Nevine Mahmoud,
press

Artforum, 2023

REVIEWS LONDON

Nevine Mahmoud

Soft Opening | Minerva St

By Gilda Williams

Nevine Mahmoud, *breast (Rosa Alptraum)*, 2019, handblown glass, resin, aluminum hardware, 10 × 7 1/8 × 7 1/2".

There are breasts, and then there are tits. With their supple glass curves and pointy resin nipples, the pair hanging temptingly on the wall here were definitely tits. The pinky-beige *breast (Rosa Alptraum)* and her deep-red sister *breast (tamarind)* (all works 2019) were convincingly smooth and perky, just begging for an illicit feel. Confronted by Nevine Mahmoud's

sculptures of fragmented erogenous zones, I sensed the conflation of two prohibitions: the taboo against touching an artwork in a gallery, and that of touching a stranger's body. Both can be tempting; both must be resisted. I must not stroke the velvety, white-marble *bottom tear:* a spherical, human-size, butt-shaped peach with giant blue-glass drop emerging from the top. I must not run my finger along the fleshy folds of the orangey-pink glass *bust (phantom Li). A final sculpture, carved slide,* was a curved chair-size marble slab that seemed to lie on its side atop colorful Formica floorboards, as if waiting for somebody to curl up and spoon it.

The five works in Mahmoud's exhibition "belly room" were not so much sculptures as come-ons, daring us to make the first move. There I was, staring stupidly at a pair of perfect champagne coupe breasts positioned at eye level, like some shameless creep. I studied the delicate nipple detailing, and the gentle fleshy curves molded around the smooth aluminum bracket attaching each boob edge to the wall. Next, I was crouching down to scrutinize the delicate crack down *bottom tear*, inspecting all round to confirm the fruit's 360-degree perfection. Anywhere outside an art gallery, the police would've been called. Alone and unobserved in the tiny space, amid a bevy of carefully arranged body parts as delicious and succulent as hard candy, did I dare reach out my hand and cop a feel of the high-polish glass and shapely marble?

"Belly room" was marvelously obscene, a masturbator's paradise. Even the checklist, with its suggestive references to "handblown" glass, "Italian" or "Argentine" marble, and assorted "hardware," began to read like a coded brothel menu, a sensation not impeded by the gallery's soft-porn double-entendre name, Soft Opening, stamped teasingly at the top. The London-born, Los Angeles–based Mahmoud has described her delight in working with labor-intensive materials and achieving her hyper-glossy finishes through "repeated touching and sanding and stroking." So only the maker gets to fondle this provocative art! This show was like an orgy for one: the artist. The rest of us were left to our own frustrations, imagining the physical sensation of surfaces so alive they seemed to lightly perspire. I could imagine a collector buying one just for the perverse pleasure of stroking it whenever she pleases.

Mahmoud cites Louise Bourgeois as an influence, and the connection with the late French-American sculptor's polished, disembodied body parts is evident. Bourgeois's *Sleep II*, 1967, is a giant carved marble phallus set on two massive rough timbers, like a bone-dry penis tower attempting to raise itself off the floor, symbolic of deflated patriarchy. In contrast, Mahmoud's seemingly drenched, life-size sculptures were not going for symbolism. Each braless wall tit was realistically meaty, about the size and color of a roast—a pink slab of ham on the left, a bloodred cut of beef on the right. Other works appeared subjected to gravity, from the drooping silky bulges of *bust (phantom Li)* to the glass apparently seeping out of *bottom tear* to the toppled *carved slide*. Mahmoud's living sculptures create unexpectedly intimate encounters, like accidentally brushing against a stranger's sweaty skin in a club, complete with the unspoken anonymous frisson. Sometimes a peach is just a peach, but not here.

Wallpaper, 2022

Fantasy, femininity, fairytales: Nevine Mahmoud's alluring sculptures at Soft Opening

Opening alongside Frieze Week 2022, Nevine Mahmoud's new show at Soft Opening, London, is a nuanced exploration of eroticism, mythology and cultural assumptions of femininity

Nevine Mahmoud *fawn, she*, 2022. Portuguese pink marble, Turkish Sivec marble. *Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London*

Nevine Mahmoud's alluring sculptures are a play of opposites. The smooth surfaces of giant peaches, lips and, most recently, deer invite touch. At the same time, they are hard, crafted in materials such as marble and glass. They hold the dual properties of coldness and warmth; fragility and sturdiness; eroticism and innocence.

These conflicts speak to what it feels like to reside within a sexualised body. There are usually unmissable nods to the female form in the British artist's sculptures, but for her new exhibition 'In Mass and Feeling' at Soft Opening in east London – opening alongside Frieze Week 2022 – she takes a step away from such direct references to the body.

In place of dripping wet fruits and suggestive doughnuts, she has cast Little Tykes plastic toy cottages, a tricycle, and a deer in marble. The light blue and pink cottage doors riff on her previous show, 'Foreplay II' at M+B Doheny in Los Angeles, where life-sized playground structures were combined with huge tongue slides and swinging breasts.

Wallpaper, 2022

Nevine Mahmoud, *Tricycle (bone)*, 2022. Epoxy resin, fibreglass, pigment. *Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London*

'The playground sculpture could be seen as a portal or entryway, which I have thought about before with the body in terms of orifices, lips and mouths; holes and cleavages,' she tells me. 'It felt like another formal way of thinking about that idea.'

There is something discomforting about the cottage doors standing alone, leading nowhere, casts of plastic forms that mimic something else. They call to mind the stone houses of witches and gnomes in fairytales. The viewer's imagination is allowed to fill in the blanks. 'The inside is carved like padding,' Mahmoud tells me. 'The shutters have a crisscross effect like a romantic barn. These things are signifiers of fantasy. They are domestic, mythological; they hint at man and nature. But they're so reduced.'

The deer appears to reside in the same mythological universe, with a white Turkish Sivec marble body and hand-carved ears that are eerily realistic, rendered in Portuguese pink marble with delicate vein markings. 'It conflates the fragile, feminine, child-like and erotic,' she explains. 'The ears connote something more lifelike and alive, whereas the paler, drained of colour aspects of the body are like a passive formalism.'

Nevine Mahmoud, *Cottage door*, 2022. Salvaged marble, aluminium rod. *Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London*

This is the first body of work for which Mahmoud has used a mix of hand and robotic carving. For example, the deer combines a robotically carved body with hand-carved ears. The artist usually tries to create as much as possible by hand but is pleased with this hybrid way of working.

The eroticism of 'In Mass and Feeling' is subtle. In moving away from the more directly sexualised symbols of fruit and erogenous body parts, Mahmoud hints at an uncomfortable eroticism attached to childhood and purity. 'I feel like what was motivating me was innocence,' she explains. 'Modesty, purity… those words were coming up. If the erotic is here, it is very forbidden. With the fruit, there is an acceptable, comfortable reference to eroticism. This is stranger.'

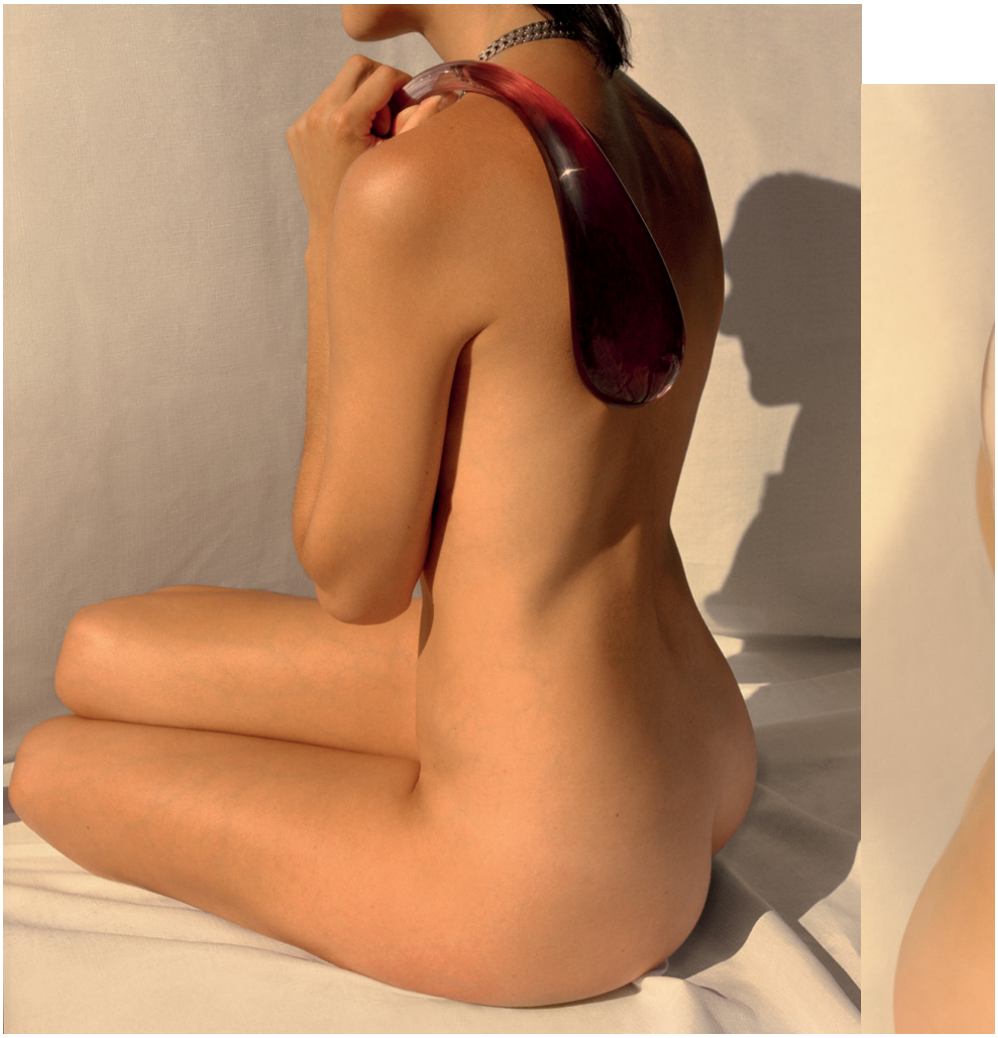
The deer also speaks to cultural assumptions of femininity. Its inclusion within the show explores the full complexity of this trope. 'It's a very tangible archetype, this frail little deer. I am confused about where women stand with that. Are we meant to negate that or feel that way?' Mahmoud considers. 'There is a beauty and elegance, but it's very passive.' ✱

Nevine Mahmoud, *Romantic shutters*, 2022 Portuguese pink marble, Carrara white marble. *Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London*

Purple, 2020

art stone carvings and glass pieces as a labor of love: the los angeles-based british artist **nevine mahmoud** sculpts highly tactile, sensual, and erotic works out of rock in the form of breasts, lilies, split peaches, and disembodied members. **love**

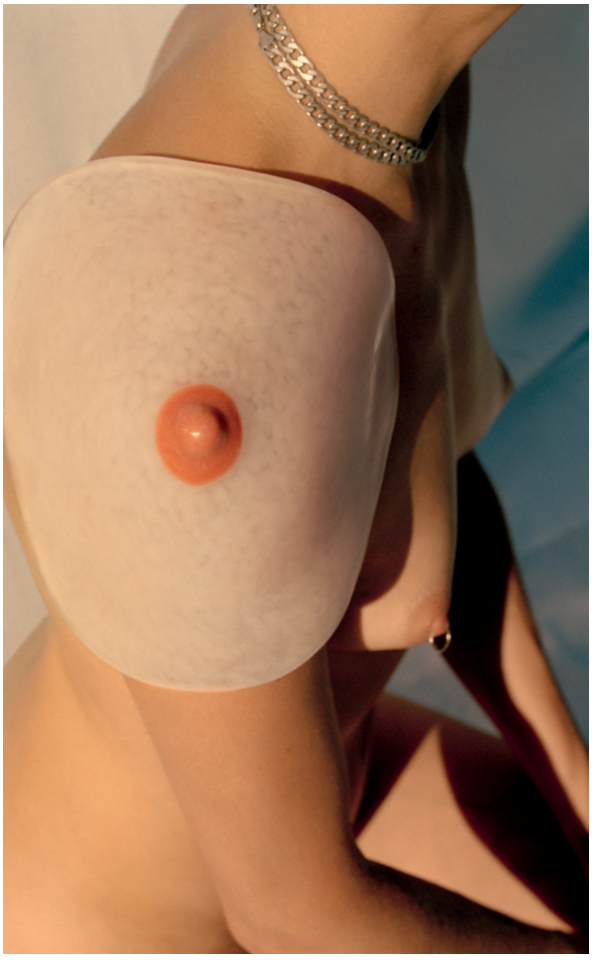
INTERVIEW AND PHOTOGRAPHY
BY AMANDA CHARCHIAN



Purple, 2020

NEVINE MAHMOUD, *BREAST (PINKY GLAND)*, 2018, GLASS AND RESIN, COURTESY OF NMSTUDIO AND M+B GALLERY

OPPOSITE PAGE: NEVINE MAHMOUD, *UNTITLED (DROP)*, 2019, BLOWN GLASS, COURTESY OF NMSTUDIO



AMANDA CHARCHIAN — What's beautiful about your work is that it's just so tactile. What inspired you to do those disembodied parts?
NEVINE MAHMOUD — The disembodied body is the most accurate representation of the history of feminism, in my experience — of being a woman and what it feels like in that body. I identify strongly with that dismembered physical presence: parts being interchangeable and alien even to themselves. The split peaches and lilies in stone are so suggestive of female genitalia that it was a natural progression to start making legs, torsos, breasts — cover all ground. And this is still evolving.

AMANDA CHARCHIAN — How would you describe your personal experience of love?
NEVINE MAHMOUD — Like nature or what we call the natural environment, love has similar qualities to art: unpredictable, beautiful, formal, but also mysterious, and circular by design, not linear. I'm very much in that headspace. I've recently fallen in love — what feels like the real deal. So, I'm quite obsessed with love at the moment, which has been both powerful and distracting for making work. [Laughs]

AMANDA CHARCHIAN — How does being in love affect your work or your practice?
NEVINE MAHMOUD — My work's been my number-one love priority for the past six years! My number-one girl, guy. Of course, I have a loving community of friends and family, but a new partner is a big shift. Also, with Covid-19 and the Black Lives Matter uprising, these things have felt more important to spend energy on than being in the studio. I worried for a while if I'd have to choose between life and love, and making art. Of course, this is not the case. In terms of my sexuality and eroticism, being in love only helps…

AMANDA CHARCHIAN — I'm Middle Eastern, and when I make pictures of women in a specific way, I feel it has so much to do with my upbringing and how, if I were in Iran now, I wouldn't be able to make this type of work. I have this obsession with natural female beauty and bodies, and am constantly representing it. Do you think, being a bit Middle Eastern, that your similar interest comes from that at all?
NEVINE MAHMOUD — I wonder, because my father is Lebanese, but we actually didn't go to Beirut very much as children. A lot of my family emigrated to France after the civil war in Lebanon, and my mother's side is in Austria. I went to an international school and grew up aware of my difference, but in no way discriminated against. If anything, the duress was experienced as a woman, even in the context of an all-girls' school. My teenage years made me extremely self-reflective about the power of the female body and the anxiety or distress that can come with it.

AMANDA CHARCHIAN — Your sculptures are about subtracting because you're removing from a block or piece of stone all day, right?
NEVINE MAHMOUD — A surface suggests the outside, the skin, the shell. But with the stone and glass pieces I've been making, the hollowness also speaks to volume. The two are inversed, but they're in intimate dialogue with each other. In the carving process, one is removing material to find a new form, so space or void is just as important as the thing itself.

AMANDA CHARCHIAN — Right, because you have to plan in advance to carve the shape.
NEVINE MAHMOUD — I do if I'm trying to make a specific shape. But a lot of those ideas first came to me in response to a specific stone. The first breast I made was because a piece of alabaster I was working with broke in half accidentally. Once I got over my fit of rage, I saw the shape and thought, "Oh, that's like a half breast."

AMANDA CHARCHIAN — Do you ever feel attracted, just in terms of energy, to some of these pieces? I'm curious how you relate on a more intuitive or psychic level to the material.
NEVINE MAHMOUD — At the beginning, when I was new to working with stone, all were magical, and I didn't really know one from the other. I responded intuitively to what I was attracted to, and that often came with color. I realized that I was more interested in working with translucent and strongly colored stones, as opposed to marble or limestone that have more subdued colors. I wanted to learn how to work with the ones that were bright red or bright orange, and this came with its own set of rules. I learned this way, case by case, rock by rock. I could only really deal with something around six inches for about two years. Then, shape and size evolves — you move on to bigger blocks, and next thing you know, you've got rooms and cars full of giant boulders.

AMANDA CHARCHIAN — It's alchemical because you're turning one thing into another, and infusing it with

Purple, 2020

all this symbolic power. You're turning such delicate, sensual things like peaches or lilies into stone, and it's somehow subversive in just the fact that you're a woman handling these pieces of stone and changing them. Does it ever feel like you're working out a process that seems more like a metaphor?
NEVINE MAHMOUD — Definitely. The impulse toward working with stone was partly metaphorical. I thought about how I wanted to project myself as a female artist. At the same time, I had a compulsion to make erotic objects, and making them in stone is both physically difficult and historically bound. It's sort of a contradiction in a contemporary setting. I thought there was a lot of richness there, and just making an attempt would produce something interesting. That can happen with all kinds of media in art, when time and energy are invested. I tend to be drawn to material processes that are technically very rigorous as a way to find my voice. I'm never really sure what I want to make until I start working with the material.

AMANDA CHARCHIAN — When I see your work, I really want to touch all of it. It makes me think about my own body. It was as if I wasn't allowed to. It had this playful, teasing quality to it: the tongue coming out of the wall — there's an erotic appeal to that. Is that something you intend?
NEVINE MAHMOUD — Definitely. Before my stone works, I was thinking about shapes that referred to the body and erotic symbols, but I was reducing them to more abstract forms. The stone helped me want to become explicit. The cut-open peach was the first example. Then the next pieces became indicative of orifices of any kind — mouths, vulvas, anuses. Still quite abstracted, but definitely more figurative. That's been a pleasurable journey for me, to exhibit this kind of explicitness in the gallery setting. I want the experience of my work to bring up questions about touch and the material. Sense is just as critical as language or comprehension in viewing contemporary art, especially with regard to sculpture.

AMANDA CHARCHIAN — I keep thinking about the meditative aspect of laboriously cutting through stone, and how you probably can't be any more present in life than in those moments where you're just working through it. I'm wondering how that's essentially a spiritual practice at some point.
NEVINE MAHMOUD — It is definitely a process that requires a lot of focus and love. Because of the repetitive nature of the work, it can be calming and take you out of yourself. At least, this was my experience. For me to start learning, I had to go out of town and drive to Ventura, where I met my mentor, JoAnne Duby. I had a very intimate relationship with her and the stone yard, Art City, where we would buy stone. Then I would drive back to LA — two or three hours — and resume daily life. Stone carving was a whole other world from the art circuit of the city, and that still stays with me now. It nurtured another mental space to make work in. And whatever respite it served, it's not a soft space. It's fucking hard! Learning different methods, through teachers and peers, and now working with my own apprentices — it's a beautiful network of inheritance.

