's labels reads like a litany of colonial atrocities: "I had the impression to be in something like a memorial for burned villages," she told me. "It's very brutal, and these beautiful objects are mute. They are now only the testimonies of massacres." The challenge, therefore, is not simply to acknowledge trauma but to find a way to move past it. To see the object, like an individual, as whole.

No one is better suited to study that whole than those who have always perceived it. "A new relational ethics begins with the recognition of the ability of the people from heritage communities to interact with their own culture," Savoy told me. "According to this view, restitutions are not the end of a process, but the beginning of a new kind of interaction with the former, and proper, owners." In other words, returning looted artworks actually permits more comprehensive scholarship. Restitution also allows African institutions to lend and borrow the way European and American museums do, so that scholarly exchange can flow in both directions. In November 2021, 26 objects that had been pillaged from the royal palace in Abomey in 1892 were removed from the galleries at Quai Branly and returned to the Kingdom of Benin. At a reception in Cotonou, Benin, to celebrate their arrival, Beninese President Patrice Talon declared that the occasion marked the "return to Benin of our soul, our identity." It was also the first significant victory in Savoy and Saar's campaign.

A century of trauma still lives in those objects. It can never be erased. But situated in new galleries under the auspices of the Benin Kingdom, the artworks can now tell new stories—or much older ones. Their import will no longer be defined by colonialism.

The debate over restitution that has rocked institutions across Europe and America over the past few years is not simply a debate over who owns culture, or where it can rightfully be displayed. It's a debate about power in a post-colonial world where reparations can still seem generations away. Conversations around racial justice, particularly following the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, may have spurred the Smithsonian's decision, in November 2021, to return the Benin bronzes in their collection. Nonetheless, the lack of public accountability for US institutions like the Smithsonian and the Met, which receive only a small portion of their funding from the state, means they can still equivocate. The Met, for their part, have returned a number of objects over the past two decades—including a pair of key Khmer sculptures – but only when the evidence of looting was incontrovertible, and international law was on the petitioner's side. Private museums, meanwhile, accountable only to their boards, can avoid the restitution question altogether.

How sculpture is acquired and how it is displayed can tell us everything about the flows of money and power that shape our cultural institutions, and by extension, the world in which we live. As a body, it's a powerful proxy for our body politic. It can help us understand historical trauma, but also learn how to better dress its wounds.

LEFT TO RIGHT:

Figure: Horn Player, Edo artist, 1550–1680. Nigeria, Igun-Eronmwen guild, Court of Benin. Brass, 24 3/4 × 11 1/2 × 6 3/4 in. (62.9 × 29.2 × 17.2 cm). The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Gift of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1972.

Head of an Oba, 16th century. Nigeria, Igun-Eronmwen guild, Court of Benin. Edo artist. Brass, 9 1/4 x 8 5/8 x 9 in. (23.5 x 21.9 x 22.9 cm). The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1979.

Head of an Oba, 19th century. Nigeria, Court of Benin, Edo peoples. Brass, 13 1/4 × 10 3/4 ×11 1/8 in. (33.7 × 27.3 × 28.3 cm). Bequest of Alice K. Bache, 1977.

Head of a Queen Mother (Iyoba), 1750–1800, Nigeria, Court of Benin, Edo peoples. Brass, 17 × 8 7/8 × 10 1/2 in. (43.2 × 22.5 × 26.7 cm). Bequest of Alice K. Bache, 1977.

Head of an Oba, ca. 1550. Nigeria, Court of Benin, Edo peoples. Bronze, 8 1/2 × 7 3/4 × 8 1/8 in. (21.6 × 19.7 × 20.6 cm). The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Gift of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1972.

Figure: Male Attendant, 18th century, Nigeria, Court of Benin, Edo peoples. Bronze, copper, 7 x 2 in. (17.8 x 5.1 cm). Bequest of Alice K. Bache, 1977.

Preventative Care

In a series of altered photographs, an artist offers remote support for monumental sculpture under threat in war-torn Ukraine.

By Kristen Cochran

Ukraine's swaddled monuments, as seen on screen almost 6,000 miles away last winter and early spring, captured the pathos of a fragile cultural moment, serving up a set of new public sculptures necessitated by threat. These 'bodies' illustrate an urgent collective effort to pad, wrap, and protect the body of the sculpture and the implicit memory of a people's culture. My intervention through these images—my touch on screen—was intuitive (yet futile), born of a sincere desire to make contact with and provide aid to a distant body of people and things during a time of great vulnerability and need.

Images: Kristen Cochran, *Touchscreen Monuments (for Ukraine)*, 2022.
Images courtesy of the artist.

NASHER PRIZE DIALOGUES: PUBLIC FIGURES

Excerpted from the talk "Nasher Prize Dialogues: Public Figures," presented at the New Museum on May 3, 2022.

Massimiliano Gioni: I have to say, this is my first panel in real life since 2020, and it feels strange. I start doubting whether I exist or not, which maybe is relevant for the panel tonight. As the title 'Public Figures' implies, we are here to discuss public art, and publicly sited sculpture, and see how these three, I dare to say the word geniuses of the practice, have reinvented the way we conceive of sculpture and public art.