AMANDA CHARCHIAN — That sense of tradition is rarer and rarer these days, especially in art making. There are very few mediums that have such a long history. You could have it 3D-printed, or why not just put it in a computer because you could essentially do that, right?
NEVINE MAHMOUD — There are also machines that can fully automate stone carving. Alma Allen, a sculptor now based in Mexico, developed a giant robot to carve his large-scale pieces. Sort of like a massive-armed, computerized chisel with accompanying software: 3D printing-meets-Marvel arm. And the work still feels connected to what came before. I'm not opposed to using newer technologies at all. And plenty of artists have pieces fabricated without encountering the raw material.

AMANDA CHARCHIAN — Do you think that your work will have a different energy if you do that — that your handmade feeling is a devotional part of it?
NEVINE MAHMOUD — Yes. The work lies in what happens along the way of making and then how it's resolved. This process cannot be designed.

AMANDA CHARCHIAN — There's that beautiful quote from David Hockney when he was making all of these quarantine digital paintings. He said that the source of all art is love. I'm wondering if you agree with him.
NEVINE MAHMOUD — I wonder, too, if the same could be said of a lack of love — how you feel and what you need to express when you have been denied love, in the absence of care. Some of my favorite sculptures are born from a place of trauma, and are beautiful and devotional because of this. The objects are expressing distress, but the act of making them is love.

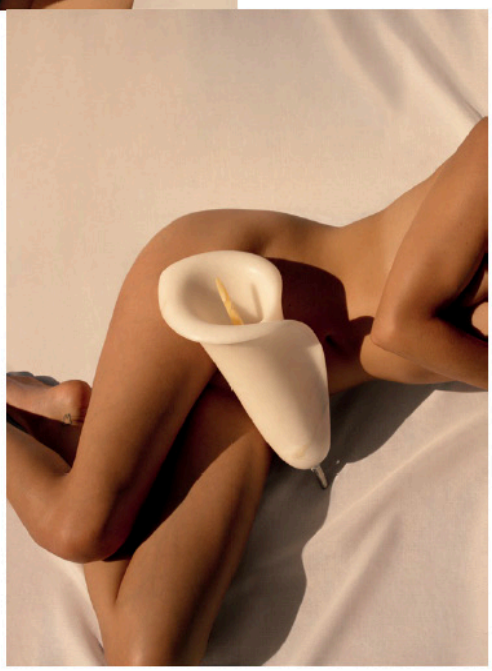
END

Purple, 2020

TOP: NEVINE MAHMOUD, *UNTITLED*, 2019, GLASS AND RESIN, 48 X 8 INCHES, COURTESY OF NMSTUDIO

LEFT: NEVINE MAHMOUD, *UNTITLED (LEG FLOWER)*, 2020, BLOWN GLASS AND RESIN, 36 X 8 INCHES, COURTESY OF NMSTUDIO

RIGHT: NEVINE MAHMOUD, *FANTASY LILY*, 2017, ALABASTER CALCITE AND STEEL, 14 X 7 X 4 INCHES, COURTESY OF NMSTUDIO AND JONAS WOOD



Coeval, 2020


6 days ago
NEVINE MAHMOUD
ART
The questions that drive Nevine Mahmoud's practice can only be answered by the objects and shapes that emerge from it. The L.A.-based artist's sculptural installations turn rooms into charged environments – potent spaces where pieces reflect, deflect, and speak to each other. She recently approached stone as a material develop ideas with, and started to exploit the element's innate characteristics to undermine expectations surrounding it. By engaging in processes that relate to the idea of creating a void for a solid to manifest, like casting plaster and working with metal, or using methods that rely on the subtraction of matter to produce new shapes, such as by carving stone, Nevine's work poignantly speaks of what sculpture can be and, most importantly, of what it isn't. Through sheer ambiguity, humorous contradiction and sensual conflict, Nevine distorts and misrepresents the body, confronting preconceived ideas about how to live in one.

The sculptural installations you devise create a reciprocity between positive and negative space. Your work seems to intentionally interact with the air that surrounds it, in an interplay of convex and concave shapes, as if the pieces were standing within an atmospheric tension. Can you speak about your interest in this dynamic?

I consider the space around or between sculptures to be as potent as the object(s) themselves. Rosalind Krauss suggests in her seminal 1979 article "Sculpture in the expanded field" that one can only differentiate categories named as sculpture, architecture, site and landscape by what they are not. Late 20th century conceptions of what Sculpture can be have very much influenced my practice. I think this perimeter of what something isn't translates as this fascination with positive negative interplay. Processes I use such as casting plaster and metal works directly with this idea of setting up a void, a negative perimeter in order to manifest the solid. Inversely, carving stone removes material in order to produce a novel shape. Both rely on subtraction but work in opposing manners. In the installation of the work, the space between things in a room creates a charged environment as the pieces speak to one another, reflecting and deflecting each others qualities. In this way the viewer may enter another world with them.

Coeval, 2020

I'd be curious to learn more about your relationship with stone and how the unyielding nature of the material interacts with the recurrent fluidity and softness of forms across your work. How does stone respond to your ideas, and how does it contribute to their development?

Working with stone represents a more recent phase of my practice, where I look to exploit a certain characteristic of a material and furthermore, undermine ones expectations of it. For example, stone possesses a unique quality that makes it irresistible to look at. At the same time, to render it soft or supple requires a huge amount of (manual) labor due to its density. I like this contradiction, or at least, this foreplay. This conflict exists in my mind too, in the way I want to pose the work. At once sensual and humorous, and at the same time alienating and somber. Stone too possesses inherent colors and textures that can greatly influence the course of my ideas. The peaches and lip sculptures for example were a direct response to the availability of bright red alabaster and orange calcite here in California.

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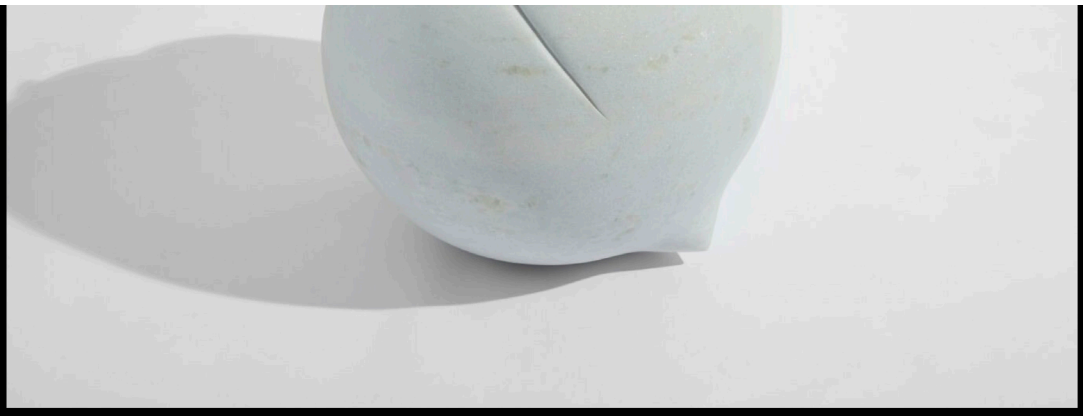
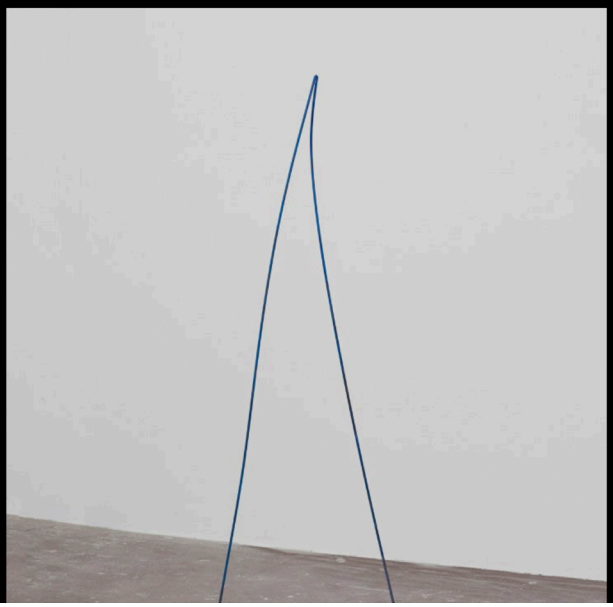


There's a process of objectification involved in your work through which fragments and moments of bodies are made into objects. It feels thoughtful and candid, and there's a special clarity to it, an exactitude. What brought you to elaborate sensual details this way? Is there a specific need that drives you?
Objectification of the body and the drive **to see it** and **possess it** has to me, since childhood, seemed a fundamental impulse of Western society. And one that continues to play a role in contemporary art as well as mainstream media. As a female sculptor, much of my work is underscored with concerns of the feminine... What does it mean for a woman to objectify her own body, to use it and expose it? What does it mean to dismember a body, to eroticize those parts, but to retain authority over them? Why does she seek an audience and who are they? These are questions that drive my practice and are answered only by the objects and shapes that emerge. Distorting and misrepresenting the body in ways that might bring humor or gravity, lust or disgust to the viewer is the only way I can see to challenge preconceived expectations of how to live in one.



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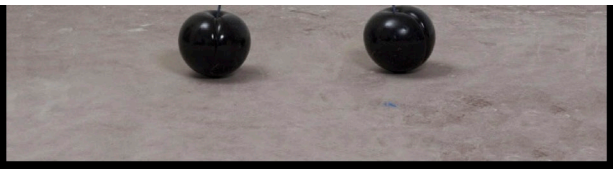

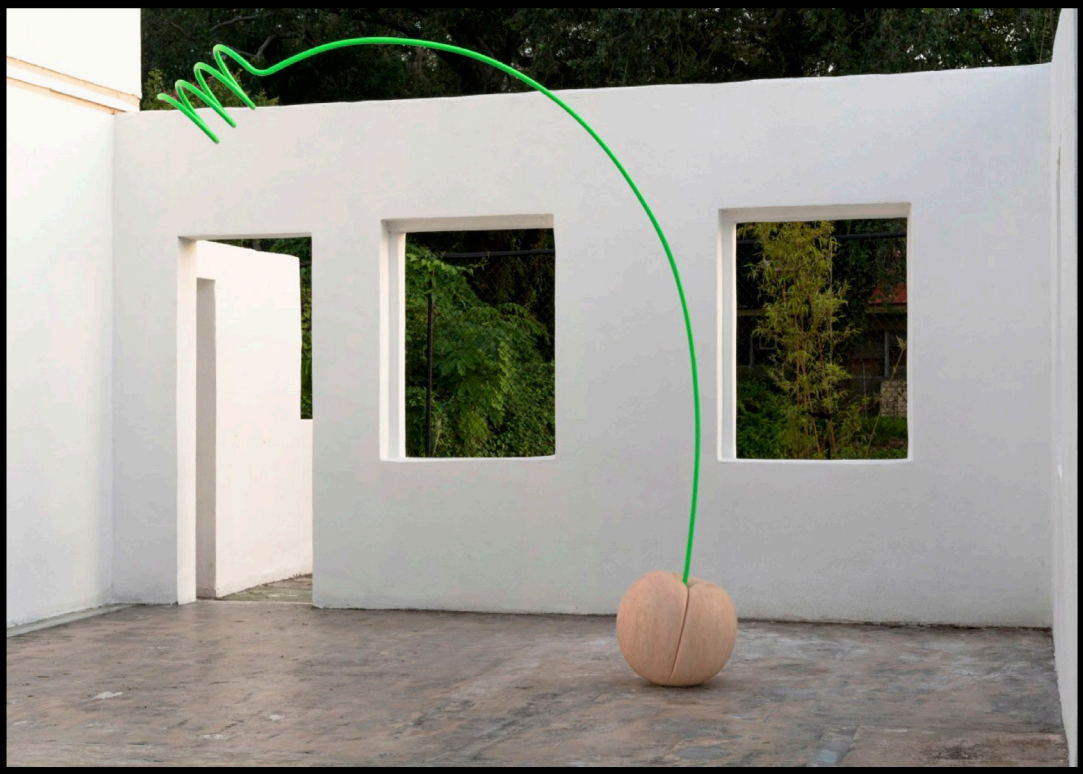

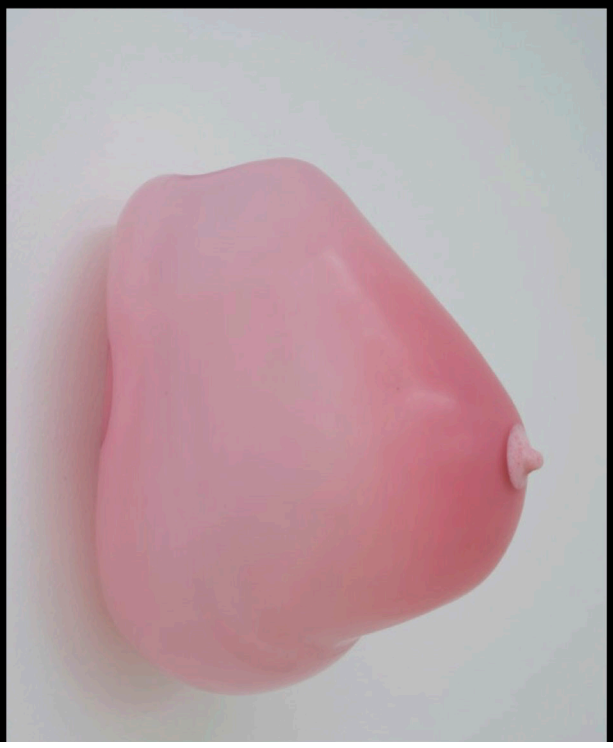

You've been living in LA for a few years now. Do you think the city, the landscape, the environment you work in have had an influence on your practice?
Absolutely. I chose to live here because it felt conducive with the direction my work was going. Marble and alabaster being so much more available definitely kept me here longer than I anticipated. It would have been a sadistic ambition to throw myself into large scale stone work in London! But that being said, nothing is impossible. The space in LA is ample and with the desert nearby on has the opportunity to work outside all year round. The city too, is a strange place. You can feel completely and utterly alone here which is both appealing and a little sickening... The perfect combination.

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TEXT BY
EVA FABBRIS

The apple has never been a particularly sensual fruit: it is only (an understatement) the biblical tradition that associates it with sin. The apple is sensual in Eve's hands, when she offers it, when one imagines the rotation of her wrist that allows her to show off, to tempt... otherwise the apple in itself, smooth-skinned and compact, does not offer great cues for seduction. Things are a bit different with a peach, especially regarding its white or yellow paste with a slightly fuzzy skin. Touch, juice, chromatic contrast between the pulp and the corrugated stone, and probably also its association with summer, the season in which the peach ripens, are all joyfully provocative elements. "Elio" Chalamet recently celebrated the peach in *Call Me By Your Name*.

Nevine Mahmoud's fruit does not lose an ounce of this sensuality, but shifts it all to the visual dimension and to the tactile contradiction. Her peaches, watermelon slices and big cherries are very compact, concentrated. They are made of marble, or alabaster, and the finish of their surfaces is calibrated to irresistibly entice one to touch them. One of the peaches has a slice cut out of it, shamelessly revealing its stone of another color; on another of these fruits a big tear is rolling down; on the sides of a watermelon slice there are droplets of sweat/condensation, while another slice has been bitten... From an Italian point of view, these slick pieces bring to mind the Memphis style, the '80s, a world of interior design in which hot and cold are useless antinomies in the face of the chromatic and graphic vitality that always emanates from the object. "Yes, why not? I am attracted to Italy, and in particular to Milan," the artist says.

Mahmoud also uses blown glass, mainly turning it into parts of the female body: flabby breasts on soft bellies, or single breasts or legs, always one at a time, always featuring an opalescent quality of the material—more aimed at exploring the opaque liquidity of glass than its mineral transparency. With these works, one may be tempted to think of a more decadent, or even painful take on form by an artist who chooses to face and focus on solid materials and finished forms.

The peach, like other Mahmoud subjects, comes in different versions. Probably the best known is the one entitled *Cleave and Spread*, in orange calcite with its stone fragment in pink alabaster clearly visible: a gentle yet unmistakable allusion. I happened to see it in one of the European venues of the group show *Seven Sisters*, curated by Martha Kirszenbaum and featuring works by female artists focused on female physicality, as part of the theme of control over one's body and one's intimacy. By Mahmoud there were also a lily and a mouth, and her role in the exhibition was to confirm the possible softness of marble, deconstructing the tradition of macho-carving.

In a 2016 article,[1] Andrew Berardini outlined the poetic-sculptural genealogy of Mahmoud's practice, placing it at a point where Eva Hesse and Alina Szapocznikow's concerns and materials absorb the Californian fetish dimension of a McCracken. Mahmoud moved to Los Angeles in 2014 where she obtained an MFA at the University of Southern

CURA, 2020

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California, and it was there that her obsession for sculpture took hold, with the beginning of her quest for sculptors-mentors who could teach her sculpture. Her tension in appropriating a masculine and muscular technique vanishes, a few years later, when Mahmoud no longer doubts dominating it; she also works with glass, excited by the changes of state that the material undergoes, from solid to viscous and boiling, in order to take shape. Aside from the glass pieces, the rest of her sculptures are produced, with the help at the most of one assistant at a time, in her studio in East Los Angeles.

If her materials of choice, as relentlessly repeated when talking about her, are marble—different types of marble in different colors and finishes—alabaster, and glass, it must be said that Nevine works with space in an equally wise manner. The erotic power of the individual elements is alluded to, playful and dense; when the artist arranges them for an exhibition, rather than occupying the space, she draws it. When one looks at one of her exhibitions, or enters her studio, the eyes follow a movement that certainly draws strength from the fact that it is provoked by individual, mocking and seductive entities. But a big part in this game is also played by the stands: the soft blue donut, an ass-hole-donut, is placed on a fluorescent Plexiglas base; the tongue (sometimes with a round hole in the middle) exists because it sticks out directly from the wall; cherries are characters, with disproportionate linear petioles that thrust themselves into space; the soft busts protrude from the wall held by a solid curved metal pipe, far from seductive or discreet; the glass leg rests on small wooden pillars; other pieces are on transparent glass plinths... it's a visual score. There is something of Mahmoud's own physicality as a young woman in this way of being in space—energetic and concentrated, with a precise desire to know how to occupy all the space. She is long-limbed, and since she is in Los Angeles her limbs are often naked. In an interview asking her what her work robes are, Mahmoud replies "Leggings and shorts in the summer—although I have some pretty gnarly burns on my hands and legs just from the grinders, so I should be wearing long pants all the time."[3] Instead, she leaves her skin exposed to space, to her materials, her techniques.

I am preparing an exhibition in which she will take part together with Derek MF Di Fabio and Margherita Raso;[4] Derek says that Nevine's works are a bit like black holes for their material and non-material density.

While working on this project we passed around Ottessa Moshfegh's stories, both the participants and I completely taken by the existential darkness void of drama of her narration. In Moshfegh's latest novel, the main character looks carefully in the mirror and detects a small dark shadow inside his pupil, saying "Someone said once that pupils were just empty space, black holes, twin caves of infinite nothingness. 'When something disappears, that's usually where it disappears—into the black holes in our eyes.' [...]"[5]

1. In conversation with me, in her studio in Los Angeles, July 2020.
2. Andrew Berardini, "Playtime," in *Mousse*, no. 52, February 2016.
3. Christine Whitney, "The Sculptor Bringing Back the Craft of Stone Carving," in *New York Magazine*, 27 March 2017.
4. *Project Room #13: Derek MF Di Fabio, Nevine Mahmoud, Margherita Raso*, Fondazione Arnaldo Pomodoro, Milan, 14 April–26 June 2020.
5. Ottessa Moshfegh, *My Year of Rest and Relaxation*.

All images: Courtesy: the artist and M+B, Los Angeles

ARTFORUM

LONDON

Prabhavathi Meppayil

PACE GALLERY

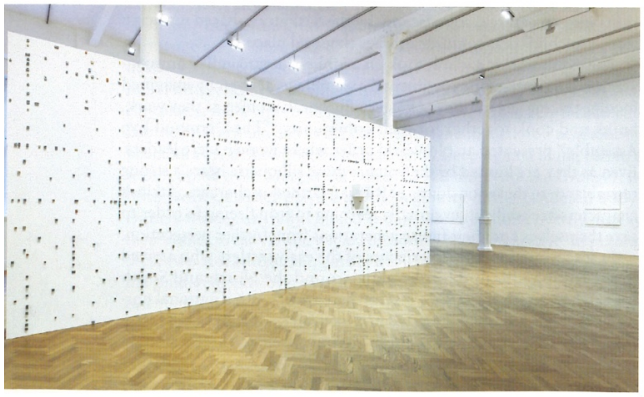
To gild is to transform, with intricate labor, the seemingly ordinary into the precious. Bangalore, India–based Prabhavathi Meppayil descends from a long line of goldsmiths, and she embeds the precise technical language of those craftspeople in her spare and stripped-back work, literally entrenching their processes in the work's surfaces. Made of painstakingly applied layers of gesso, each of which takes hours to dry, her pieces feature the imprints of endless horizons of tiny geometric shapes made with a *thinnam*, an Indian goldsmithing tool traditionally used to embellish bangles. Many of the works are serial: Sixteen panels, eight panels, or two panels of enigmatic, barely textured white gaze back serenely as the eye adjusts and the details come into focus. Lines, ovals, corrugated rectangles, squares incised with smaller squares, diamonds, dots, and dashes: Each repeated component is just a few millimeters wide. One large panel combines alternately horizontal and vertical rectangular sections of varied *thinnam* patterns, punctuated by swaths of untreated gesso, like rigid quilting.

"The practice, the process, is a way of life" Meppayil has said of these pieces, of a kind that first came to broad attention in the West when her work was included in Massimiliano Gioni's 2013 Venice Biennale. But there is no gold used, only the holy abstraction of white on white, a geometric snow blindness that reconstitutes, if you submit to it, how and what the eye can see—an additive stripping away, adornment in the negative. Instead of encircling a wrist, dangling and chiming as the wearer gesticulates, the jewelry patterns lie flat, in matte silence. But delicacy does not mean simplicity, and as these marks invoke the tools that made them, they likewise summon the time and effort. Within the quiet is noise, the tap, tap of the tool as it is impressed on the gesso-primed surface—a tiny geometric metronome, counting endlessly into pictorial space.

Agnes Martin, Lygia Pape, Robert Ryman, and other heavyweight Minimalists and post-Minimalists are often invoked to contextualize Meppayil's work; so, too, are artisanal legacies, Indian culture, and traditional craft and technique, which also means their ongoing obliteration by industrial technologies. For Meppayil, these histories and practices are not mutually exclusive, but combine, collapse, and repeat in different iterations—a global modernism par excellence. Named according to Meppayil's idiosyncratic, nonhierarchical ordering system, *l/forty seven* and *l/hundred thirty one*, both 2018, hinted at the grid, a structure emerging from copper wires that Meppayil covered in thick layers of gesso, then sanded in places to expose the oxidized lines that shimmer green, purple, blue. As in the patterned gesso panels, tiny differences glimmer with the viewer's shifting perspective; these works contain devotion and ask for yours in return. Likewise, *sb/eighteen*, 2018—a freestanding wall that divided the gallery in two—displays 875 found iron, copper, and brass goldsmith tools in a low-relief grid. Craft relic and art object combine, become one.

Transcendent, *pure*, *mystical*, *essence*, *presence*: These words are used again and again to describe Meppayil's art. They are not wrong, these tropes of geometric abstraction, but the material and cultural specificity of her practice gives it another dimension; her work requires time, physical encounter, and attention to detail. If there is a language here, it is one of duality and shifting syntax: a metonymy both traditional and contemporary, in which the simplest mark becomes the tool, becomes the fingers, the hand, the arm, the body, and all of the bodies before and after it, a temporal and corporeal flood behind the white that delivers calm and escape from all of the above.

—*Emily LaBarge*



ew of "Prabhavathi Meppayil," 2019. Foreground: *sb/eighteen*, 2018. ground, from left: *hundred thirty six*, 2018; *l/hundred venty eight*, 2019.

Nevine Mahmoud

SOFT OPENING

There are breasts, and then there are tits. With their supple glass curves and pointy resin nipples, the pair hanging temptingly on the wall here were definitely tits. The pinky-beige *breast (Rosa Alptraum)* and her deep-red sister *breast (tamarind)* (all works 2019) were convincingly smooth and perky, just begging for an illicit feel. Confronted by Nevine Mahmoud's sculptures of fragmented erogenous zones, I sensed the conflation of two prohibitions: the taboo against touching an artwork in a gallery, and that of touching a stranger's body. Both can be tempting; both must be resisted. I must not stroke the velvety, white-marble *bottom tear:* a spherical, human-size, butt-shaped peach with giant blue-glass drop emerging from the top. I must not run my finger along the fleshy folds of the orangey-pink glass *bust (phantom Li)*. A final sculpture, *carved slide,* was a curved chair-size marble slab that seemed to lie on its side atop colorful Formica floorboards, as if waiting for somebody to curl up and spoon it.

Nevine Mahmoud, *breast (Rosa Alptraum)*, 2019, handblown glass, resin, aluminum hardware, 10 × 7⅛ × 7½".

The five works in Mahmoud's exhibition "belly room" were not so much sculptures as come-ons, daring us to make the first move. There I was, staring stupidly at a pair of perfect champagne coupe breasts positioned at eye level, like some shameless creep. I studied the delicate nipple detailing, and the gentle fleshy curves molded around the smooth aluminum bracket attaching each boob edge to the wall. Next, I was crouching down to scrutinize the delicate crack down *bottom tear*, inspecting all round to confirm the fruit's 360-degree perfection. Anywhere outside an art gallery, the police would've been called. Alone and unobserved in the tiny space, amid a bevy of carefully arranged body parts as delicious and succulent as hard candy, did I dare reach out my hand and cop a feel of the high-polish glass and shapely marble?

"Belly room" was marvelously obscene, a masturbator's paradise. Even the checklist, with its suggestive references to "handblown" glass, "Italian" or "Argentine" marble, and assorted "hardware," began to read like a coded brothel menu, a sensation not impeded by the gallery's soft-porn double-entendre name, Soft Opening, stamped teasingly at the top. The London-born, Los Angeles–based Mahmoud has described her delight in working with labor-intensive materials and achieving her hyper-glossy finishes through "repeated touching and sanding and stroking." So only the maker gets to fondle this provocative art! This show was like an orgy for one: the artist. The rest of us were left to our own frustrations, imagining the physical sensation of surfaces so alive they seemed to lightly perspire. I could imagine a collector buying one just for the perverse pleasure of stroking it whenever she pleases.

Mahmoud cites Louise Bourgeois as an influence, and the connection with the late French-American sculptor's polished, disembodied body parts is evident. Bourgeois's *Sleep II*, 1967, is a giant carved marble phallus set on two massive rough timbers, like a bone-dry penis tower attempting to raise itself off the floor, symbolic of deflated patriarchy. In contrast, Mahmoud's seemingly drenched, life-size sculptures were not going for symbolism. Each braless wall tit was realistically meaty, about the size and color of a roast—a pink slab of ham on the left, a bloodred cut of beef on the right. Other works appeared subjected to gravity, from the drooping silky bulges of *bust (phantom Li)* to the glass apparently seeping out of *bottom tear* to the toppled *carved slide*. Mahmoud's living sculptures create unexpectedly intimate encounters, like accidentally brushing against a stranger's sweaty skin in a club, complete with the unspoken anonymous frisson. Sometimes a peach is just a peach, but not here.

—*Gilda Williams*

PARIS

Bernard Frize

GALERIE PERROTIN

Rules can set you free. This credo has defined Bernard Frize's practice for more than forty years, leading him to design various systems, protocols, and restraints intended to rid his paintings of self-expression. To this end, Frize has, for previous bodies of work, engaged assistants in an intimate choreography whereby six hands worked together, used multiple brushes to map out all the possible moves for a knight on a chessboard, and stretched up dried "skin" harvested from a large basin filled with gallons of house paint. The results of such techniques—mostly large, colorful abstractions—were recently on view in the Centre Pompidou, Paris, retrospective "Bernard Frize: *Sans repentir*" (Without Remorse). And while the survey duly celebrated Frize's unconventional practice and the diversity of his oeuvre, it failed to delve into the artist's characteristic serial approach, in many instances showing only one result of a painterly experiment the artist repeated numerous times. Fortunately, Perrotin provided a concurrent showcase, "Now or Never," for Frize's recent series. As seen here together, works produced under more or less the same set of conditions found distinction from one another mainly via the painterly accidents—drips, bleeding, or splatter—that sometimes also result in unintentional pictoriality and illusionism. While these chance and subjective effects disrupt Frize's highly regimented practice, they serve as further proof of the artist's having ceded creative control.

Produced between 2016 and 2019, the eighteen paintings in the Perrotin show were made with a blend of acrylic and resin, a concoction that Frize has been using since the mid-1980s. Dragging transparentized jewel tones across the canvas with a thick brush, the artist creates colorful and luminous linear patterns that range from simple vertical bands (*Deuz*, 2018) to an intricate basket weave of brushstrokes (*Bork*, 2018.) A particularly indicative installation in an upstairs room featured five identical square canvases that had each been divided into thirty-six squares with red or green pencil prior to being painted. Slight variations in the paint application from one painting to the next resulted in a series of patchwork-style compositions that ranged from one constituted of tidy pastel cubes (*Epa*, 2018) to a bright, drippy madras (*Buc*, 2018.) While adhering to a modernist grid, Frize lets the paint do what it will. The ensuing imperfections—stunning dark bands of overlapping colors, swirling watery seepages, and delicate monochrome dribbles—beautifully illustrate the tension between order and disorder that is at the heart of Frize's practice.

Bernard Frize, *Nami*, 2019, acrylic and resin on canvas, 39⅜ × 31⅛".

Three of Frize's most recent works, *Nami*, *Bem*, and *Gol*, all 2019, were the by-products of a new protocol involving distinct layers of paint. Frize forms the backgrounds of these paintings with strokes of color that subtly shift from blue to purple to orange to yellow and back again as they run from the top to the bottom of the canvas. Over these vertical striated bands, Frize has added splashes of blue-green paint, which unexpectedly bring a sense of realism to the ostensibly abstract compositions. The new paintings' surfaces remain characteristically smooth and flat, but the splotches create illusions of texture and distance. To this viewer, these works alternately look like planks of acid-eaten anodized titanium and leaves fluttering over a blurred, light-streaked highway. Indeed, interpretation is the final variable in Frize's experiments—and it gives the artist one more chance to distance himself from his paintings.

—*Mara Hoberman*

Behjat Sadr

BALICE HERTLING

In *Le temps suspendu* (Time Suspended), Mitra Farahani's 2006 documentary on the Iranian painter Behjat Sadr, the artist explains that "in painting, you suspend time." Sadr passed away ten years ago at the age of eighty-five, but in this exhibition, her decades-long practice crystallized in nine oil paintings (one supported by steel struts running from floor to ceiling), seven collages, and four photographs. Her canvases often read as abstractions, but they are squarely grounded in the real: in the materiality of the varied surfaces and the viscosity of oil paint.

As an art student in Italy in the late 1950s, Sadr took European art informel as a reference point. Here, two paintings dated ca. 1957, around the time the artist exhibited at Rome's Galerie Il Pincio with the support of her teacher Roberto Melli, bore witness to the influence of that movement. Both *Untitled*, like all of the works on view, these two vertically formatted canvases feature wide strokes of black oil paint and muted flickers of red and green. But Sadr did not adhere to the tenets of European modernism; instead, she created a practice that was

FLAUNT

JANUARY 7, 2020

NEVINE MAHMOUD | SECOND BASE IN A WHITE CUBE OR: A DIALECTIC HOMECOMING

BY CHIARA MANNARINO

When Nevine Mahmoud first began making art, she mainly cast sculptures in plaster and metal. However, upon arriving in California in 2012 for her graduate studies at the University of Southern California, she became fascinated by the idea of working with the abundant regional stone, including bright orange honeycomb calcite and red and orange alabaster from Utah. Inspired by the area's offerings, Mahmoud quickly shifted from casting to carving, eager to explore a traditional process in more contemporary ways. "I choose materials that require extreme problem solving," she shares, drawn to producing objects that belie the strenuous means by which they were achieved. The tension between Mahmoud's taxing labor and the soft and sensual forms she creates imbues each stone sculpture with a poetic delicacy that defies the inherent bounds of its hard material.

After years of hollowing out stone to create her sculptures, Mahmoud wanted to investigate means of achieving hollowness without intensely extracting material. Working with glass offers this possibility, as the glass-blowing process involves a hollowing out of its hot, supple form without any chiseling required. Its intimate molding technique has been regarded as a sensual act since ancient times, making glass an especially fitting medium for Mahmoud to deploy in her erotically-charged work. "Casting and carving are both subtractive but operate totally differently, so I like working between those two," says Mahmoud, connecting her engagement with both materials. She collaborates with glass-blowing specialists to create her glass pieces, but carves all of the stone works herself. While her sculptures are indebted to outsourced labor and to a community of stone carvers who taught her much of what she knows, everything is ultimately channeled through her.

Mahmoud's recently-opened show at Nina Johnson Gallery in Miami marks a new milestone in her continually evolving practice. *Bella Donna* is a further development of the glasswork the artist exhibited at NADA Miami in 2018, and displays an entirely new set of stone and glass sculptures that effectively sum up her past two years of work. Mahmoud sees each exhibition as "a different articulation of these objects interacting with each other." Their unique communication within each distinct exhibition space collectively reveals what lies at the heart of Mahmoud's practice: sensuality, juxtaposition, and playfulness.

While Mahmoud originally resisted the allure of producing erotic objects, she eventually succumbed, simultaneously underscoring a desire to touch sculptures in a traditionally untouchable space. Immediately drawn to the peach form, blatant and obvious in its vaginal assimilance, Mahmoud was thrilled when considering how people would respond to it. Her sensual forms, such as "breast (sailor Venus)" and "Bust (Babette)," respectively, and single legs in "Flute limb (1)," are always elegant and occupy a delicate balance between the scandalous and the sophisticated. She has carefully cultivated her own vocabulary outside of societal boundaries, which allows her to render seductive sculptures that exist within a space unique to her vision.

Flaunt, 2020

Her vocabulary, however, fits almost perfectly into that of erotic sculpture of the 1960s. "I am so indebted to sculptors of the '60s and '70s, because their experimentation was rooted in basic traditional ideas of what it means to split something up, of weight, fragments, plasticity," she notes. She considers sculptures from the 1960s to be some of the "most compelling objects to be around." Working towards her Bachelor's degree in London, Mahmoud was presented with a canon of twentieth-century sculpture that largely prioritized white, male artists. She immediately noticed that sculpture made by women was incredibly overlooked. Polish sculptor and Holocaust survivor, Alina Szapocznikow, for example, is an artist who history, Mahmoud says, "missed out on while they were looking at artists such as Eva Hesse and Louise Bourgeois." Szapocznikow serves as a great inspiration for Mahmoud, whose forms reinterpret Szapocznikow's sensual, tactile sculptures from the 1960s. "There is a direct relationship between what I've been doing for the past five years and Szapocznikow's practice," attests Mahmoud.

Mahmoud is excited about the resurfacing of Szapocznikow and other women sculptors of that decade. This newfound belief in and respect for their work allows Mahmoud to continue feeling confident in the way she approaches her own practice today. She is aware of the immediate connection her work draws to the erotic sculptures of this time period, and for this reason, is always trying to understand where exactly her work fits into our contemporary moment. However, this lasting legacy of the sixties might demonstrate the endurance of issues from that time period—now, of course, experienced in different forms and articulations. This historical moment is marked by the concerns of the Civil Rights, Women's, Gay, and Anti-war Movements, all of which persist in evolved manners today. Mahmoud's artistic identification with this decade demonstrates its continued relevance in our current time as well as an ongoing need to fight these battles as they endure in our world now.

Mahmoud says, "I consider all of my work feminist in the adjective sense. I am a confident, self-empowered woman making work, and my work is a direct expression of that," she asserts. Mahmoud is constantly figuring the female body and confronts people with forms that are erotic and sensual, feminized or feminizing. Her sculptures exist in a state of precarious yet perfect balance between the provocative, scandalous, and tantalizing. She cleverly destabilizes the power of the male greats who have gained their prestige by casting women into bust form or by subjugating the female figure to a perpetual existence on a pedestal. Unlike men such as Allen Jones, whose sculptures of the late 1960s quite literally turn women into objects of the male gaze and confiscate any and all of their bodily autonomy, Mahmoud introduces her own female subjectivity and sensibility to her work. In doing so, she subverts the fetishistic male mode of viewing and opens up an entirely new set of possibilities for her sculptures.

These works play with our perception, almost asking us to reach out and touch due to their allure and tactility, while their materiality simultaneously introduces a sense of danger to our encounters. While her stone works have the potential to injure us if unhinged, we simultaneously assume a great responsibility when interacting with her delicate glass pieces. This layered experience also makes a powerful statement about consent, especially when considering the intimate, female form in her work. What exactly is an appropriate way to interact with these objects? Mahmoud, of course, thinks deeply about how to place her works in the gallery. With some propped on pedestals, others the ground, and a number mounted on the wall, each sculpture asks to be approached and observed in a unique way. For Mahmoud, there is always a delicate harmony between sculptural form and installation. For example, "Cherry Vigna (Lush cherry)"—a 900-pound cherry, made of hand-polished Portuguese marble—sits in perfect balance in the outside courtyard. While it is precarious as a round form resting on a flat, horizontal surface, it is also entirely self-sufficient, appearing strong, sturdy, and rooted in place.

Mahmoud's titles also factor into how we should perceive these objects. From "Breast (Jamón Jamón)" to "Bust (Genie)," Mahmoud is deliberately lighthearted rather than prescriptive. "I prefer the title of the works to play with the object in question instead of defining its boundaries," she clarifies. "So word play, mimetic sounds, and pop cultural references are ways that I might confuse, subvert, or exaggerate qualities of the sculpture. With much of the newer work being figurative and feminized, I have found many titles in names and characters. Often with recurring shapes, I use an umbrella term to communicate its persistence." Of course, the exhibition's title, *Bella Donna*, similarly embodies Mahmoud's cheeky approach to her erotic sculpture. Translating to "beautiful woman," it ironically refers to a whole while Mahmoud's work segments the woman's body into breasts and legs, distinct components of a full entity.

Underneath their playful exteriors, Mahmoud's sensual sculptures are embedded with deep meaning, and, thereby, occupy a vital place within the art world today. While women's bodies continue to be heavily censored in both physical and virtual spaces, Mahmoud's sultry sculptures ask the radical question of why female sexuality is still deemed negative and even obscene within contemporary societal standards. Through the act of embracing and harnessing its sensual power through her sculptures, Mahmoud frees the female form in her work and dreams of a world in which women can experience that same freedom in their everyday lives.