We'll start off with Hans Haacke, who is returning to this theater after a couple of years, too. In fact, we had a wonderful exhibition with Hans I believe in 2019, and so, let's start off with you Hans, and particularly we ask you to talk a little bit about one of your most recent and already legendary pieces, which is called *Gift Horse*, which is an extraordinary reflection on what monuments can be in cities and their function and their meaning. We also had the honor of hosting it on the 4th floor [of the New Museum], so it's a sculpture that exists both in the public realm and within the walls of museums.

Hans Haacke: The *Gift Horse* ... I believe it was in 2014 that I was invited, together with five or six other artists from around the world, to make a proposal for the Fourth Plinth on Trafalgar Square [in London] that was not occupied since sometime in the 19th century. It was meant to be an equestrian statue, as it is customary on Trafalgar Square and many other places. I don't remember exactly why it was empty; one of the British kings or sons of British kings was supposed to be presented but, it didn't come through.

Gioni: I think the money to make the sculpture was not raised because the figure that was supposed to be celebrated was not loved. Which is interesting in the context of responsibilities of public figures. It was a missed fundraising opportunity because the person that was meant to be commemorated was not loved.

Haacke: There were no PACS, so who could do it?

Gioni: Yeah, there was no go-fund-me.

Haacke: So, I came up with a proposal and I never dreamt of it being accepted, but it was. I did research on the site, its history, and then also research on what came to mind. In the end, I made a proposal of a skeleton rather than a normal sculpture of a horse. A skeleton of a horse should be presented there because [socially] things normally are not good. But on the raised front leg of the skeleton should be a live ticker of the London Stock Exchange.

And as I said, I didn't expect that this would be accepted, and particularly with the title *Gift Horse*. But the remarkable situation around the plinth is that the jury that decides whose proposal should be realized is in fact quite independent—independent of the mayor, independent of all sorts of other authorities that might have a say and certainly not be happy with a gift horse there. And so, behold, I was asked to actually execute it.

And then it was a question of how to do it, and I did further research and found that [the painter] George Stubbs (1724-1806), when he was young, made prints of skeletons. I found a book at the Library of Cooper Union, where I taught for 35 years, of George Stubbs prints. The skeleton was cast in a foundry in Philadelphia … and *Gift Horse* was put together, was put on a boat, and shipped to London. It was put up on the plinths, and then it so happened that Boris Johnson, who is now the prime minister—however long it may take—was the mayor at the time, and it was customary that the mayor would unveil whatever an artist had produced for this empty plinth, and he did. I was there with my camera, and I was standing behind him and I took a photograph of his white hair—he has a lot of hair, and he loves it, and he goes with his hand into his hair all the time—and it was just at that moment when the head of the *Gift Horse* was unveiled. I remember Boris saying that it reminds him of the subway system of London, that needs to be taken care of, and the people in Trafalgar Square were rolling their eyes as far as I could see. Then the ticker was running, and everybody could see their fortunes.

Gioni: It's actually quite interesting, besides this presentation, that it was never shown outdoors, no? It's never been shown in a square. Do you think that has something to do with the exceptional opportunity that the Fourth Plinth grants to artists? I mean, would it be met with more opposition if it were to be shown elsewhere?

Haacke: Possibly. But what is fortunate with the Fourth Plinth, is there is a plinth. You can't reach it; you can't damage it or you really have to come with equipment to climb up there. But if it were in a public square here you might have to have a guard there.

Gioni: I'm thinking of Boris Johnson and the very fact that *Gift Horse* was realized. It's a bit like the Groucho Marx saying—that you would never be a member of a club that would accept your nomination—and how actually the realization of a piece that is so clearly critical, the very fact that it does get realized then installed in the public space, does that feel like a consecration of its force, or maybe a weakening of its potential?

Haacke: Well, as I said, I was very surprised that it was accepted, but I was glad. But maybe I mentioned, I believe when it was here at the New Museum on the top floor during my exhibition, in the review in *The New York Times, Gift Horse* was not mentioned.

Gioni: Wow, that's more than a horse. It would be an elephant in the room. So, I want to pass on the word to Fred. Fred, you chose an image of a legendary project of yours, *Mining the Museum*, and you want to take us through?

Fred Wilson: I figure I'll start with perhaps the first one, and while it was in a museum and museums proport to be for the public, which is … well, that's a whole other story, but anyway. In the Historical Society in Baltimore, I was looking around—I had the run of the of the whole museum to do whatever I wanted to do, but everything had to be on the third floor. They had all these figures, these cigar store Indians, but all throughout the museum they had these figures, and so I collect them all and put them all together. However, they're all facing away from you and the title I gave them individually was *Portraits of Cigar Store Owners* because it really is not a portrait of any native person I've ever met. They're facing away, so you can't take in their images. But what are they facing?