TAGS

Nevine Mahmoud Nina Johnson Bella Donna Miami Alina Szapocznikow The Home Issue

Vogue, 2019

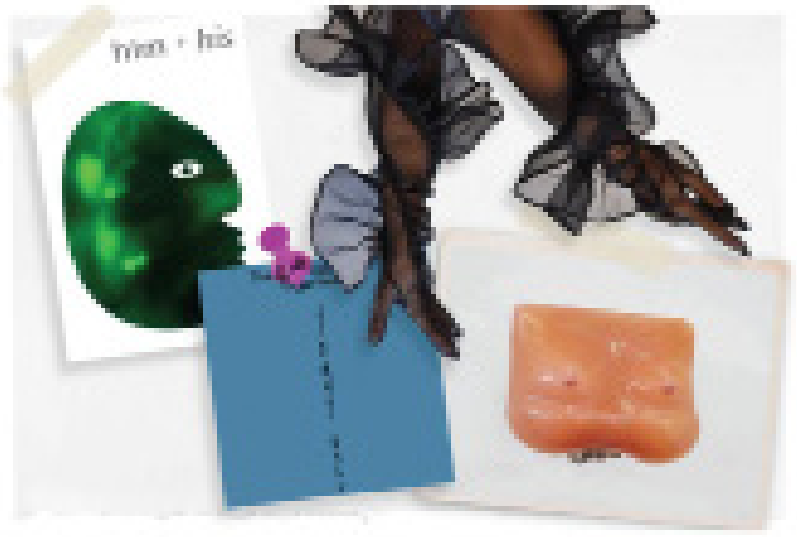
VOGUE

ARTS & LIFESTYLE

The Vogue Edit: What We're Loving This Week

From the perfect weekend getaways and the restaurants to book now, to the spring items to add to your wish list, here's what the Vogue editors are loving this week.

Olivia Singer, Executive Fashion News Editor



ATTENDING:

London-born, LA-based artist Nevine Mahmoud has returned to her hometown to present her first European solo exhibition, Belly Room, at Soft Opening, showcasing a series of marble and glass sculptures that explore the fragmented body. At once sensuous and uncanny, her works conjure a similarly compelling femininity to Louise Bourgeois or Laure Prouvost, but her sensuous minimalism is all her own. What's not to love?

Artnet, 2019

artnet news

On View

Art That Makes You Smile: 5 Exhibitions to See This Summer That Embrace the Joys of Play

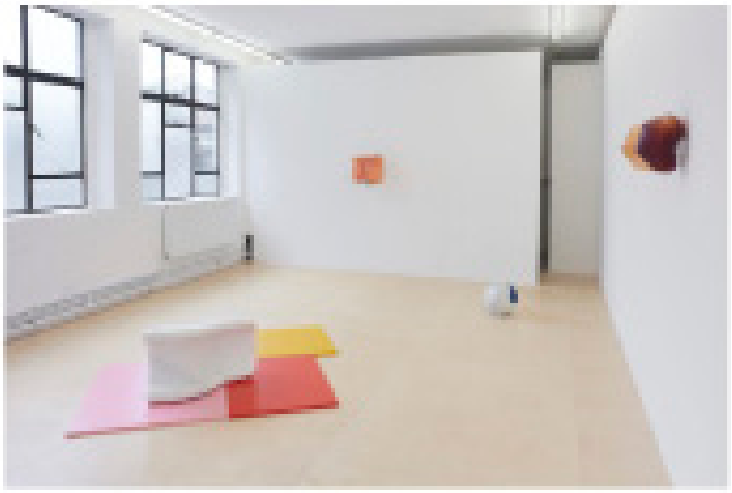
Some of the most memorable art is that which brings a smile to the faces of onlookers, and, this season, there's plenty to see.

Maria Vogel, June 14, 2019

When summertime rolls around, it brings with it a desire to enjoy carefree leisure. And though museum-going and gallery-hopping may not sound like the most relaxing ways to spend your downtime—while observing art, you're often confronted with works about heavy topics or important issues—art can have a playful, easygoing side to it, too.

Some of the most memorable art is that which brings a smile to the faces of onlookers, and, this summer, there is no shortage of shows that embrace the power of playfulness. Below, we've rounded up five exhibitions by artists who treat play as an integral part of their practice.

Maria Vogel is an art writer and the Operations Manager of galleries at The Wing New York.



Nevine Mahmoud, Installation View. Photo by Theo Christelis, courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London.

Nevine Mahmoud, "Belly Room" at Soft Opening

In her first European solo exhibition, Los Angeles-based artist Nevine Mahmoud sculpts bodily forms with pristine flair. "Belly Room" at Soft Opening, London includes works which Mahmoud constructs in the traditionally male-dominated materials of glass and marble. Fighting against these the rigidity of these mediums, Mahmoud creates what appear to be delicate and soft representations that possess an innate femininity. Sometimes fleshy in appearance, the works are both sensuous and playful. Between their curvy shapes, pink-to-nude hues and lighthearted appeal, one forgets the durable materials that formed them.

"Belly Room" at Soft Opening, London is on view through June 30th.

Time Out, 2019

Nevine Mahmoud: 'Belly Room'

★★★★☆

THERE'S STUFF HAPPENING in Nevine Mahmoud's first European solo show. Sensual, tactile stuff; sexual, bodily stuff. You feel like you're walking in on a seriously private moment, bodies caught midway through something you maybe shouldn't be seeing.

There are just five sculptures here – all tits, butts and tongues made of marble and glass – but they are totally lovely. The glass breasts are bulbous and bulging, real loose and flabby. They look dangerously fragile, glistening against the white gallery walls like they're perpetually moist. On the ground there's a stunning marble peach, as immediately evocative of a tuchus as a peach emoji, with a single glass droplet of what might be sweat or saliva slipping off it. Opposite, a big marble slide sits on coloured panels. It looks like the peach has just rolled off it, like a body part off a tongue. See? Stuff is happening.

The stone carving is gorgeous. Each work looks soft and undulating, like it's made of dust and candy floss instead of marble. It's a playground of body forms and textures: slides and balls, soft and hard, opaque and transparent. For all the formal compositional ideas here, it's a hell of a lot of fun. It's halfway between glorying in the body and making you feel a bit icky and uncomfortable.

These are joyful, sexual, playful sculptures. Even if it feels like you maybe shouldn't be looking, they're more than worth a quick peek. ■

Eddy Frankel

WHAT IS IT...
Playful, sexual sculptures made of glass and stone.

WHY GO...
These are beautifully made and totally sensual works of art.

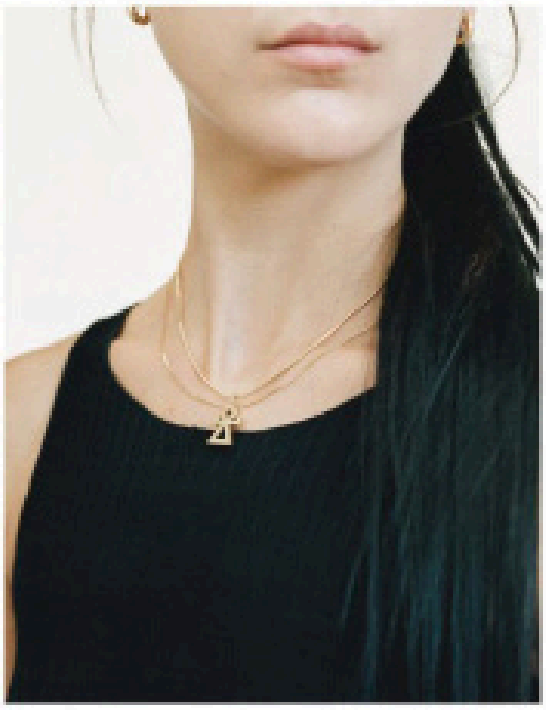
→ Soft Opening.
⊖ Bethnal Green.
Until Jun 30. Free.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAUL SALVESON. IMAGE COURTESY OF NEVINE MAHMOUD AND SOFT OPENING, LONDON.

Kinfolk, 2019

Kinfolk, 2019

Meet the sculptor who wrings succulence from stone.



ELISE BELL

Nevine Mahmoud

Nevine Mahmoud is ill, which means she's enjoying a moment of rest. "I'm not very good at taking breaks," she says. "I'd been feeling like I was getting sick for a while but I was ignoring the signs. The studio is my home, you know." But Mahmoud's Los Angeles studio is no ordinary studio, no ordinary home: It's outdoors, and full of tools more associated with a mason's yard than an artist's loft. Mahmoud—who trained in London before flying west to pursue her studies at the University of Southern California—makes large-scale carvings that juxtapose the softness of flesh with the solidity of stone. Her work is gaining recognition following her triumphant 2018 solo show, Everyday.

What in everyday life do you find the most sensual? There are a lot of tactile things about being with another person, but really in terms of the everyday it's being in certain buildings, where the material is all around you and really encompassing you. It can feel so theatrical, almost as if you are role-playing in a set, and that can be so thrilling and sensual. I was actually in a new architectural environment in China and staying in this hotel that was so moody and dark, with concrete everywhere. It doesn't need to be luxurious, but an attention to the materials all around you and being very direct with the materials you use is so common in architecture and that's why I find so much joy in it. My aspect for artistic material very much transitions to buildings. I built my own house and my own studio.

Your work deals a lot in attraction. When did you find yourself attracted to stone? For me, coming to LA was partly about this weird cultural climate that was so exotic [compared to] the history of England. I knew from the outset that the materials here were so much more accessible: I could walk into a metal workshop if I wanted to, or walk into a quarry. I started to get to know people outside of my art class and I would go photograph their studios which were outdoor studio complexes. I became fascinated by people who worked in stone and wanted to know more about their method and craft. One day I brought this big stone into class and said to my professor, "I can't be bothered to do this school trip. Can I just go and learn stone carving instead?" I could never shake off the feeling that I just needed to do it. After grad school I went back to the idea of stone.

From prior to working with stone, Mahmoud was preoccupied with materiality and exploring "the reasons why certain things make you want to touch them."

really latching onto the fact that I wanted a teacher. So when I got my mentor, I saw this beautiful, big orange rock and I knew I had to come up with something quick, an idea to pin my learning onto. I was like: "What if I made this into a peach?"

In your 2018 solo exhibition, *Foreplay*, there is an abundance of sensual imagery related to fruit. Why is that? The fruit came with the stonework in a way. I wanted to work with a traditional material and sync it up with myself and my perspective as a woman. My thought process became: "What would be the most interesting way to undermine the materiality of stone, which is hard and resistant and not edible? What would be the inverse of that?" [It was a] contrast I was immediately drawn to, especially as these oversized objects take on the size and scale of a body part. A torso-sized peach—do you want to eat it?

What work of art do you wish you had made? It changes every two years, but [the Polish sculptor] Alina Szapocznikow inspired me to look at my work more personally and be more forward with my sensual and sexual desires. Her resin lip lamp and all those variations of her body and her face in resin and bronze, those are just perfect to me. I'm not good at being too quick and crafty, but the beauty and the looseness of her work continues to excite me.

Do you find stone carving to be relaxing? I've always worked in a very industrious way that's required a lot of mental and physical focus. For me, I need my process to be labor-intensive or my head spins out. The more physical it is, the more meditative it is.

You relocated to LA because the materials attracted you. Are there any other places where you feel you could be inspired? I'm not sure about how long I'll be in LA for. I'm old enough now to enjoy the security of staying in one place, but I'm not stuck here forever. I don't think I could ever consider not working outdoors. It's good for your health; it's good for you mentally. According to the stone carvers here, Santiago in Chile is a great place to carve due to its proximity to Argentina and the mines there.

Should we expect to see an evolution between *Foreplay* and the work you're creating now? I think I'll always be making large, sensual work, but the material will change. I have a habit of moving on to a different material every three years. I don't agree with sticking with one motif for the sake of having a motif. *Foreplay* certainly was a great playground for me to try out stone and create a lasting stamp for my experience with that material, but I've since found myself working with glass. It's the supple nature and how it looks like liquid that I've become really drawn to, especially in a figurative sense. How you can make glass look like breasts, for example.

It's an interesting move: Stone is so hard and durable, whereas glass is delicate. I know. Again it's a paradox, how something as fragile as glass can also be so resistant and strong. The tools you can use for glass are the same in terms of heaviness and physicality as the utensils for stone.

A lot of female artists often feel the need to justify their figurative work by instilling a feminist message. Is there a reason why you are returning to the human body, particularly the female body? I'm interested in displaced, broken up body parts, but really a lot of it comes down to myself and my own fascination and obsession with women's breasts and how they are so prevalent and objectified. I think I spent a long time shying away from figurative objects and trying to find figures in inanimate, abstracted work. It's been very productive for me having these moments of inserting actual renderings of the body to scale. I'm enjoying working with them and I love how fucking weird they look.

"Architecture is very sexy to me," says Mahmoud. "Spaces can feel very theoretical, almost as if you are role-playing in a set."

Yes! Yes! Yes!

Sex and visual culture are long-running bedfellows—we're so used to the influence of sex on our surroundings that we often see it in strange places (are the rows and rows of phallic creations in our cities' skylines actually a line-up of architects' gargantuan erections, or are they merely well-designed to minimize ground space and maximize capacity?). Sometimes the lines aren't so blurred. What of the art that wears its sexiness on its sleeve, diving head first into the most natural yet oftentimes confounding of all human acts? We speak with six young artists who explore what sex and sexuality means today, from the most niche of fetishes in the online world to the women who are reclaiming pleasure for themselves IRL. What does sex look like in 2018? Why does it continue to fascinate artists? And what exactly is a cyber-erotic blob?

Words: Rosalind Duguid, Charlotte Jansen and Emily Steer

Elephant Magazine, 2018

Elephant Magazine, 2018

Nevine Mahmoud *JUICY FRUIT & HARD STONE*

"For me, a finger or a crack could also be erotic. And that could be any gender. It's about touching, and hidden places." Suggestion and seduction are key to Nevine Mahmoud's sculptures—cold, stony forms that draw the mind to the warmest parts of the human body.

How does eroticism feed into your practice? The sculptures are rooted not just in eroticism as a theme or feeling but specifically in sculpture. There are a lot of female surrealists who I am very interested in, and then their male counterparts, like the Duchamp erotic objects, which were something I grew up with and was always very intrigued by. They're erotic objects, weird body parts—today that might be sex toys. I thought it would be interesting with stone because the process of making it is so labour-intensive and there is so much touching in the finishing of them, it involves repeated touching and sanding and stroking.

There is a real mix of hard and soft. As the viewer you want to touch the works but there is a discomfort built in—it even feels as though you could bite into the peach sculptures, which would of course be very painful. I think there's that translation of hard to soft which speaks very directly to process and your body wanting to interact with it; innately being in play. You don't even have to say anything if that translation is already visible. I mean, that's why I like sculpture. It evokes feeling instead of clear thought.

Do you feel there is a repelling element as well? I hope that's there. For me, in terms of body parts, anything that's fragmented or dismembered is innately uncanny or strange. They are pretty but I hope they also operate on a level of wondering what world they belong to, or imagining if a person was that big or that small.

Do you feel there is an element of cleaning up in your work? That's something that happens quite a lot with eroticism. Many of the less appealing aspects are taken away; like hair, moisture and veins. I think that's true. Maybe that's part of the hyper-seduction or something. I think the challenge is trying to get things a little bit more direct but also keeping some of that cleanness, which is denial of certain textures or elements of that environment, which creates more seduction. You're not giving the whole picture.

Do you feel there are some objects that are innately erotic or do you think it is completely our cultural understanding or filter that makes them so? I think what we generally define as erotic are a lot of female bodies and particular erogenous zones. A crack or a crevice can be so many parts of a body as well. The peach is quite distinctly like a woman's vagina, but there are also cracks where your skin folds over on your finger. For me, a finger or a crack could also be erotic. And that could be any gender. It's about touching or hidden places. There are some forms in nature that to the human eye... I do believe there are realms of beauty or symmetry that are quite attractive.

I have always understood your objects to be gendered. There are obvious things like the peach, but then there's the tongue that could belong to anyone yet I still see it as female. Do you think this is fair, or is it purely because we're used to seeing the female body presented in a more erotic way? It's not something I say out loud or write down, but it is feminine. But I don't always think about them as gendered. The tongue is interesting. When I showed a friend of mine my booth at the Armory, she saw the tongue as a guy and the female objects were on the floor: there's this funny clown man on the wall, which I liked. He's just on the wall, exposed, not really knowing what he's doing.

There are a number of artists who have looked at disembodied female body parts—Sarah Lucas is an example of one who does so very politically. There is also a negative discussion around the disembodied forms in porn. Your work feels more celebratory. I think it's operating in a realm that's performative. You want art to be engaging, but when it's celebratory it's almost a performance between the work and the viewer; it's making you feel. I hope that they do that.

You've mentioned that you don't want to pick stone that looks too traditional. Nonetheless, do you want there to be a dialogue between your works and much more traditional stone depictions of the body? Stone has that inherent "this is art". The material is so loaded that working with reduced or pop forms brings it back into... not design, I hate that word, but not antiquity. I do want there to be a middle ground.

You do get lots of luxury materials in sex toy design too. I was obsessed with the rose quartz dildo with the mink tail on the end in Coco de Mer (a sex boutique) in London. There's definitely that luxury element to some of those alabaster and quartz textures. But the more I work with the stone, I'm contrasting more with metal or resin. I hope it will become more fluid. (ES)

Elephant Magazine, 2018

Opening pages
Nawno Mahmood
Skull Slice, 2017
Calcite and glass
12.7 × 34.4 × 6.3 cm

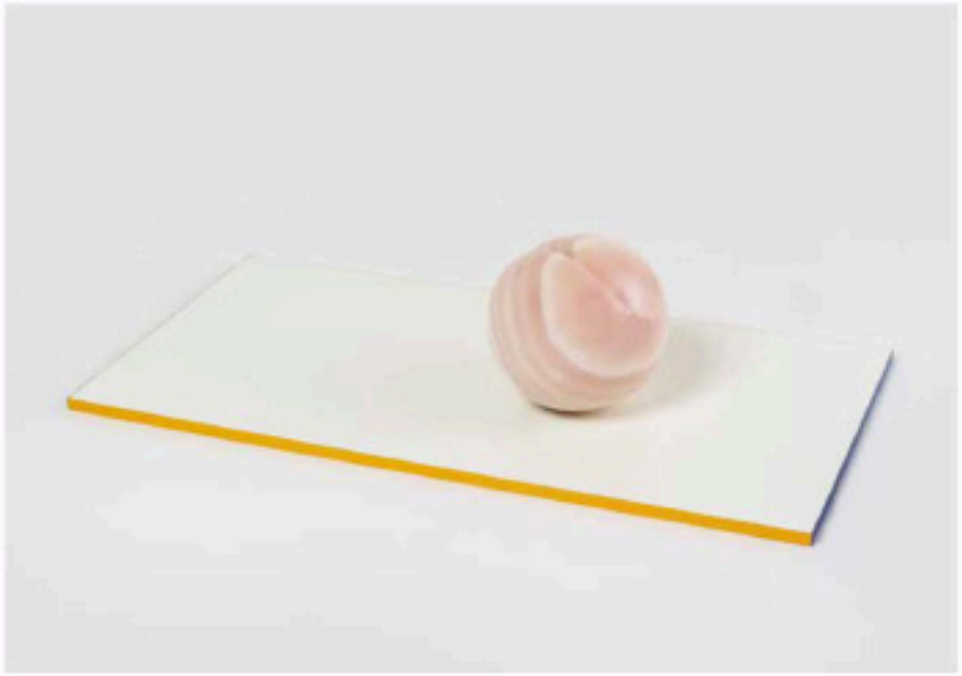
Previous pages
Mother Milk, 2017
Turkish marble, pigmented resin
20.5 × 48.6 × 25.4 cm

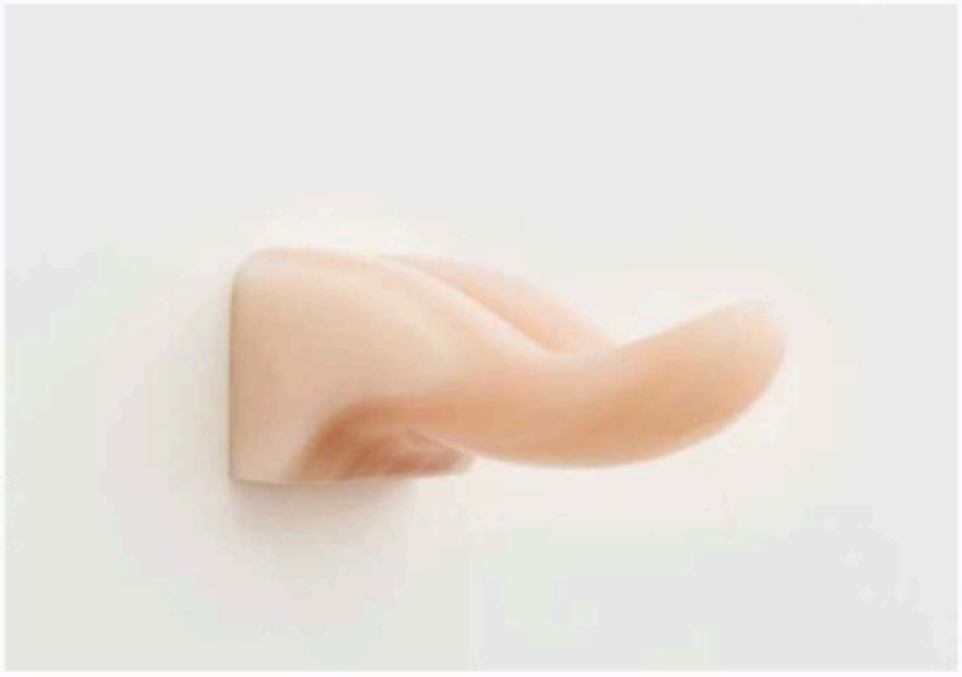
This page
Blue Donut, 2017
Blue marble, plexiglass
Marble: 40.6 × 40.6 × 22.9 cm,
pedestal: 91.3 × 45.7 × 45.7 cm

Naked Ball, 2017
Persian onyx, glass
25.4 × 25.4 × 25.4 cm

Opposite, below
Knife, 2017
Persian onyx, stainless steel
and steel hardware
12.7 × 28.7 × 16.5 cm

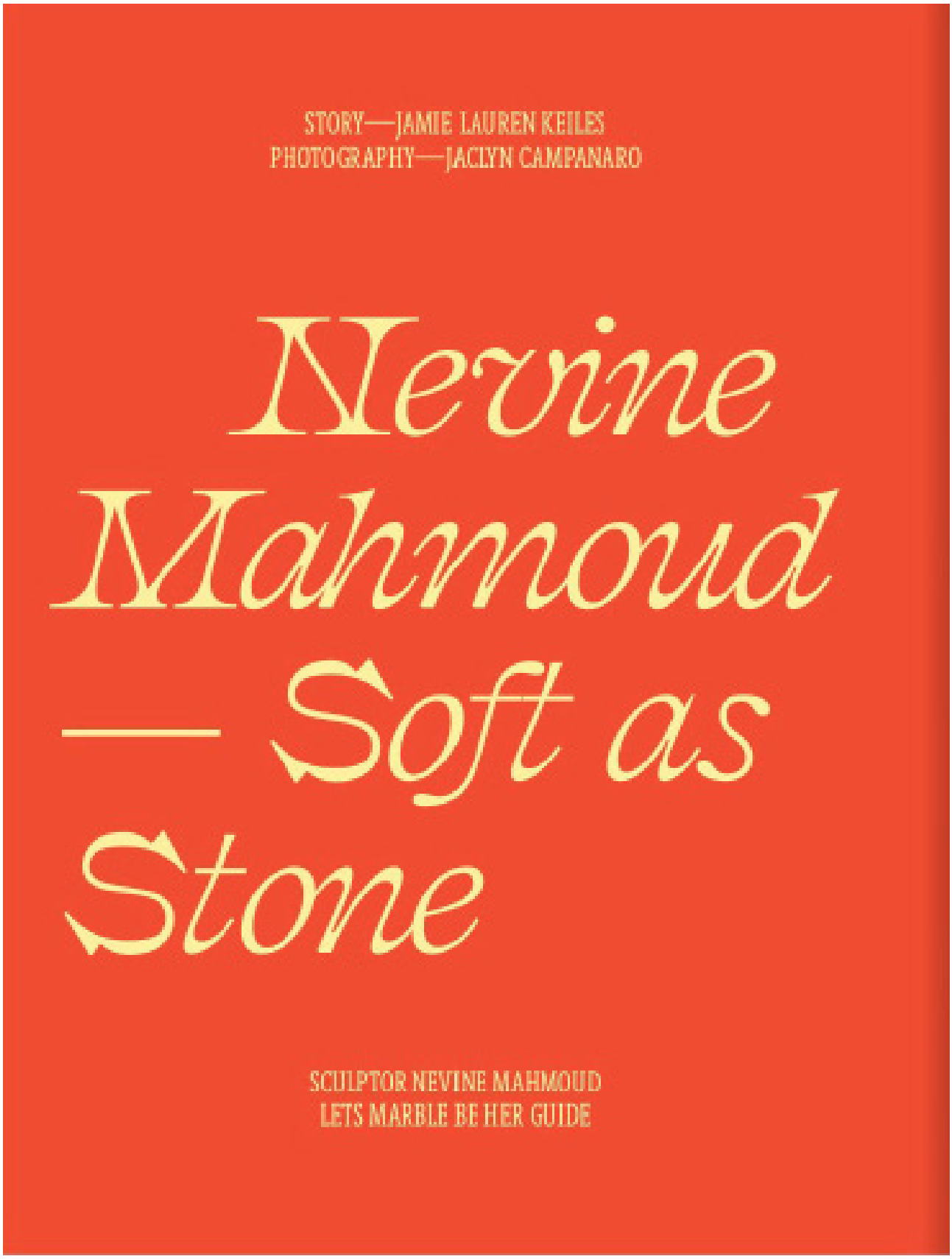
Elephant Magazine, 2018



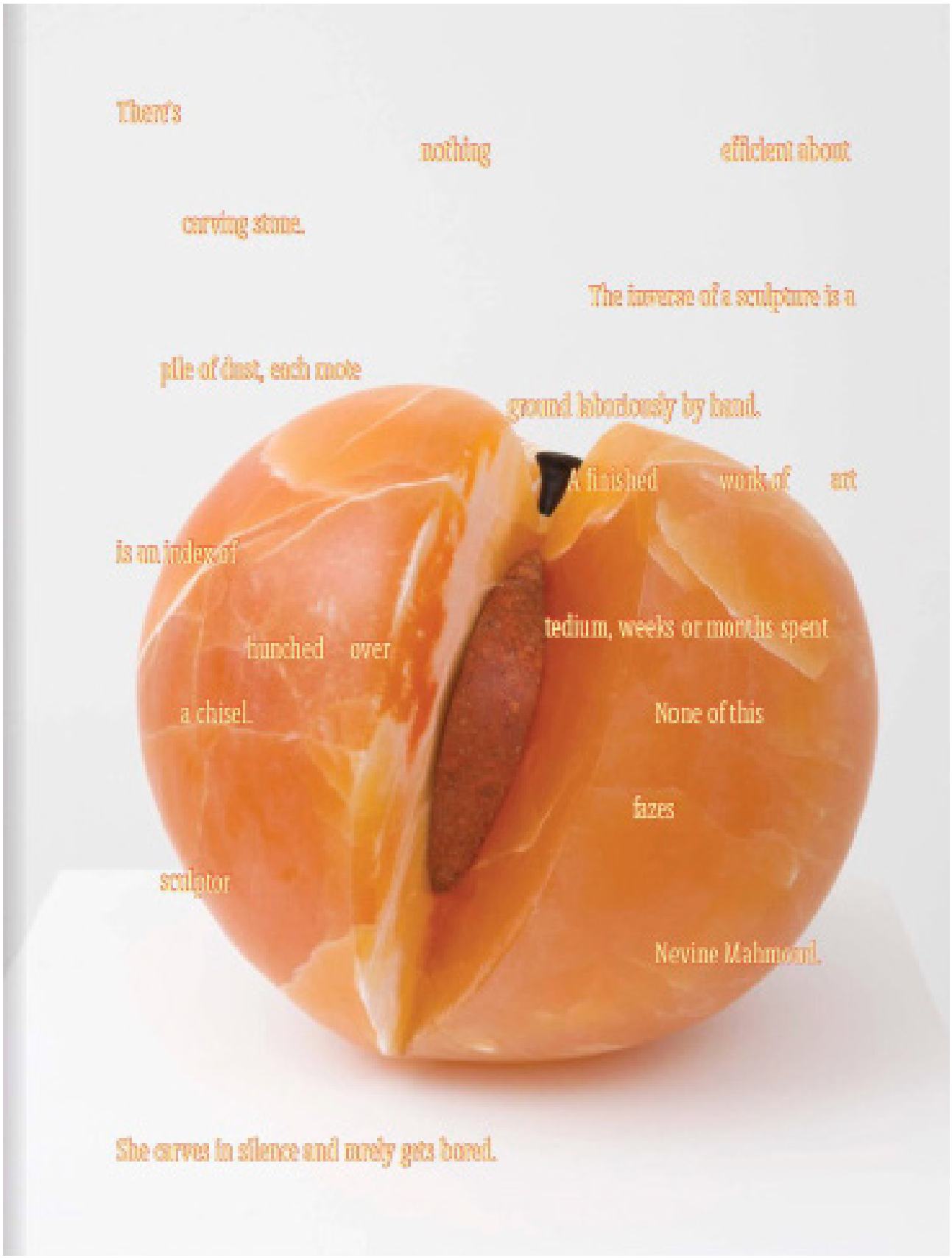


105 Nevine Mahmoud

No Man's Land, 2018



No Man's Land, 2018



No Man's Land, 2018

No Man's Land, 2018

"Even if you've been doing the same thing for two hours, you'll learn something new," she told me. Mahmoud, 30, was born in London and started making sculptures as an undergraduate at Goldsmiths. She switched to carving stone full-time after her MFA at the University of Southern California. I met her at her studio in Alhambra, California, east of Los Angeles, in a garage in the shadow of a 7-Up factory. Mahmoud herself is tall with dark hair and the arms of a person who does not work at a computer. Her studio floor was littered with sculptures: an alabaster flower with a subtle human nipple, a pink marble tongue caught mid-lick. Mahmoud's sculptures are funny—almost too funny for stone, the stately material of graveyards and churches. Such is the immediate joy of her work: crass common shapes exposed for their grace by methods in use since before the birth of Christ.

There are faster and more reliable ways to make objects, but coming to terms with the pitfalls of a rock is as much Mahmoud's occupation as the finished shape itself. Though carving could, in theory, be learned through online research, its skills are hard to express in easy search terms. Each sculpture presents a unique challenge of finding the best way to hack off a chunk of stone. As in Hellenistic Greece, or Renaissance Florence, the craft is still best conveyed through demonstration. Mahmoud walked me through the tools at her disposal. A metal hand chisel moves across the material slowly, liberating tiny baby teeth of stone. A pneumatic hammer cuts the rock more quickly, but efficiency comes at the cost of precision.

Mahmoud learned to hone these techniques from Joanne Duby, one of the few female carvers at Art City Stone Yard in Ventura. When Mahmoud is stumped by a difficult shape, she calls upon Duby's 43 years of experience. Duby was instrumental in Mahmoud's most well-known work, a 50 lb. peach with a missing slice, rendered in calcite with a travertine pit. Getting crisp cuts inside the sphere proved a challenge, and Duby came through with a custom drill bit. When *Peach with Erotic Inside* debuted at the *2017 Armory Show* in New York, the sphere of its skin was so improbably smooth, and the orange of its flesh was so unflinchingly rich, that many viewers assumed it must have been plastic.

"I'm attracted to those stones that will always speak to being a rock," she said. "But that also have this part of them that's like, oh my God, it's so brightly colored—or so very consistent in color—that it's almost questionable that it's stone."

Art City Stone Yard is a kind of Flintstonian answer to Ikea. When Mahmoud goes shopping, she looks for rocks in solid colors, with very few veins. She's drawn to orange calcite and pink Turkish marble, but finding the right rock can be more luck than skill. When Mahmoud takes a chisel to a hunk of raw stone, she's the first to see its inside. If she finds the guts don't live up to expectations, her options are to change her plans or scrap the draft. She's done both before. When I suggested a half-carved sculpture was a toilsome mistake, she seemed unfazed.

"It can be frustrating, I guess," she said. "But in a way, that's why I work the way I do."

No Man's Land, 2018

No Man's Land, 2018

No Man's Land, 2018

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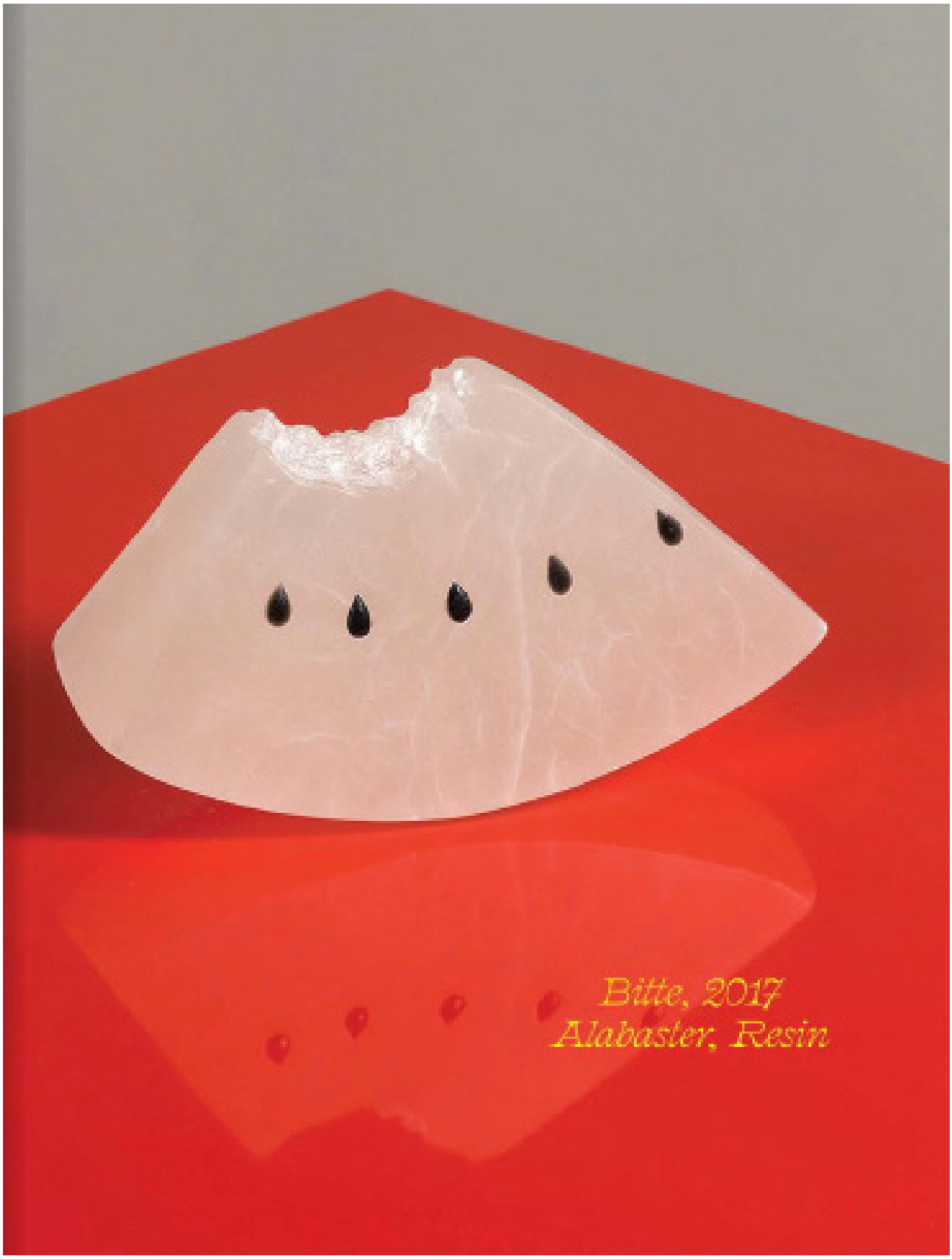
No Man's Land, 2018