I told the chief curator that I wanted to meet with the native community in Baltimore and she very seriously said to me, "Well, there are no native people in Baltimore."

So, I went out and found the Cherokee, the Piscataway, and the Lumbee communities, and borrowed photographs of their families, some early ones, and some more recent photographs. And they all came to the museum for the opening, never having ever stepped foot into that museum before.

Before I got there, there was an exhibition of duck decoys, so what was on the wall [for my show] was there for that show. It's the map of the Chesapeake Bay and all the duck hunting clubs were on the map, so I said, well, why should I take that down? I'll just add the native tribes onto the map with the ducks.

Gioni: In a sense—most notably with this show, but also, we'll see images from your 2003 Venice Biennale intervention and in many other projects—you have used the exhibition and the museum as a medium, which is something that all of you have in common. How did you come to that idea and what did you learn, or what did you expose about museums in that practice and in many other of your interventions?

Wilson: I do these museum projects in museums from my own experience working in museums. I was a guard at my college museum, and you really

get to know how people react in that space, and of course you are invisible as a guard. I'm there, but I'm invisible as a person. After I went to college, I used to work in the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Natural History in the education departments, in a freelance kind of way, usually back and forth between the two museums, and then go to my other job which was running some community centers in East Harlem.

Mostly, I was very intrigued by my relationship with the museum. I was an artist that was looking at art as a visitor and a worker in the museum, so all these different roles that I played sort of competed with each other—different vantage points that one would have of an institution because of who's looking, what their background is in relation to what and who's looking.

I also just found there are many things that I got mad about in museums, as much as I love them, because the perspective was very specific and just not everybody's perspective. From that point, I began to kind of interrogate institutions to try to reveal what they were not saying, or that they didn't even know they were not saying, by making exhibitions with their collections. I never expected anybody to invite me to do that. I was surprised after I did this one [in Baltimore] that anybody did after that. Because when you realize you have a perspective that's different, you can get really mad about these institutions that seem to be just erasing you, like there was no other perspective. And going from the Met to the Museum of Natural History … it becomes very clear that they have agendas and particular scholarship, and I perfectly love scholarship, but they're so good at making you think one thing about something, so that really got me upset, and so [this work] is from that. I'm a very calm person, but that's my way of being angry is to get in the museum and, you know, root around in the basements and present it to the public, a different perspective.

Gioni: I think all of you are public figures yourselves, but with you, Tania, it's also inevitable to think also of the role of artist as a public figure now, and maybe we'll have a chance to discuss that, but so you want to tell us a little bit about this project?

Tania Bruguera: I was called by Catherine Wood [curator of contemporary art and performance at the Tate] to tell me, "OK, you're going to do the next Tate Turbine Hall commission." I was very happy for a second, and then I was like, oh no, what am I getting into? The first thing I did was look at all the history of all the previous Turbine Hall projects, and then I realized that I what I wanted to do was a socially engaged art project, which is basically an invisible project, something that nobody is going to see but the institution itself. That project was a question I asked the institution, and the question was very simple. It was: the Tate Modern is one of the most important art institutions in the world, are you as important for your neighbors?

Then I went there [to London] and lived there for a long time. I said "OK, if I'm going to do this project with the neighborhood, I have to be here." You know, I must have a day-to-day relationship with them. We created a group called Tate Neighbors, which still exists. We went around the Tate and we saw different organizations or people and the neighbors. There were people who never ever went [to the Tate]. But you had other people, for example, a guy who was actually part of the staff, and you have the guy who was part of the group critiquing the Tate during its relationship with BP. That was a little scary for the institution when I invited them, as they were very critical.

But I didn't know what I was going to do [for the project] and I have to say that the Tate was very cool with that. Not knowing what the project was, I was meeting every day with the [neighborhood] people, and then one day we start talking about how it has changed in our culture, the idea of recognizing somebody and how people now do a little cut and pay for recognition. Before, when you had buildings named after people it was because they did something amazing, not because they paid so much money. And there was a big controversy with the person who gave £100 million for the name of the new Tate building. And we decided that what we wanted was to rename the building.

And we decided to name it after Natalie Bell, and the way we selected her was after many, many discussions, we wanted to find a person that was good to the neighborhood. Natalie Bell has been working for 25 years as a social worker. She worked with kids at risk, and thanks to her work she saved some of these kids who now are studying, and now she works with elders. She was really, really loved by their community, but she's one of these invisible people that nobody sees—one of these public figures that is not public.

I was very proud because after we finished, we had not only created a process in which the neighbors talked to the director and all the people [at the Tate] about what they find works and doesn't work in a very candid way, at the same time, it was a very beautiful moment, because the people who work in the museum, they didn't want to do their job because they didn't know who [the building would be named after] because it was a secret until the last day. And as soon as they [heard] who the person was, in less than 24 hours, the whole building had the new labels. Everybody was super excited. You know? So that was quite beautiful.