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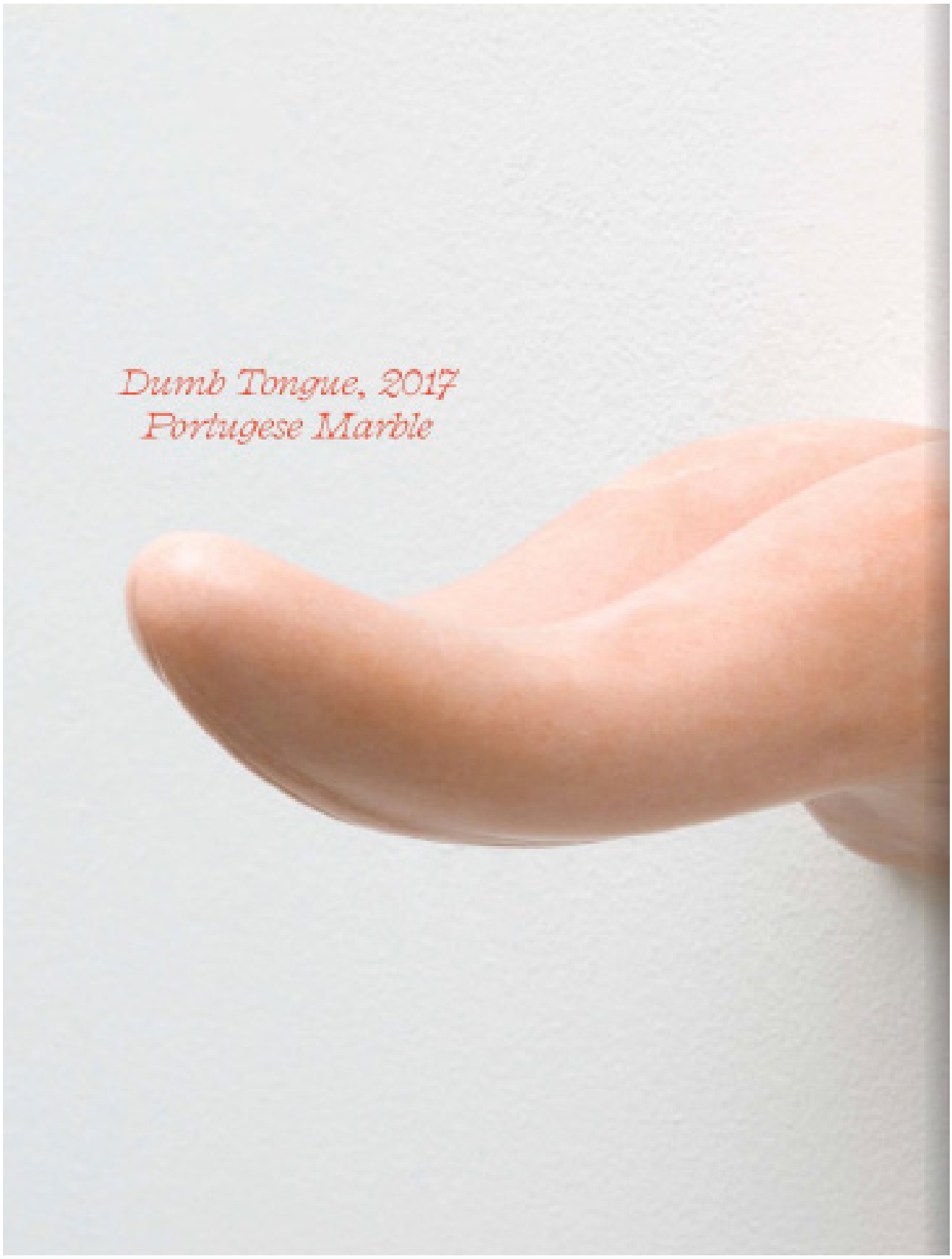
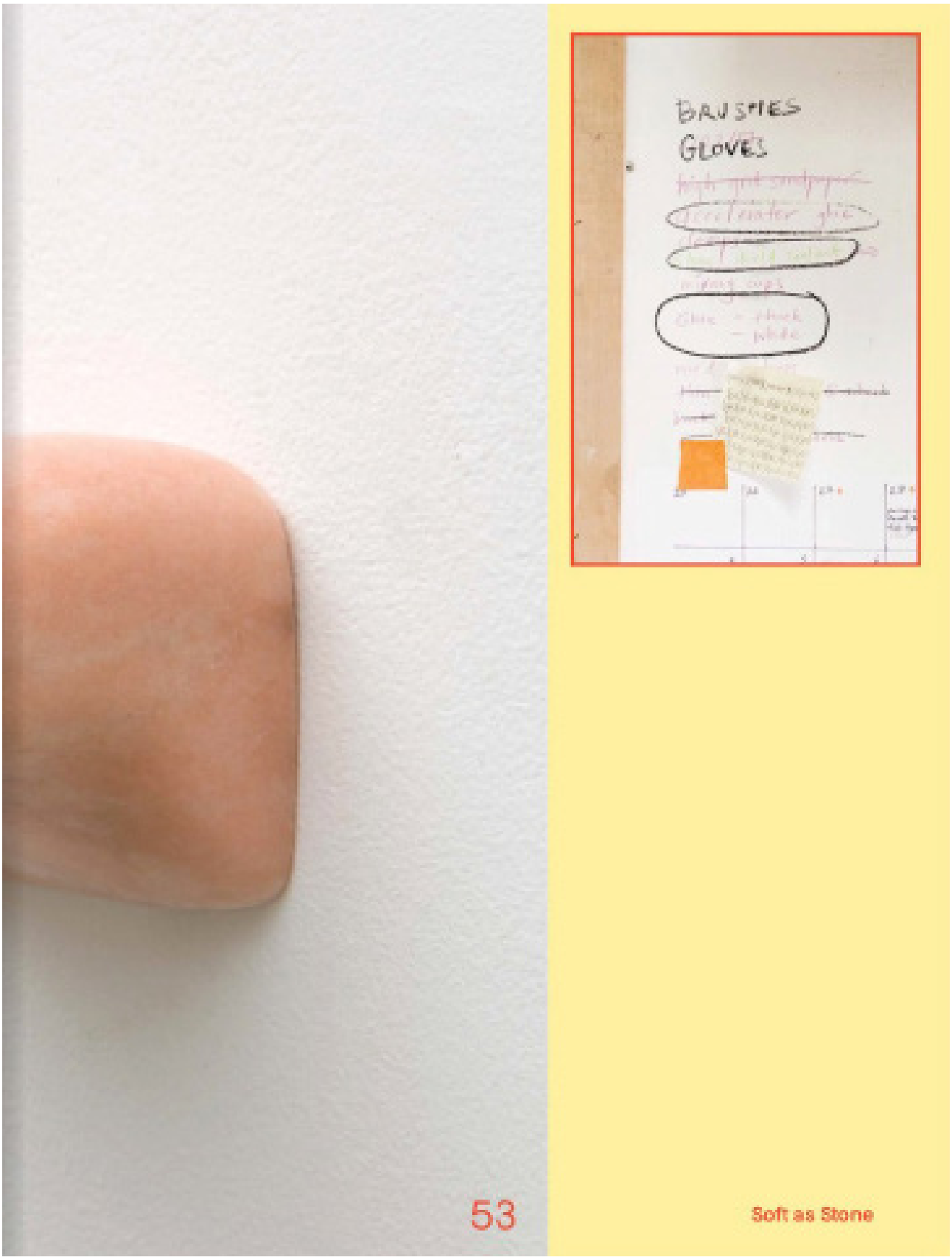


No Man's Land, 2018



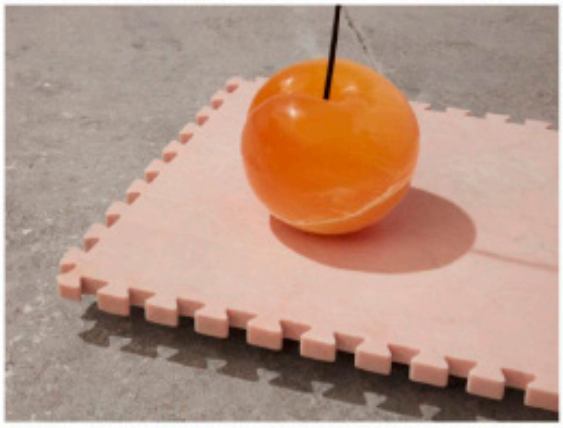
The New York Times Style Magazine, 2018

THE NEW YORK TIMES STYLE MAGAZINE

5 Things T Editors Like Right Now

A by-no-means exhaustive list of the things our editors (and a few contributors) find interesting on a given week.

May 4, 2018

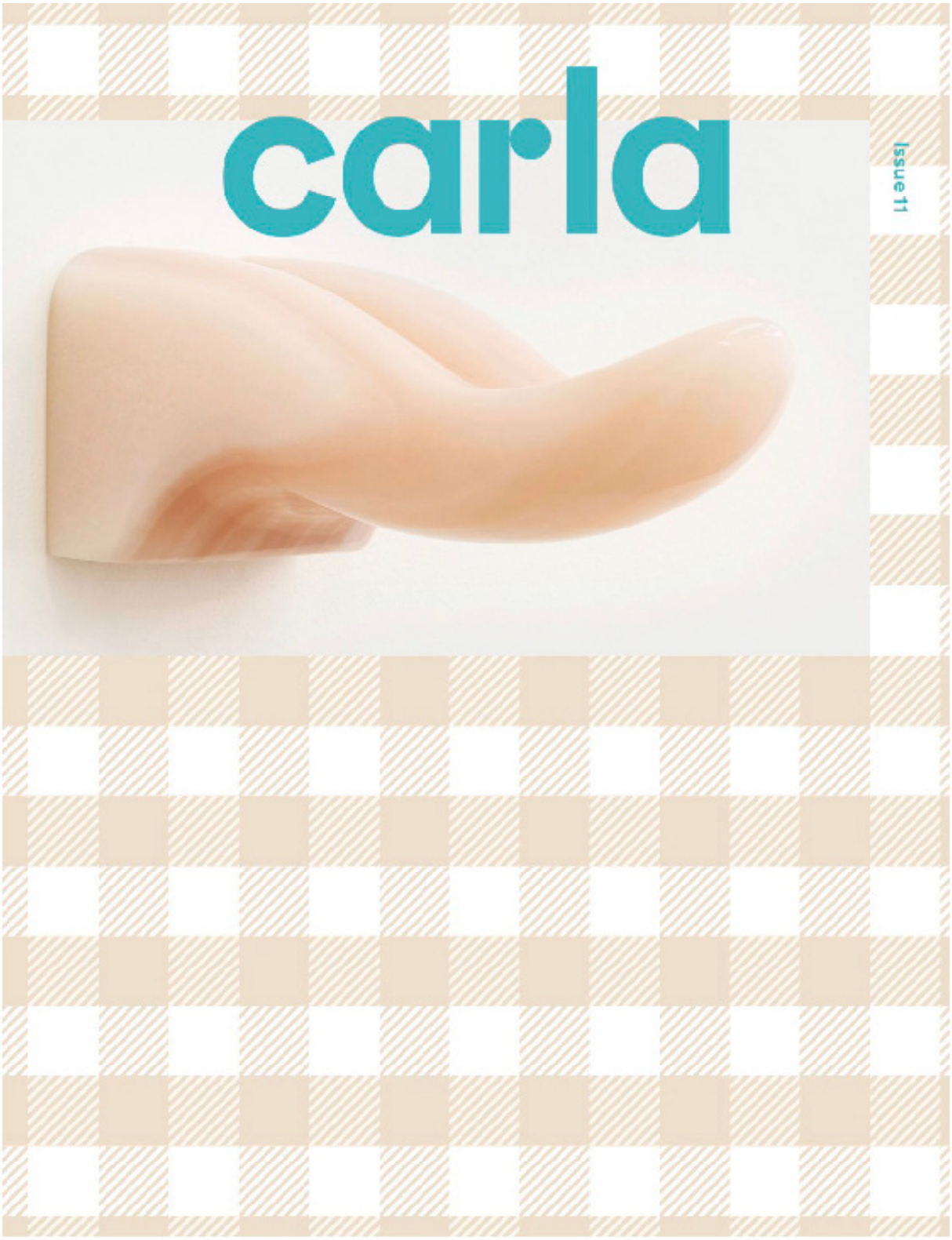


Marble Fruits, With Ceramic Whipped Cream

"The lusciousness of the first bite of whipped cream on top of a sundae and the feel of the curve of a breast in one's hand evoke feelings that for some are one in the same," says the New York-based artist Genesis Belanger, whose ceramic sculptures often cast commonplace foods in surreal new lights. A selection of her latest work — including a vase with two protruding hands that cup twin dollops of cream — will go on view at Reyes Projects in Birmingham, Michigan, next week, in the exhibition "Body So Delicious." The group show will feature the work of five artists who explore the interactions between food and the body.

The exhibition began with softly hued paintings of hot dogs, the show's curator, Bridget Finn, explains. She had seen the artist Ivy Haldeman's eroticized renderings of sausages, emerging from pillowy buns, and couldn't get them out of her head. "They're just so sensuous," she says of the hot dogs' anthropomorphic forms, which humorously suggest the ties between desire, consumerism, food and sex. From there, Finn saw a through line to the sculptor Nevine Mahmoud's laboriously hand-carved marble sculptures of fruit, the artist Alix Pearlstein's woven Band-Aid works and the artist Amy Brener's hanging silicone sculptures, which often appear as if they have ingested troves of miscellaneous everyday objects. Finn will display new work from each of these five artists, who happen to all be female. "There's a metaphysical thread, sure, but, really, the works are more experiential, in referencing the actual needs and wants of the body — which I think women may be more in tune with," Finn says.

Carla, 2017



Carla, 2017

hundreds of Skype calls, thousands of emails and WhatsApp messages, innumerable CAD renderings, inventories of exotic objects and materials, and the booking of many flights to far-flung locations."[1] Countless narratives from museum staff across the catalogue recount Adrián's offbeat antics leading up to the exhibition—field trips to seafood shops, cake makers, and Hollywood prop houses. Later Barcena describes Villar Rojas' relationship with institutions he works with as "parasitic in nature and function." Indeed, in a lengthy interview with Villar Rojas, Helen Molesworth admits that when she first saw his proposed exhibition budget, she proclaimed, "Fuck, you can't rethink your relationship to spectacle! Not on my dime. You can do that on your next project!"[2]

Though hyperbolic, Molesworth's response emphasizes the absurdly expensive lengths Villar Rojas proposed to go to, leaving MOCA the bill. Referring to the planning process for the exhibition, the artist later tells Molesworth: "art, this art world, is very much a political battlefield, and somehow, this is what we 'staged' during our two years of dialogue and negotiations."[3] Yet two years of negotiations on this particular battlefield played out only for the select few *behind* the scenes. A further distinction amidst this behind-the-scenes battle is inevitable between the people *performing* the labor, and the people intellectualizing said labor (i.e., artist and curator).

Villar Rojas describes the tasks needed to create a spectacle—and the resultant physical labor—as "limited resources to fulfill infinite desires."[4] He wonders, "Is all this invisible process more relevant to me than the visible side of my work?"[5] Here the labor not only becomes pedagogy but also disregarded as invisible. The fact remains that this labor is not nothing: people are needed to *do* the labor. Stuff needs to be produced, materials cajoled. The labor is visible to somebody; the pertinent question is to whom.

Semantics aside, there is a conceptual rift between Villar Rojas' experience of the making of the work and the average museum visitor's experience of viewing it. While MOCA is often referred to as "The Artist's Museum," institutions also have a responsibility to be public-facing rather than navel-gazing. For *Theatre of Disappearance*, were the extreme amounts of physical, material, and financial demands worth the ultimate public-facing end product? A moody and ephemeral spectacle? It seems that the viewer is left to experience only a fraction of the work, and potentially only the less interesting remnants, while inside the inner sanctum of the museum, checks are written, flights are booked, and an intellectual battlefield spins onward.

Nevine Mahmoud at M+B

November 11, 2017–January 6, 2018

The Greek sculpture, *Aphrodite of Knidos*, is believed to have been carved from marble by Praxiteles in the fourth century. The sculpture takes the goddess Aphrodite as its subject, fresh from a bath with towel in hand, looking up to the door as if someone is coming. She has yet to cover herself; why should she? Naked and unbothered, Aphrodite's stance is casual, with her head cocked to the side, indifferent to the sound of an approaching viewer. As Anne Carson writes in *The Glass Essay*, "Nudes have a difficult sexual destiny,"[1] but Aphrodite can't seem to care—while her gaze remains insouciant, her posture is locked in a perpetual state of come-hither.

Compulsive sexualization is a timeworn method of the male gaze, through which women are reduced to fragments of their bodies, visually spliced into tantalizing bits and shown only as a breast, a pair of legs, or a bare face made pretty and transformed by the removal of her glasses.

Nevine Mahmoud's debut solo exhibition at M+B, kept a tight control on its objectification with precise arrangement and charged proximity. Its title, *foreplay*, alluded to an initiation. Mahmoud's play with suggestion and expectation

Angella d'Avignon

Carla, 2017

Nevine Mahmoud, *Blue donut* (2017). Image courtesy of M+B Los Angeles and Morten Elder.

Carla, 2017

gave an ambiguous effect: carved marble, steel, and delicate glass objects were provocative and presented alone, like prizes. Placement of work was precise as though marking invisible points on the floor like a sigil, charging the room with tension.

Mahmoud pushed at the edges of her visual vocabulary and her sexual references landed squarely: an unfurled tongue in *Lick (all works 2017)*, for example, and a dangling bell-like nipple in *Breast Shade*. Innuendo abounded; language was at play as much as materiality. *Mother Milk* featured an alabaster blob fit with a pinkish nipple, teasing at the possibility of its function. Similarly, across the room *Blue donut*, a puckered donut-shape carved from blue marble, was propped up like a tire or a beckoning orifice, contrasted with the complementary transparent yellow of its acrylic supporting column.

Fruit and skin share a similar texture of flesh. Mahmoud's stones looked touchable, smooth, maybe cool under the palm. A bite was taken from a wedge of orange calcite in *Slick slice* and, in *Peach ball*, a drip of glass glided along the split crevice of a pale, glossy pink globe of Persian onyx. The globular stone looked heavy and ripe, bursting but inedible. Mahmoud's objects read like luxury items, not unlike Venetian glass fruit clustered in bowls in ritzy mid-century homes. Hunger was aroused but refused; this teasing back and forth was volumetric. In *Abacus arm 1*, for example, a pipe wraps itself into a circle on the wall, threading itself through giant beads of stone, like the toys found in pediatric waiting rooms made elephantine.

Like the show's centerpiece and most monumental work, *Primary Encounter (pink tensions)*, everything here had the ambition to fit together neatly. In the work, two hulking cubes were gingerly pulled apart (or in the process of being fitted together), one with a rounded hole and the other, a rounded peg. The opacity and heft of the muted pink stone countered the colorful transparency of the nearby plexiglass plinths. Tone and form in *f o r e p l a y* spoke to a level of contrived drama in romantic or sexual interaction that does not exist in the world outside the gallery. In this way, the show was cinematic, even gratuitous in its precision and oblique, allusion to Greek idealistic forms. Or, like the female body of advertising, built up by those mathematical men who lay the groundwork for our collective notions of perfect physique and, subsequently, sex (the kind that no one's having).

The gender binary is persistent, even within the liberal greyzone of the art world where an alternative canon—one that includes women and people of color, for instance—is still catching up to male-dominated provenance. With Mahmoud behind the knife and at work in the traditionally masculine labor of stone carving, materials like glass, steel, and stone are welcome diversions from essentialist gendered renderings.

Mahmoud, like Medusa, turns the soft to stone. Sigmund Freud pathologized the myth of Medusa—she was decapitated by Perseus who used her head as a weapon of war—and made it psychosexual. In his analysis, Freud links Medusa with castration, claiming her face as a point from which boyish terror springs. It seems that for Freud, the allegory of a powerful woman such as Medusa (and perhaps powerful women in general), is more a political threat than anything else. After all, it was Eve who bit the fruit first, who was banished into history as the first evil woman, a temptress like Aphrodite in the garden, or a sexual menace like Medusa with her snakes. In *f o r e p l a y*, material and psychosexual drama turned loose the notion that gender has an accompanying aesthetic and behavior, a concept that the ancient Greeks erected countless statues to. Within these bounds, women are framed as either generous in their beauty or destructive in their deviance, a limited sexual imagination that Mahmoud helps to shake free.

1. Anne Carson, *Glass, Irony, and God* (New York, NY: New Directions Publ., 1995).

Artforum, 2017

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS

November 28, 2017
By Travis Diehl

Nevine Mahmoud

M+B
612 North Almont Drive
November 11–January 6

The title of Nevine Mahmoud's first solo show, "f o r e p l a y," goes just like that, the letters held apart. Likewise, the exhibition itself is desirously spaced, opening with *Primary encounter (pink tensions)* (all works 2017), comprising two big, pink marble blocks, one with a hole, the other, a corresponding peg. The pair is separated by a few charged feet of empty floor. Mahmoud combines a classical conceit—the erotics of marble sculpture—with a contemporary chill, as if Pygmalion were a Minimalist. And in case you get carried away with the idea of abstract penetration, a slick sense of humor keeps things real; two of the nine works on view, *Abacus arm 1* and *2*, resemble nothing so much as handrails threading soft stone rolls of toilet paper.

Breast shade and *Mother milk*, a bell shape suspended on a steel cable and a soft white blob on a glass plinth, respectively, are both tipped by pink resin nipples straight out of a Tom Wesselmann nude. The first piece trails a long wire to within a tantalizing half inch of the floor. It's important that it doesn't reach, of course—just like it's necessary that we can't touch art. *Slick slice*, an orange calcite wedge glazed with tearing glass, sits on a transparent pedestal so that one can take a look underneath. Poor, reflexive creature: You will.

— Travis Diehl

Nevine Mahmoud, *Breast shade*, 2017, alabaster and pigmented resin with stainless steel hardware, 13 x 18 1/2 x 18 1/2".

AnOther Magazine

The LA Sculptor Carving Erotically Charged Forms From Stone

June 28, 2017
By Hannah Tindle

The first thing one notices when talking to artist Nevine Mahmoud is her accent: a base of well-spoken Queen's English peppered with a distinctly Californian twang. It's inevitable that the artist, who was born and raised in London, picked up such intonation – she moved to LA in 2014 to undertake an MFA at the University of Southern California. The second thing? The manner in which she speaks about her practice, with a no-nonsense clarity, a breath of fresh air amongst the many pontificators knocking around the various corners of the art world.

Now represented by M+B Gallery in West Hollywood, Mahmoud's work takes the form of sculptural stone carvings; she whittles coloured alabaster and marble into the shape of surreal yonic fruits, arousing flowers, petal-like nipples, contorted tongues protruding from walls and disembodied lips – a welcome subversion of a traditionally masculine medium. Mahmoud's work returns to her hometown this month for a new exhibition at the White Cube, Bermondsey, titled Dreamers Awake – an all-female show tracing the influence of Surrealism upon the work of Louise Bourgeois, Hannah Wilke and Mona Hatoum, to name but a few. To be included in such a line-up for an emerging artist is "an honour", Mahmoud says. Here, alongside images of her erotically charged work, we speak about learning her craft at a place called Art City, and the surprising influence of Bruce Nauman.

On learning her craft…
"I've only been working with stone for around two years, since I started going to this place where I could buy it up in northern California, a couple of hours away by car from where I live. It's called Art City and I became totally obsessed with it. There are three of four women who work up there and the rest of the artists are predominantly male. Joanne DuBy, one of the women, started teaching me – she is a fucking amazing sculptor – and we did lessons for about a year. So I would go up there for two days of the week and would spend the rest of the week down in LA – and that's how it's been for a while now. My skills have obviously improved a lot and it's now less like a lesson whenever I visit, however."

On working with stone… "I just really wanted to do something different. I was very aware that I had been labelled as a 'young sculptor in LA' and so I kind of went with using older and traditional materials and methods to see how the conversation would work in that context. So I worked with plaster and metal and I had been thinking about stone for a while, but just hadn't had the sort of space to do whatever I wanted. There's a lot of thinking and planning during the early stages of making the work in stone – mapping out the shape, figuring out the scale. And then there is adding the fine detailing, sanding and polishing. It takes anything from a week to a month, working every day, to complete a piece. Choosing the colours for pieces has been this really organic and intuitive process. Every piece has been made in response to a rock that I have encountered. Each sculpture is innately unique because each rock I use is different and is sourced from all over the United States."

On the artists who influence her… "I would cite Louise Bourgeois as one of my influences, for sure. I obviously have always looked at the work of female artists, but I have been greatly influenced by men too. Bruce Nauman and Joseph Beuys, for example, have had a huge impact on my practice. Nauman in particular – he never really worked with carving, but always fragmented and dismembered the body in his work. I always look at very figurative sculpture from the mid-century too, but I strive to hybridise this with very feminine influences."

On being a part of Dreamers Awake… "I think a lot of processes in Surrealist art – or at least the themes – have always been something present in my work: consciousness driven forward by unconscious desire. Also, elaborate and strange visual imagery is something I think about a lot. With the fact that this show is all-female I feel incredibly excited to be a part of it. Surrealism was a movement very much defined by men. The women involved in that historical context are often side-lined, and actually don't identify as Surrealists – but they were making work in sort of that way. It's an interesting topic to bring up today."

New York Magazine, 2017

NEW YORK MAGAZINE
THE CUT

TASTEMAKERS | MAR. 27, 2017

The Sculptor Bringing Back the Craft of Stone Carving

By Christine Whitney

Photo: Julia Leonard

"Lilies are the most erotic flower," says London-born, Los Angeles-based artist Nevine Mahmoud. She's explaining the inspiration behind her carved-stone sculptures of the flower, which have turned many an art-world head as of late. Mahmoud's been making a name for herself with her feminine-meets-rock-hard forms in alabaster, marble, and calcite (think: the aforementioned flowers, a pair of lips, a tongue, and a 50-pound peach), a unique oeuvre that taps into an ancient, traditionally male-dominated craft.

In 2012, Mahmoud moved from her native England to L.A. to attend the MFA program at the University of Southern California, where she became enamored with the medium. "It started with finding this supplier and outdoor artist studios in Ventura," Mahmoud says. "Literally it's a huge yard just covered [in stone], with carvers were working on giant sculptures — outsider artists and weird hobbyists who are obsessed with it." Immediately obsessed herself, Mahmoud spent a year photographing and conversing with the artists, even asking one of her professors if she could take a course at the Ventura studios in lieu of working as a teaching assistant. "He was like, 'Hell, no, you can't stone-carve,'" the artist remembers. She put her aspirations on the back burner until after graduation. "After doing a lot of shows with the same work from grad school, I was just like, 'I need to do something different,'" she says, which meant enrolling in carving lessons with a carver named JoAnne Duby, who "just taught me everything — she's my guru."

Mahmoud's clearly an artist to watch; she recently joined the gallery M+B in West Hollywood and showed her carvings at New York's Armory Show, to rave reviews. But she's quick to assert that her work path is not set in stone (pun intended). "I'm a constantly shifting human," she asserts. "Who knows what I'm going to be making next?"

Below, The Cut visited the artist in her Alhambra, California, studio to talk about British humor, vintage shopping, and the thrill of Craigslist.

New York Magazine, 2017

You're from London. Tell us a bit about your background.

I was born and raised in London and came here after undergrad. I wanted to move to L.A.; I've been obsessed with this city for a while. I'll always love London and I miss British people, but day to day, there's no comparison.

What do you miss most about the British?

The sense of humor — it's very particular, very snappy and quick. The general recreational conversation there is not talking about yourself; it's more like jokes.

Your family is still there?

They are. My dad is Lebanese and my mom is Austrian. They met in Europe and moved around their whole lives before settling in London, so they're very supportive of me being out there and they love to visit. They met on a Greek island that we still all frequent. It's very romantic.

How do you manage your time?

[Figuring out] my routine and studio habits is probably something that's caused me the most anxiety of anything in my life. Getting into the routine I'm in now has taken me the past six years. Being in the studio is a really integral part of my process — it's really about going to this place every day and just being there. You don't need to make anything, you don't have to complete anything.

What's the first thing you do in the morning?

One of the first things I bought for my kitchen is one of those beautiful, stove-top Alessi coffee makers, so I have coffee, make breakfast, and listen to BBC Radio, but then I'm pretty quick to get out of the house. I don't like to stay at home in the morning. Either I get lunch ahead of time or do an errand. I used to go to Home Depot like every day, but now that the studio equipment is more built up, I don't do as much of that — I just buy stone.

What do you love about working with stone?

It's really absorbing and labor-intensive, which are things that really attract me. It's about tools and technique, and it's not easy to work with, but it's very pleasurable. It's intuitive and mathematical and I like that the material is old and has history embedded in it, literally. It's got all these contradictions. You never really know what you're getting, but there's all this room to interpret stone.

How do you pick the stones you work with?

I pick the stones depending on a shape or form that's been on my mind, but then that stone becomes synonymous with it. It feels really like it's about bringing out this ultimate thing I see in the color or the opaqueness. Now it's getting a little difficult if someone's like, "I love the peach!" [and wants me to make another one]. Sometimes that piece of calcite I have access to doesn't really want to be a peach right now. I just have to wait. It's this weird back-and-forth.

New York Magazine, 2017

What helps when you're not feeling inspired?

Definitely being away from the studio for a little while. I used to struggle with that, or get really concerned if I felt like I had no ideas. Now I feel less pressure to be inspired in general. As long as I'm here and can see stuff, I know that there are things to do. Conversations with other artists also inspire me a lot.

Who would be your ideal studio visit?

Because she was just so badass, Louise Bourgeois. Or Bruce Nauman or Isamu Noguchi — he's been my go-to stone carver for a really long time.

You're very inspired by other women artists. Who are some of the most influential for you?

Louise Bourgeois and Alina Szapocznikow — I look at her stuff every day.

There's this show I'm in, in London at the end of June at the White Cube. It's this big group show of female artists under the umbrella of surrealism and modernism: Claude Cahun and [Bourgeois] and Kiki Smith and Mona Hatoum. Of my contemporaries who are kind of emerging, Kelly Akashi and a couple of others are also in the show.

What do you like to have around you when you work?

Recently, music. I try not to listen to headphones too much, just because with carving I want to have my senses all equal. I listen to this radio station that broadcasts from London a lot and gives me a lot of ideas, called NTS. They actually broadcast from a store right next to where I live, and in London it was the same thing; they broadcast from the square next to the apartment. It's just very comforting and really great music — obscure stuff and old-school stuff.

What are you listening to on repeat?

A dance playlist. These friends of mine keep coming over for dinner and everyone will bring two bottles of wine each. We'll have some great meal and then start playing music and drinking and dancing. It's gone until like 4 or 5 a.m. a couple nights. No drugs, just energy. I'm just compiling the music we've been playing — a lot of R&B and hip-hop stuff, like that Miguel song, "Adorn."

What's your studio uniform?

I have a cupboard of old T-shirts, [like this Backstreet Boys one], and leggings. Shoes are like this [white Reeboks], or sometimes I'll need something steel-toed. Leggings and shorts in the summer — although I have some pretty gnarly burns on my hands and legs just from the grinders, so I should be wearing long pants all the time.

New York Magazine, 2017

What's the story behind the Backstreet Boys shirt?

I got this when I was like 16 from Camden Market. It was from this store that sold all the '90s band T-shirts in vacuum-sealed plastic bags, and these high-waisted jeans I still think about all the time. They were called Fizzy Jeans, and they were skin-tight, and stretchy — we bought those by the boatload.

What's your style like outside the studio?

It's pretty different. I like to wear colors, block colors, silks, translucent fabrics, and nice jeans. I haven't really been into dresses, but more tailored stuff. I just got this classic Gaultier '90s, net, sheer, tight top with crazy patterns. I found it at a place called called Replica Vintage … It's really good, it's a lot of Gaultier and Westwood, that kind of darker '90s stuff. And I have this Calvin Klein velvet pantsuit — blue velvet dots on sheer, sort-of silk. It's like a smoker's jacket kind of thing with loose pants.

When did you realize you wanted to be an artist?

When I was like 16. I played the flute, I was in theater a lot, and I was doing art. Acting was like this adrenaline rush, but I was just obsessed with drawing and photography. And I remember being like, "Oh, what will I choose?" And I was like, "[Art] is gonna be more realistic — this is gonna sustain me and keep me interested for longer."

What were some of your most memorable theater roles?

Males always, always men. Except once I was an old woman, a billionaire, who went back to her hometown to murder this guy that raped her. It's this play from the '30s and it's crazy. That was a pretty great role.

Did you see the movie *Elle* with Isabelle Huppert?

I just saw that — it's excellent, she's amazing. That film and *Mustang* [from 2015] are two of my new favorites.

You have a child's slide and a big metal spring here in your gallery. What are you doing with them?

Those are just forms that — scale-wise, shape-wise, color-wise — I'm just keeping here constantly, because I know they're both going to be emerging in my work.

Where did you find them?

Craigslist. Everything is Craigslist. I look for slides and car parts, always. Now people know the work so I'll get text messages [if they find good ones].

How do you unwind?

I'm trying to garden more. And there are always home projects to do. But I'm pretty social, so if I'm in the mood to unwind, I'll just have someone over, and we'll have a glass of wine and cook some food.

What's your signature dish?

Through winter, I was doing a really rich, red-winy stew with game, and pasta. I also got really into savory pies, like onion tarts. Tonight I'm doing a roast chicken.

Artsy, 2017

ART SY

Art

20 Artists to Watch at The Armory Show

• Artsy Editors Feb 28, 2017 10:18pm

Nevine Mahmoud ⊕ Follow

B. 1988, London • Lives and works in Los Angeles

M+B • Presents Section,Booth P6

Portrait of Nevine Mahmoud in her Los Angeles studio by Emily Berl for Artsy.

5 Images

View Slideshow

Two years ago, Mahmoud carved an erotic peach from a slab of stone in what would ultimately spark a daring new body of work for the young sculptor. This week, in her debut at The Armory Show, the series culminates in a collection of handcarved forms that reference elements of the human body—including a lone tongue, a pair of lips, and a single breast.

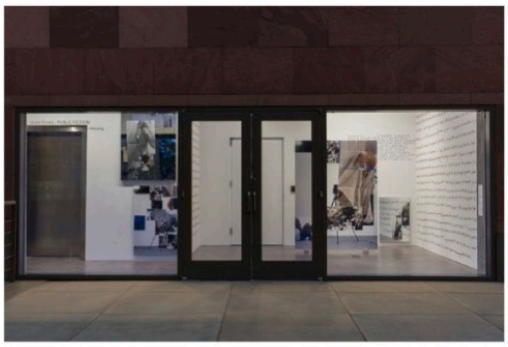
"They're disembodied body parts; parts without a whole," says Mahmoud from her studio in a converted garage in eastern Los Angeles. Inspired by the fragmented bodies in works by Louise Bourgeois and Alina Szapocznikow, and the unsettling quality that can accompany even their most erotic or attractive forms, she laces beautiful shapes with strange, dark undertones. Though sensual, the sculptures are fashioned in hard stone and often affixed with metal and mechanical parts. "I'm always hoping to find a form that sits somewhere between familiar and bodily—something that you would recognize as your own, but something that's also alienated," she says.

The sculptures on view have been carved from alabaster, sun-yellow calcite, and opaque pink and white marble, using a traditional process that's a departure from the plaster casting technique she employed for her MFA work at the University of Southern California. A particularly fruitful stone-gathering mission once led her to a stone-carving studio in Northern California, where she found a mentor in an older female sculptor. "That's kind of how I've learned everything that I know," she says of this new chapter of work, the next iteration of which will be on view in her fall solo with Los Angeles gallery M+B.

LA RB LOS ANGELES REVIEW OF BOOKS

A Note on the Contemporary Canon: Public Fiction's Show at MOCA Los Angeles

By Paloma Checa-Gismero
June 17, 2016



HIP-HEIGHT ON THE RIGHT inside edge of the window frame, perpendicular to me are three captions on a concrete wall. Two point to works inside the gallery, and one to an address far up in the Hollywood Hills. I am outside Los Angeles's Museum of Contemporary Art, standing across the glass from storefront: The Poet and the Critic, and the missing, the most recent exhibition by the independent art platform Public Fiction.

Storefront: The Poet and the Critic, and the missing is a two-show project occupying the anteroom of The Marcia Simon Weisman Works on Paper Study Center, on the plaza level of MOCA on Grand Avenue in downtown Los Angeles. Curated by Public Fiction's leading soul, Lauren Mackler, it has brought to the space works by artists Nathaniel Mackey, Nevine Mahmoud, and Lynne Tillman (between March 19 and April 25, 2016), and Nancy Lupo, Litia Perta, and Paul Mpagi Sepuya (between May 2 and June 19, 2016).

Complementing the shows was the missing, a screening on May 5 that included Isaac Julien's The Attendant (1993), Alfred Leslie and Frank O'Hara's The Last Clean Shirt (1964), Maha Maamoun's Domestic Tourism II (2009), and an installation of Mungo Thomson's 2002 video The American Desert (for Chuck Jones). Lastly, the cycle will close with Stanya Kahn-directed performance A Fugitive Thought on June 2.

Watered iced coffee in my left hand. It is a Tuesday and the museum is closed. I stand outside the storefront in the empty plaza that is also a roof for an underground contemporary art mausoleum. Below my feet, silent, is Helen Molesworth's show The Art of Our Time. MOCA is closed for the day, but the storefront is a storefront. Across its full wall, glass captions are still white with text printed on black non-serif type. Name of the artist, date, and place of birth. Name of piece, date, a short narrative, information on materials and technique. The first caption from the top reads "Paul Mpagi Sepuya." The San Bernardino–born, Los Angeles–based artist brings three pieces to the show: Study with Five Figures (3009) (2016), Figures/Ground Studies (2016), and Study with Four Figures (3001) (2016), three sets of inkjet prints mounted on wood bracings, where mirrors, cameras, tripods, and bodies denote the game of gaze reciprocities that seem to fill the exhibition space. This triangle expands on Sepuya's long exploration of the intimate space of an artist's studio and the relationships that occur within it. Such interest is now transplanted to the art gallery, following curator Mackler's interest in investigating the spaces of in-betweenness that exist within art exhibition spaces.

Los Angeles Review of Books, 2017

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For almost three months, storefront: The Poet and the Critic, and the missing runs parallel to The Art of Our Time, MOCA's redrawing of postwar art's conventional chronologies. A big reframing of the museum's contemporary art collection, The Art of Our Time emphasizes the affinities among artists, told in relation to their shared institutional affiliations, their art schools and galleries, and major historical events. The Art of Our Time decenters the canonical sense of New York as contemporary art's cradle, and revisits instead the importance of schools like Black Mountain College in the articulation of shared generational conversations and formal developments. It also explores the tightknit interactions between postwar architecture and avant-garde art, revisiting the structural concerns of installation and object-based artists on both coasts. MOCA's show centers desire, sexuality, and the body as major transgenerational concerns, and reconsiders art trends in light of changing modes of production, especially for the post-industrial US–based art collected by MOCA. A Western avant-garde-centric rewriting of history, in other words, proves inadequate for understanding a city whose indebtedness to foreign influences has long been acknowledged.

Discursive gaps are inherent to curating. They exist in most exhibitions, sometimes as substantial conceptual lacks, sometimes as loci where affinity threads weave between pieces, exhibitions, and the visitor's experience. Mackler's concept for Public Fiction's residence at MOCA was to explore these gaps as points of entry to The Art of Our Time. Thus storefront: The Public and the Critic, and the missing acts like a set of captions, comments to the main narrative of that exhibit, and interventions in MOCA's new institutionalized account of the contemporary avant-garde. In a conversation, Mackler remarked on the footnote-like nature of its insertion in MOCA's structure. Slight, subtle additions to the museum's proposal remind one of scribbled notes on a book's margins. The art of our time is, Mackler's counter-exhibit argues, art made today by the young and mid-career artists with a solid presence in the circuit of alternative exhibition spaces like Public Fiction and others. These are notes to the contemporary canon from actual young practitioners situated in the city of Los Angeles.

The last of the captions points to Nancy Lupo's Bench 2016 (2016): "Bench 2016, on view in a white Dodge Caravan, license plate 7KAA008 parked near 2130-2178 Castilian Drive, Los Angeles CA 90068." I go back to my car, miraculously parked on one of MOCA's side streets, sip the rest of that iced coffee, mostly melted now, and type the address on my phone. Out of downtown, onto the freeway, off the freeway, into Hollywood, up the hills, past the park, up and up, past apartment buildings, houses, and then mansions overlooking the mussed metropolis. To my right there's a steep cliff with cacti. On my left I spot the white van. As at MOCA's storefront, I lean against the windows to get glimpses of a long pine bench in the back of the vehicle. Thousands of yards of dental floss weave through the bench's scaffolding. Hundreds of little branches of spray millet hang from the structure. This is Nancy Lupo's piece, a workbench that is also a garden, inside a van.

Public Fiction's vitrine-like gallery is spatially equivalent to the museum's gift shop, across the square, on street level. This mirroring pays homage to Public Fiction's original emplacement: a storefront in the Highland Park neighborhood of Los Angeles, where Mackler started her independent project in 2010. After five years of working in that East Los Angeles suburb, Public Fiction is now a nomadic gallery. Property value escalated in Highland Park since she started, a gentrification that occurred partly due to the presence of alternative art and music venues like hers, as well as other services targeting the young, creative, middle-class Angelenos displacing the Latin@ community from the area. As is often the case, art got caught in the middle of complex processes of value transformation. Public Fiction got expelled from its Highland Park storefront by the very processes that enabled it and that it helped set in motion.