And then at the end of the project, of course, I wanted to do, let's say, an invisible sculpture. A sculpture that is in your hand and your heart you know, like something that is not to touch or to see, but to feel. I also wanted to ask the institution: Can the institution feel? You know, can you feel? Can you feel your neighbors? Can you feel the people who are working in this place? At the end, I learned a word: legacy, and I didn't know this word before. And it is because Francis Morris, the Tate Modern director, came to say 'OK, we need a legacy,' so that the legacy of this project is not only the name on the building. I said, you know what, metaphors are not enough. So, I said that what we need is to have Natalie Bell, who is part of the neighborhood, is not trained as an artist or anything like that, to be a trustee of the board. So now Natalie Bell is sitting there, you know? And she is part of the decision-making process.

TOP: Tania Bruguera, Hyundai Commission, 2018. Performance at Tate Modern, Turbine Hall. © Tania Bruguera / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo: Tate Images.

ABOVE: *Portraits of Cigar Store Owner*s, from the exhibition, Mining the Museum: An Installation by Fred Wilson, The Contemporary and Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, April 4, 1992–February 28, 1993. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

RIGHT: Hans Haacke, *Gift Horse*, 2014. Bronze with black patina and wax finish, stainless steel fasteners and supports, and 1/4 in. (5 mm) flexible LED display with stainless steel armature and polycarbonate face, 15 ft. 3 in. x 14 ft. 1 in. x 5 ft. 5 in. (464.8 x 429.3 x 165.1 cm) © Hans Haacke. Courtesy of the artist and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York. Photo: Gautier Deblonde.

Ana Mendieta, *Anima, Silueta de Cohetes (Firework Piece)*, 1976. Super-8mm film transferred to high-definition digital media, color, silent, 2:23 min. © The Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection, LLC. Courtesy of Galerie Lelong & Co. / Licensed by Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

VOICES

ARTIST TALK: BREAKING THE MOLD
ART & HEALTH: UNDER THE MICROSCOPE
NASHER PRIZE DIALOGUES: AMBIGUOUS UTILITY
NASHER PUBLIC: GROWING SPACE FOR EVERYONE

FALL 2022

BREAKING THE MOLD

*Artist **Nicole Eisenman** recalls her adolescent foray into figurative sculpture.*

I found a couple of images recently through my best friend in college, Molly Bradford. Molly had pictures of a project we did together; in fact, Molly really began this project, and I joined her in it. This is from my freshman year at Rhode Island School of Design, and it was Christmas break. We had a month off for winter break, and the first week everybody left, and Molly and I stayed in school, and everybody was gone. There was empty space, a lot of the project rooms had been cleared out. So, Molly and I found a project room and started dragging junk into it like an old bed springs and broken furniture and this and that and building these armatures. Then we went to the store and bought hundreds of pounds of plaster, and we actually stole a lot of plaster—that's how we were back then; we were little thieves. We would buy one bag of plaster and roll out of the store with three of them on the trolley. But we were students on a limited budget, so that's how we did it, and we built these sculptures. We built about seven or eight of them that week and then left. We both went home for the holidays.

A couple of weeks later, they were discovered by somebody at school, and we almost got suspended, and our parents ended up cleaning up our mess for us. They had to pay the school to have them demolished and thrown away, and we had made a big mess making them.

But it was amazing for me to discover that she had these images from 30-something years ago. I haven't forgotten about it, but I forgot what they looked like, and I forgot how good they really felt. It was a project born out of friendship, a really important aspect—learning at that point in life, at the age of 18, that art didn't just happen on a piece of paper in my bedroom or in an art class in school. That it was a social activity. That you could think bigger and make bigger.

So, I went through RISD as a painter. I graduated, came to New York, and dabbled in sculpture in the 90s. I never fully committed. But then, in 2011, I was offered to do a project in London at Studio Voltaire, and they said, "Come do something outside of your regular practice." I remembered this sculpture thing from college, and I asked them to get me 1,000 pounds of plaster and $700 worth of two-by-fours. I spent three weeks there, making maybe one sculpture every two days or so. I ended up with about 15 or 16 sculptures, in an old church in the South of London. On the airplane over, I had made some thumbnail sketches of different gestures I was interested in building up. When I got there, we had a couple of assistants, and we were pulling tarot cards, and would decide on the gesture of the sculpture that day based on the card we pulled. There are similarities to some of those sculptures from RISD from 1985. And back at RISD, we were doing some of those same things, like pulling old desks and mattresses off the street and integrating them into the installation and working that way. It was a space that really had this feeling of being a workshop.

Then came Münster. So, Kasper König had seen this work at Studio Voltaire. I was really interested in the idea of presenting a workshop on sculpture, building these things in situ. He asked me in 2012, I think, for a proposal for the Münster Sculpture Projects, a show that he has curated for over 50 years. He started doing it when he was in his 20s, and he does it every 10 years. The last one he did, in 2017, when he was 75, was the one where I presented this piece, *Sketch for a Fountain*, that is now in the Nasher Garden, or a version of it. This process was interesting to me in thinking about public art for the first time, and context. I was thinking about how the pieces used who's in relationship to them, depending on the neighborhood. I mean, the demographic of Münster is pretty like, you know, wealthy-liberal-white-bourgeoisie kind of looking place, but within that, there are students. There is a Turkish community, and there are a lot of senior citizens, and so there are other micro-communities. So, I thought about context and how you want to approach the work. Is it something you want to get on a bicycle and ride half a mile to see and discover in the woods somewhere? Or is it going to be more in an urban place in the city and you drive by it and you can see it that way?

So, looking at the history of the Münster Sculpture Projects I remembered seeing a Martin Kippenberger sculpture when I was a student from one of the earlier iterations of the show. I really was down with this Kippenberger. He built an underground ventilation shaft used for subways and put them on this lawn. I remember photographs from *Artforum*, and then when I got to Münster, I recognized the lawn. I was like, that's it. I have to do my piece where he did his piece. The lawn was really elegant to me. It was like the equivalent of a white cube gallery, as close as you could get to a perfect arcadian space outdoors in Münster. It had a backdrop of a hill which, at some point in Münster in the 70s and 80s, was a gay cruising area, so that was a nice kind of connection.

Kasper König asked for a proposal, and getting him something was a big rush. He says, "Just give me something, doesn't matter. We can always change it, but just have some idea." So, the first thing that popped into my head was the idea of organizing figures around a body of water. You know, at the fountain, the water becomes a kind of an excuse, a gathering place for the figures, and anything could happen around it; it doesn't really matter what the figures are doing. I built the figures in a foundry in Düsseldorf. They're made out of plaster with foam inside them.

So, the show opened and this lawn is in a residential neighborhood, and there's a school nearby. Many kids would come after school and hang out; people would come to hang out in this park, make little barbecues, and bring little hibachi. It was a social space for this neighborhood, and I was concerned about interrupting that social space by putting the sculptures there, but then maybe it balanced out because kids could also get in the fountain and splash around. Indeed, they did, which made me really happy, and then the show opened, and there were a lot of visitors. I hadn't taken into account the traffic volume for this show in Münster. They had like a million visitors throughout the show, so it was heavily trafficked, and the lawn got decimated quickly. The dirt from the ground would go into the water, then into the pipes of the sculpture, and clog it up, so we were constantly draining the pool, cleaning out the plumbing, and reconfiguring it.

We wanted to see what it would be like to have these plaster figures outdoors for four months and how people lived with them. You know, the plaster fell apart, and it was like watching a body decay. The sculptures are made from porous materials, and porous materials age like humans do.

This text was excerpted and adapted from a lecture delivered on September 21, 2019, at the Nasher Sculpture Center as part of the 360 Speaker Series.

Untitled, Molly Bradford and Nicole Eisenman. Plaster and mixed media, installation view, 1984, image courtesy of Molly Bradford and Nicole Eisenman.

Nicole Eisenman, *Tis but a scratch' 'A scratch?! Your arm's off!' 'No, it isn't.'* Plaster, wood, mixed media. Installation view, Studio Voltaire, London, 2012. Photo: Andy Keate, courtesy of the artist.

Nicole Eisenman, *Sketch for a Fountain*, Bronze and plaster, installation view, Skulptur Projekte Münster, 2017.

UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

An artist recalls his struggle with cancer and how a series of his paintings encouraged his and others' healing.

BY JOHN POMARA

My current work investigates the conventions of painting and its relationship to the digital world and photography. I embrace both with a constant tension between their appearance on the surface. That's the big picture. But I want to give you the other picture of my work that started in 1991. My mom had cancer and I began thinking about the human body. I was taking microbiology photographs that I could find and tried to make them look like large-scale photocopies by taking the images, the actual photos, and moving them on copy machines and playing with paint, emulating the look of cancer cells. At the time, I never really told people that—except at one point I did, at a lecture, and somebody got very upset at the idea of cancer cells as imagery—because the paintings also evoked a certain amount of beauty. So I stayed quiet about the image's source. I was trying to be an abstract painter that dealt with real subject matter that was important.

A few years later in 2001, I was invited by the DMA to do a Concentrations exhibition. When Bonnie Pittman was director there, I worked with Suzanne Weaver, who was the curator, and produced another body of work, and at this point I had been going to a urologist at UT Southwestern for some medical problems, which would later lead to cancer, but it wasn't diagnosed as cancer yet; it was probably way too early. I was looking around at a lot of the equipment and the electronic machines that they have to look into your body, and I began thinking about those in terms of making my artwork look like that, still blurring the images. One of the doctors gave me some photos of an exploratory biopsy they did of my body, and I told him I was an artist, so he gave me a bunch of copies, and I took them home and pinned them up on my studio wall and began to use them to create this body of work. It was following that, around 2007 or 2008, that I did get diagnosed with cancer, and, at the time, the doctor reluctantly told me that it was a very aggressive cancer. Of course, I was very concerned, and sort of freaked out for about a week and then came to terms with it.

At the time, I was creating a new body of work that was probably the most beautiful I've ever created, but I never got that far with it because of having to do surgery, and I was promised one incision and when I woke up, I had six because they thought the cancer had spread already. The doctor told me if the surgery had happened a month later then it would have been too late, so I was very lucky.

Later, I was commissioned by the UT Southwestern art curator Courtney Crothers to take up again the work that I had begun in 2007 or 2008 but had never really pursued; it was just sitting around in sketchbooks and on my computer and different files of imagery that I was working with. So when I was approached through Courtney and Bonnie Pittman, they presented my work to Dan. Podolsky, who oversees the UT Southwestern system, and Bonnie suggested, "Well, why don't you talk to John Pomara? He's had cancer. He'll be very sensitive to the clinic."

They showed me the plans for the hospital, which were still in the early stages, and told me that there would be skylights over each of the paintings, so I began working and couldn't quite imagine what this space was going to be but did my best to follow this body of work to completion. The paintings are 12 feet long, 6 feet tall and the colors are intense. The top section has parts of human bodies because I began to think about what it is for the body to dissolve or to disappear. I thought of my own situation and 'formlessness' was the word that kept coming to my mind. How do you paint formlessness? This was the first time I began to try to depict that. I also give my students this sort of assignment of choosing between words—absence or presence, for example—and I was thinking of that, how you depict that sort of duality. So the parts of the human body that are depicted in the paintings were severely cropped and magnified—600% to 800% to 1,000%—in order to make it begin to dissolve into this sort of luminous ethereal sense of space.

I thought of them as being very spiritual as well, not religious but spiritual. I tend to be sort of Zen Buddhist in my beliefs and I want it to reflect the idea of being immersed, not only in beauty, but in this formlessness that goes with that. And to see them, I kept thinking of Mark Rothko, as if I was given my own chapel, because I love Rothko's work; it's profoundly beautiful and evokes a spiritual quality that I enjoy. When I was probably 15, I had some friends come over to my house and I was looking at art books at a young age and they asked me, "Well, who are your favorite artists?" And at the time—and they still continue to be—I said, I like Mark Rothko, but I *love* Andy Warhol. Two different spectrums. My work really embraces both aspects of reproduction like Warhol, but also the ethereal beauty of a Rothko.

If you're suffering with cancer, you might get to see these paintings. They're in the oncology clinic for UT Southwestern in front of different nurses' stations where people go in for chemo.

I was at a reception at a local gallery once, and I was talking to a group of artists, and a gentleman walked over and he said, "I heard somebody say your name is John Pomara." And he says, "I just want to thank you for your work that's in the hospital at the cancer clinic. I think you know that's a place I don't really want to be, but when I go in and I look at that work, it makes me breathe a little lighter and it just fills me with hope." And I almost began to cry. To have my work touch somebody's heart in that way, and I know probably others' as well. It brings me great joy to know that the work is in my own Rothko Chapel.

This text was excerpted and adapted from a lecture titled "Reaching New Heights: Overcoming Physical Limitations," delivered on October 30, 2019, at the Nasher Sculpture Center as part of the Art and Health Series.

LEFT, ABOVE: John Pomara, *Spiritual Bypass 1*, 2017 (installation view). Unique UV pigment ink on canvas, 72 x 144 in. (182.8 x 365.8 cm). Dallas: UT Southwestern Medical Center. © John Pomara. Photo courtesy of the artist.

LEFT, BELOW: John Pomara, *Spiritual Bypass 6*, 2017. Unique UV pigment ink on canvas, 72 x 144 in. (182.8 x 365.8 cm). © John Pomara. Photo courtesy of the artist.

AMBIGUOUS UTILITY

A curator considers her role in presenting works that straddle categories in spaces that challenge exhibition paradigms.

BY SU WU

I remember when I was first starting out, I went to this arts writers' conference at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, and I think it was supposed to be an annual thing, but it was such a group of maladjusted people that it only happened once. But I remember Christopher Knight of the *LA Times* telling a story about talking to an artist, and the artist said, "Well, if it wasn't for artists, you would have nothing to write about." And Christopher Knight—Pulitzer Prize-winning Christopher Knight—responded, "Well, but then I would just write about why artists don't exist." And it's something that I've carried with me ever since, this important reminder that no artist or designer ever really *needed* a writer in order to make their work, or at least they shouldn't. Like, maybe as a curator, you create the space or the means for an idea to be reified in the world. But in general, I'm tertiary to the main event, and I think that's a really lucky place to be.

There's this great Rancière quote about how in every logic of emancipation there has to be a third thing, that separate reason to

exist. And, for me, I've been very fortunate to find myself in this third thing, in this space between design and art. And, in particular, what has interested me is this commonplace that when you ask people what the distinction is between design and art, they will very often point to use. So what I try to do is emphasize that even in design objects, or especially in design objects, use is not a baked-in or essential quality; that of course use is constantly being defined and redefined by our relationships to one another, by how we are needed, by how we can be of service. I had a conversation once with a machine learning expert about captchas — the images that ask you to identify all the trains or bridges as a digital security precaution — and he said, almost as a throwaway, that historically the default image used to test machines has been a picture of a living room. That it's very hard for the machine to identify a chair, because of course you can sit on almost anything.

Still, and I'm willing to be wrong, I do think there is a distinction among design and craft and art. But, at least for me, it has been in the space of frustrated utility, of ambiguous use, or sheer laziness, that design and art tend to bump up against one another and enter this space where our knowledge and our ignorance meet, turning one into the other.

When I first moved to Mexico City, I was asked to curate the inaugural, 2019 show at MASA—a new exhibition platform and gallery founded by designer Héctor Esrawe and my co-curator Constanza Garza, along with Isaac Bissu and Roberto Diaz Sesma, with some new Mexico transplants, Age Salajõe and Brian Thoreen. They asked me to organize a show of "Mexican design," and we just immediately set out to undermine the premise.

As immigrants to Mexico, we were really interested in this long history of what it can mean to define a place through shared longing and shared affinity rather than strict citizenship and borders, and we set out to look for work that had been made by artists who had also sought something in Mexico. Among the pieces, we showed an On Kawara date painting that he made in Mexico in 1968, which is a really significant year in Mexican history, and a large Leonora Carrington painting. She, of course, was helped by André Breton and the Mexican ambassador to leave Europe after World War II and went to Mexico, where she spent the rest of her life. And we got permission from Breton's daughter to reprint the first "Manifesto for an Independent Revolutionary Art," which he co-wrote with Diego Rivera, and Allen Ginsberg's estate gave us an unpublished

recording of Ginsberg reading all of Jack Kerouac's Mexico City Blues, which we played in the bathroom.

I guess, in retrospect, it was a show about friendship and how optimistic we were that we could create a new sense of place, including work of ambiguous utility. There were pieces by Pedro Reyes, and by Jose Dávila, Alma Allen, and Francis Alÿs, a painting of a person lifting the floor to put on their shoes. And I remember there being so much explaining that we had to do about showing art and design together in this dilapidated old mansion that had been the site of a famous double murder and daring to call it an exhibition. In this small way, it felt like proof that art and design could be in conversation with one another without that being the explicit topic, and that no one's career would be ruined because of it.

But it was a recent MASA exhibition that felt like the closest I've come to a reconciliation—that a design exhibition doesn't need to be about design history, or about use per se, but that design can be capacious enough to encompass other ideas. Called *Elementos Vitales*, we presented the work of Ana Mendieta, the late, great Cuban-American artist who was sent by her father when she was 12 to live in the United States, where she grew up in group homes and foster care. Mendieta didn't return to a Spanish-speaking country until she was a student at the University of Iowa on a trip to Mexico; she would then spend every summer in Oaxaca from 1973 to 1980, and made some of the most significant works of her life while there, including the first *Silueta* film work. But her work had never before been shown in Oaxaca. So, we were honored to be trusted by her estate to bring these works for the first time back to the place where they were made.

And I see that exhibition, right? I see the exhibition that talks about Mendieta in Mexico, that looks at Mendieta's relationship to, say, certain similarities between rituals in Oaxaca and rituals in Afro-Caribbean cultures, and it looks like a beautiful exhibition that I would have been deeply proud of. But that's not my third way, that's not my separate reason to exist. I really wanted to think about exhibition accessibility, about vantage point, and to take those things seriously, to offer a place to rest when you're watching a film work, and not allow exhibition seating to be an afterthought. So we invited five Latina or Mexico City-based artists to make seating installations, conceptual resting places, from which to engage with the film works and to let each medium attempt to enhance the other.

Pia Camil, who is a Valle de Bravo-based artist, made an installation called *Bluejeaneando*, from 120 pairs of soft blue jeans, and it was paired with Mendieta's piece *Burial Pyramid*, which was filmed at the Yagul archaeological site. Mendieta is buried in stones and similarly, while you're engaging with Pia Camil's work, you're buried under this pile, you're brought low to the very ground that Mendieta had buried herself in. And of course, jeans are also a silhouette, this way of implying the body when the body is absent.

Another piece was by the Mexican architect Frida Escobedo, who was recently selected to design the new modern and contemporary wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Escobedo responded to Mendieta's Creek, in which Mendieta lays in San Felipe Creek in Oaxaca; Frida was very interested in the movement of the water and in the reflectivity of the water, the sound of metal. Also, as an architect, a lot of her practice centers on how underlying structures can change human behavior. In this instance, she takes a material that is more commonly associated with bondage —these are chains—and by giving them a frame, she creates an object of cradling, of support.

I think there is a tendency, or maybe an impulse, to talk in design about works that fail, or that are gross or wacky, in terms of these non-cathartic feelings: of frustration or disgust, and surprise, of novelty. And I completely agree with all that. But I also think that works of frustrated utility add an important ethical rejoinder to notions of use. A lot has been written about the racist and sexist implications of wanting things that are pure or devoid of ornament. But I mean even these aspirational notions of fewer, better things—as though objects that complicate our lives or are haphazard, or that are disabled or broken, or bad and bewildered, are just not worthy of existing, or not worthy of our care. I think that they can become important spaces of double meaning. You know, it's just not that human to be good at life, not really. And I think that in some writings around craft and design, craft has done itself this disservice and backed itself into a sort of sentimental illogic by trying to map onto notions of the well-made.

I don't want to implicate this panel, but that's my last point. I think that we might all agree that there's no implicit good to things made by hand, or the well-made; that of course terrible people can make beautiful things.

This text is excerpted from the talk "Nasher Prize Dialogues: The Uncanny Politics of Objects" presented on April 2, 2022, in Dallas.

TOP: Ana Mendieta, *Silueta del Laberinto (Laberinth Blood Imprint),* 1974. Super 8 transferred to digital, color, silent, 3 minutes. © 2022 The Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection, LLC. Courtesy Galerie Lelong & Co. / Licensed by Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

MIDDLE: Pia Camil, *Bluejeaneando,* 2019. Second-hand jeans. Photo: Alejandro Ramirez.

RIGHT: Brian Thoreen, *Black Rubber Collection.* Mexico City: *Collective/ Collectible* at MASA. Photo: Brian Thoreen, courtesy of MASA.

GROWING SPACE FOR EVERYONE

Nasher Public *artist reflects on* The Queer Birth Project.

BY LISS LAFLEUR

The Queer Birth Project is a five-year project with the goal of documenting and sharing the childbirth experiences of queer people in America, including LGBTQ+ folks. The structure of this project is based on a re-envisioning of *The Birth Project* by feminist artist Judy Chicago. *The Queer Birth Project* directly recognizes the significance of visibility and seeks to promote an intersectional and radically inclusive view relating to childbirth in America.

The Nasher Public exhibition I mounted last summer comprised three works: a large-scale immersive fringe installation, two neon light sculptures, and a digital soundscape.

Birth fringe (yellow) (2022), consisted of rows of cascading yellow fringe that took up the majority of the gallery. In my practice, fringe stands in as a queered, non-curtain, soft architecture that I utilize as both a philosophy and a time-based practice. As a philosophy, fringe transforms. It takes up physical space, it sparks joy, and it asks people to slow down.

The two neon works included in this exhibition were titled *Growing bodies* (2022) and *It is strange to take up so much space* (2022). Growing bodies documents the chronology of my partner's body through her pregnancy. The outlines of her changing body, originally recorded using a Sharpie marker in my studio, are illuminated through a series of rainbow-colored neon lines. My partner, a masculine-centered queer person, never planned to carry our child. However, after three years of my own infertility, she decided to try, and it worked. This piece is personal to me, and while it documents our own transition into parenthood, it also recalls the flexibility and multiple ways that queer families can be formed.

The second neon piece, *It is strange to take up so much space*, is a handwritten excerpt collected from a survey response to the question, "How do you feel about the size and changing shape of your body during pregnancy?" The answer prompts us to think about both the physical and physiological changes that occur with pregnancy. As queer parents, we move through spaces that are not designed for us. We develop new relationships to family, and we fight for a sense of freedom and inclusion. I really love the excerpt as a proposition that asks us to question space both inside and outside of the body.

The final piece was a soundscape that fills the gallery with stories of queer birth. Using direct quotes from two questions in ongoing research relating to the body and dysphoria. I've woven together multiple narratives into a 40-minute libretto for the voice. Singing these reflections on changing bodies and identities is meant to elicit a sense of joy, recognizing, celebrating, and creating a new space for community.

The installation at the Nasher was the first iteration of *The Queer Birth Project*, and my first collaboration with the sociologist Katherine Sobering, who is contributing research on queer birth narratives. It's a proof of concept, it's arts-based research, it's a collaboration, and, most of all, it's an invitation for other people to participate and share their stories. We plan to continue building this project through three outlets: a national survey where LGBTQ+ families can share their stories, a collection of visual artworks, and, eventually, a publication.

We are living in wild times, and I cannot think of a more significant moment in our history to be creating this work, to try and relate to others, to find joy through adversity.

In June of 2022, the US Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade, removing access and autonomy around reproductive health. Our own governor in the state of Texas is actively working to revoke parental rights to the parents of trans kids, imposing painful and unnecessary burdens on these young people and their families. The US is the only wealthy country in the world without a national program for paid parental leave, and BIPOC individuals are still three times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes. The climate in the state of Texas can be openly hostile to LGBTQ+ people.

Through this work, we hope to expand cultural ideas relating to birth and family building. We also hope to encourage others to participate, to take the survey, or to reach out to us.

Liss LaFleur, *Birth fringe (yellow)* and *Growing bodies*, 2022 (installation view). Fringe, neon, and metal, dimensions variable. Dallas: Nasher Public: The Queer Birth Project, May 7 – July 17, 2022 at the Nasher Sculpture Center. Photo: Kevin Todora.


MUCH SPACE

absurd
sexualized
violent
gnarled
ugly
warty
mathematical
work
death
reproduction
disease
aging
sexual organs
orifices
peduncles
protuberances

things of this sort