What has remained stable, however, is Public Fiction's dual nature as a publication and an exhibition project. Both, in Mackler's words, "accumulate content and layers of sense." The show makes evident how Mackler builds the layered articulation of meanings: works and words are located on the gallery's walls, on its windows, freestanding within it, and outside. Some are activated in a projection room — "like a movie theater," she has said — and others inside the museum's main galleries and hallways. The related publication can be accessed at publicfiction.moca.org, which gathers installation shots, pictures taken at the artists' studios, stills from the screened films, fragments from the text-based pieces, and texts by Corrine Fitzpatrick and Quinn Latimer. "Together," as Chris Kraus wrote in Where Art Belongs, her monograph on alternative art practice in Los Angeles, "the writing and the visual work form a system in which (as in life) meaning occurs through accretion."

Earlier this spring, the first exhibition of the twofold storefront: The Poet and the Critic, and the missing, featured Song of the Andoumboulou: 148 & Sweet Safronia's Wave Unwoven (2016) by renowned poet, novelist, and critic Nathaniel Mackey. Mackey's poetry was fixed on the window inside frames that remind one of computer screens, boxes that make one want to scroll down his stanzas, a gesture that curator Mackler had already initiated in the online publication accompanying the project. "Long since in some room reminiscing, long on / something said said again. A symphonette / of beaks, bits of wood scrap, wheese what / there / was of it left …" Mackey writes, referring to the lit gallery behind his vinyl words. "We knew it wasn't up to us. / We knew it was a game. We enjoyed it / High chiming strings way back in the mix / re- / buffed us, a remote broadcast it seemed." One pictures the morning party sunrays on a misty chilly porch.

Also in storefront: The Poet and the Critic, and the missing's opening show were works by artist Nevine Mahmoud and award-winning novelist and essay writer Lynne Tillman. Mahmoud's Fluid mechanics/ objective parts (2016), focuses on the material aspects of her creations, sexy emulations that exude self-referentiality and intimacy as well as contention. Their forms speak of fluidity, self-contradiction, change, morphing. As if they traced the formal extorsion suffered by points in space, printed on shiny, velvety, pink plastic. A perfect counterbalance to Mahmoud's figures are Lynne Tillman's words. Her Ode to DCW (Dining Chair Wood) (2016) appears inside a light box on the gallery wall, and reads: "Made of wood, like the Eames chairs, covered in hard foam rubber that didn't show traces of bodies pressed upon them," responding to the materiality of Mahmoud's work and the underground pieces of our time's new canon. Tillman's words pose the unavoidable question: where do each of us position ourselves amid this contention?

Despite The Art of Our Time's welcome revisiting of the canonical stories of recent art history, the exhibit remains strongly faithful to the autonomy of art and its exceptionality. It engages with its local and tourist audiences through traditional didactic captions, explanatory texts, and short videos hosted on the institution's website. However, by hosting a rotating selection of smaller exhibitions such as storefront: The Poet and the Critic, and the missing, MOCA allows its audience to profit from the exploratory character of independent curatorial practice, as well. With their informality, platforms such as Public Fiction are raw fresh winds that help invigorate the museum's more constrained institutional agenda. Conversely, Public Fiction benefits from the legitimation of inhabiting MOCA for three months. It expands its audience, it receives a budget, it is able to commission new works and engage in fair trade with its artists. Lauren Mackler's vision is backed by one key piece of the national art establishment, and artists become gatekeepers in the translation between the canon and the varied art production that a megalopolis like Los Angeles generates — the symbiotic relationship between more established and smaller institutions is mirrored by that of the writers to the objects in the exhibit. As Corrine Fitzpatrick writes: "Poets use words to mine mysteries and thus can provide language — the wardrobe of reason — to objects existing in space," and Mackler's show helps mine the mysteries of MOCA's attempt to redraw the canon within the milieu of art production in 2016 Los Angeles.

Paloma Checa-Gismero is a PhD candidate in art history, theory, and criticism in the University of California, San Diego.

aqnb

Considering Nevine Mahmoud's Three Isolated Effects

By E.D. Noice
May 11, 2016

On a lonely hill above Los Angeles I find myself texting a complete stranger in order to be taken to an exhibition I know nothing about. Typically when I'm asked to write about art, I've at least heard of the gallery, and if not, I'm able to familiarize myself prior to visiting the show by reviewing photos and reading a press release. A barren website and a cryptic appointment e-mail containing the word 'access' confirming my reservation are all that lies between myself and the exhibition.


Nevine Mahmoud, Three Isolated Effects, 2016.

The stranger turns out to be Lewis Teague Wright, the 'Gallery Director' for transient art space Lock Up International that has hosted shows in London, Frankfurt and Mexico City. On this particular day Nevine Mahmoud's Three Isolated Effects exhibition, running from April 18 to 24, is showing in a 10×10 space in a Public Storage facility in Los Angeles' Elysian Park neighborhood and is made up of three sculpture pieces by London-born and LA-based Mahmoud.

The abstract ambiguity of Mahmoud's pieces marry perfectly with their surroundings. Contained within the walls of a storage unit, we understand there is value. There is worth in the work. In the same way that value is given to art objects displayed in the white cube, Mahmoud's Three Isolated Effects, too, feels right at home in a space with its function of storing a person's valuables.

With construction going on both above and below the unit that houses the show, I become acutely aware of the delicacy of viewing art in a way I'd never realized. The floors and walls of the space are made of creaking and groaning plywood —the kind that noise and movement flow through freely. The banal act of walking from one piece to another to view it becomes a disruptive and self-conscious one. At times it leads me to focus on factors outside of the art, influencing the viewing experience.

Mahmoud's most formally recognizable and least abstract piece is a colorful, to-scale beach ball. Without a list of titles or materials to refer to, I'm left to observe exactly what's in front of me. Its glossy finish and stillness leads me to believe it is made of ceramic —making it a replica of a delicate, light object made of a different, yet equally fragile material. Diagonally across from the ball is a free-standing fibre-glass piece of what I can only guess was once a jacuzzi or bath. Smooth and white like the faux-porcelain of any domestic tub on one side, and rough and painted a bright, chalky, Pepto-Bismol pink on the reverse.

Almost invisible due to its hue and broad surface is a golden, canary yellow panel to the right. It lies nearly flush against an already yellowed plasterboard wall, creating a subtle and atmospheric piece that complements and observes the installation alongside it, without leaving an intrusive impression. The pieces conjure nostalgia in both their formal and conceptual existences. The colors and materiality of all three artworks make them familiar, even when a piece's shape or size is surreal.

AQNB, 2017

Nevine Mahmoud, Three Isolated Effects, 2016.
Installation view. Courtesy of Lock Up International.

It's rare to see a show with a title, environment and works that so succinctly combine and freely converse between themselves. Three Isolated Effects achieves what many Los Angeles art shows miss out on; existing outside of the city's influence. Blanket statements about a place as diverse and complex as this one are typically invalid, but there are two truths that are proven exceptions to this rule: that Los Angeles has a lot of space and light. Although the white cube is an equalizer, it's hard to ignore how these two physical elements exist and inhabit this Californian city. Mahmoud's show, like others put on by Lock Up International, become truly free of existing in any one location.

As curator Teague Wright leads me through the labyrinth of identical hallways and safety-orange metal unit doors, in a generic Public Storage facility, in an ordinary residential suburb, these two truths of LA fall away —we could be anywhere. This anonymity, and the Lock Up International website's lack of explanation, leads to an art exhibition palette cleanser, one that asks you to forget the white cube. Instead you're invited to pay attention only to what is around you, and in front, lending itself tremendously to Mahmoud's show, as abstract sculpture typically requires even a modest suspension of disbelief. This return to basics is both refreshing and eye-opening, leaving me glad to know that the places and modes of how we view art have a dialogue all their own, being hashed out on an international scale.**

Art Review, 2015

ArtReview

SOGTFO (Sculpture or Get the Fuck Out)

28 February – 11 April 2015, François Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles

May 2015 Issue
By Arturo Berardini

Tits or Get the Fuck Out. In the darker, scuzzier and more diabolically playful corners of the Internet, where identity is at best fluid and undefined, TOGTFO is, according to writer Quinn Norton, 'a transgression to test a new person's ability to participate within an in-group'. Though directed at women or users perceived to be women, you're not supposed to show your tits. That's maybe the worst possible response. Or the worst outside of taking it as a literal request and getting upset. Better is, maybe, 'All I have are your mom's and nobody wants those', or just ignore the fuckers.

The question presumes that the majority of /b/tards, anons, trolls, hackers and lurkers are dudes, which most of them are, and the Internet's language, culture and criteria have been largely set by men. Artist and exhibition curator Charlie White asserts that sculpture has had the same history, but that it shouldn't have had to, thus the show's title.

Of all the different media, sculpture has a particularly cock-dragging history and is dude-dominated in general, in LA in particular, and the gang of artists in this show engages with that history, collectively pushing the medium into new places. Of the six artists, all ladies, two midcareer and a trio of emergers, none are flashing their tits or buckling under the offence of patriarchy. With humour, panache, skill and style that matches and surpasses their male peers, the work of these artists supersedes any bullshit gendering.

Amanda Ross-Ho's Untitled Sculpture (Once U Go Black) (2015) quietly engages with LA sculpture icon Charles Ray's subtle and significant rescalings. Here the upsized bottom hips of a mannequin sport a fade-to-black of panties stacked atop panties creeping down its legs – an American Apparel model tweaked for surreal effect. The sculpture doesn't read here as an objectified body but rather as a bit of amusing motherfuckery (to use the Anonymous term) with display, bodies and commerce.

Kathleen Ryan beautifully engages with display and material in Bacchante (2015), which has concrete balloons tumbling down a granite plinth, a bulbous match for Nevine Mahmoud's ceramic balls in Basketball (2014) and Beachball (2015). Rounding onward, Mahmoud's gnarly, heavy metal spiked rings, plunked on and off pristine coloured platforms with one particularly sizeable vagina dentata calling itself O (2015), matches in shape and title Kelly Akashi's surreal free-floating wall, dubbed Figure oO (2015). Standing with two circles cleanly chopped out, the wall displays the artist's disembodied hand cast in wax. Rather than assertive phallic obelisks, we have assertive holes all the more badass for their yonic vacancies. Andrea Zittel's Flat Field Work #1 (2015) reads in this context as a bridge. Zittel takes issues of domesticity to a level of autarchic seriousness. Her perspicacity and facility with materials make craft, previously considered 'women's work', simply art.

Given the male-dominated history of sculpture, the ladies here offer neither a junior alternative nor a reactionary riposte, but a sophisticated set of objects working with essential issues of sculpture in ways that the gentlemen just couldn't. White locates with these artists an important shift in our understanding of art (especially the history of it in Los Angeles) and its relationship to gender, flowing out of feminist and trans advances but also the postgender continuum offered by online avatars. Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer sums up the possibilities beautifully in the final line of her essay that accompanies the exhibition: 'an all-female sculpture show is pretty cool, but an all-female Senate would be so much cooler'.

MOUSSE

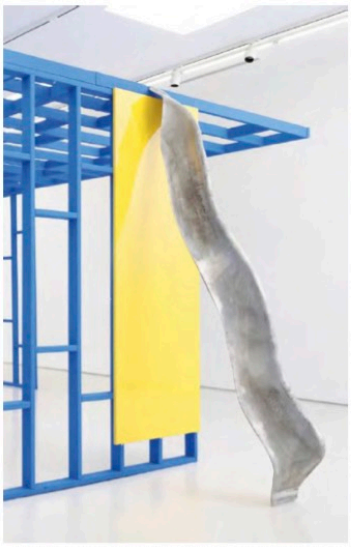
Playtime

By Andrew Berardini
Issue 52
February 2016

Inverted gears warp inward, raw metal with an organic curve. A post-industrial sea creature, this mouthy hunk of raw metal plunks onto a slick primary-hued plinth, raised just off the floor. Balls in the colors of faded ice cream sag without bounce. Chopped slides arced and prone beam in more cheerful primaries their unuseful curves, some magic of modern material cast just so for the whimsy of children. Old car parts cast shadows on photo paper like those nuclear winters you hear about where the flash of the explosion makes vaporized bodies permanent shadows on thick walls. And these special stones carved just so, a calcite peach, a disembodied alabaster tit, they sit on these bright primary plinths too, though the latter was spotted in a makeshift bar sitting on the glossy surface of a piano, regaled with cheap barroom chatter and an instrumental from the keys of Wham's immortal Careless Whispers. Playground minimalism plunked with curved stones from the pornographic end of Noguchi or Hepworth, the work of Nevine Mahmoud is all of these things.

The locked weirdness between modern materials and shapely living bodies, the natural and unnatural, a yearning for some kind of order refused with a chop, the roughest metal lingering on those perfect plinths. Dangerous pussies or vagina dentata or whatever, anyway you cut those lopsided circles you still don't put your fingers in them. The stones on the other hand beg for a soft touch to see if its translucent skin as yielding as it looks. The peach, though suggestive, still feels PG, laying a finger on that can go down without a hint of the illicit. But wanting to touch the disembodied boob
(even thinking of it as a boob without a body) feels just a little bit creepy. One doesn't often view sculpture begging to be handled.

Every time I see one of John McCracken's spacey, leaning planks, I want to smear a greasy thumb across the perfect sheen of its surface. I yearn to mar its perfection with my imperfect, squelching, sweating body. The triumph over the messy living over the perfection of these objects' inhumanly (or post-humanly) modern materials. His work has become easy shorthand for me in thinking about contemporary commodity fetishism and its attendant alienation, another way to throw my body on the machine.



"New Babylon" installation view at Roberts & Tilton, Culver City, 2015.
Courtesy: the artist and Roberts & Tilton, Culver City

Most minimalists, though less fetish-y, still beg for a hand to finger their unhandled forms and make them more human. If seen as a cautionary tale of our sometimes disastrous love affair with machines, Donald Judd and Carl Andre look like ignored Cassandras making monuments to the tragedy of disappeared bodies. But seen as they wished themselves and their work to be understood, they were butch ultra-literalists. They wanted things that could not be anything but what they were, sucked of all content, smashing old illusions, doing it with all the romance of a stack of plywood. Monuments to an emptied-out monumentality, or truly (at least to me) triumphal sculptures to industry at the moment when its force started to fail. They poured their concrete and stacked their bricks just as all the American steel mills went rust belt and their factories and foundries were dubbed Superfund sites. In chopped forests and mine runoff, in quarried mountains and chemical treatments, the
EPA might be able to better tell you how much toxic wastes goes into the creation of that literal geometry of industrial manufacture. Industrial materials were also employed in that generation by female artists as well but to very different effect. Eva Hesse and Alina Szapocznikow made corporeal sculptures with these materials but found themselves in early graves, most likely from their unmasked exposure to their media's carcinogenic chemicals. Szapocznikow, a Jew during World War II, had survived Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen and peritoneal tuberculosis, both experiences that brought a contemplation of corporeality to her work in all its fragile mortality and occasional sex appeal, but it was likely the polyester resins that gave her the breast cancer that eventually took her life. Also a casualty of Nazism, Hesse as a child made it out of Germany, but her uncle and grandparents died in concentration camps. Clearly less representational than Szapocznikow's cast body parts, Hesse 's sculptures differed greatly from Judd and Andre in its palpable psychological moods, organic forms, and occasional sexual innuendo.

Mousse, 2010

The work of Nevine Mahmoud lives in this tradition of sculpture set forth by Hesse and Szapocznikow through a similar use of materials and concerns. But her meditations on her mediums absorb some of the hard edges leftover from a fetish minimalist like McCracken, the tension between the plinth and the knotted hunk of metal atop it, between the rough industrial skin and the slick surface it rests upon. The corporeality that Nevine brings to her work, through inclusive of both the psychological complex and surreally sexual, also finds a curious element of play: the balls, the slides, those specific colors. Though the elemental metal works look quite menacing in their way, the shapely slides bear a human curve. Looking at Nevine's work, I kept dreaming of Jacques Tati's Playtime (1963). In his DVD commentary for the British Film Institute, scholar Philip Kemp described the film's plot as exploring "how the curve comes to reassert itself over the straight line." The hard angles of modernity, cookie cutter mass production, the straight lines that the gray worker's walk of the new modern Paris (and the occasional striking color brought by flowers, vivid non-conformists, and the working class). The old Paris construction workers and dancing teenagers walk and move in curved, organic paths and rhythms. Tati's iconic character Mr. Hulot himself in his messy humanity is hilariously and somewhat melancholically lost in the mess of this bloodless, boxy universe. Given this paradigm, it's hard for me not to think of Judd, Andre, and the gang as purveyors of this soulless modernity, and Hesse, Szapocznikow, and Tati as bodies trying to resist its hard geometries on their round bodies, some to more violent effects than others of course (but the world has always been so much harder on women to be sure). This is a false dichotomy perhaps, but I still feel it.

Humor and play itself are rebellions against the efficiencies of modern life, the exhausting churn of perpetual work so many people in the industrial and postindustrial world find themselves in. Our generations ultra-modern materials have long left plywood and concrete behind, but we all stare at the unbroken perfection of computer screens. Apple's triumph was to make the least machine looking of machines; its sleek metal and plastic without orifice as if it was shat from a robot and never saw a human hand (which we artist too much or reduce his work to a single element) this is also a clear tactic of late-capitalism.

"Play" is one of those words that seem to litter contemporary art writing to the point where even I read one of this delightful world with a bit of a pause, but rather than dismissing a cliché, perhaps I'd rather explore why we need to feel this sense of play, why an artist like Nevine choose to make these beautiful, almost classical, post-minimalist objects out of balls and slides, along with those old
car parts and menacing hunks of metal. Not a Luddite, I don't wish to attack modernity and its mechanical advancements wholesale but such progress has casualties. The assembly line of death that both Hesse and Szapocznikow barely escaped, the industrial poisons
that eventually took them. And though the issues are maybe not so stark, we still somewhat blindly rush forward into futures without thinking of the whiplash of progress, worked to death and always complaining of being "busy," as the old John Lennon song goes, by giving us no time instead of it all. And here in the work of Nevine I find both the promise of play and the material reveal of the suppression of labor, all seen the perspective of an intelligence in full possession of a body aware of the potential casualties of our most modern desires.

Los Angeles Times, 2014

Los Angeles Times

Review

'Seven Reeds,' exploring the 'work' in works of art

December 4, 2014
By Christopher Knight

Seven Reeds," a group show of painting and sculpture at Overduin & Co., takes its title from a short 1949 documentary by Italian filmmaker Michelangelo Antonioni.

The five artists don't illustrate his film's narrative, which followed the production of synthetic rayon from natural materials all the way to finished fashions. But, using Italian Arte Povera as a starting point, they do operate in a murky, sometimes provocative area somewhere between nature and culture.

Jacob Kassay's irregularly shaped canvases are covered in finely splattered paint that looks alternately like a celestial star-map or cheap linoleum. Stretched denim torn with holes by Valentina Liernur is part working-class fashion statement, part homage to Lucio Fontana's slashed paintings, where real spaces intrude on art's typical illusions.

A glazed ceramic basketball by Nevine Mahmoud is a primordial vessel crossed with an impossible modern toy. Fredrik Vaerslev pushes wooden slats out from the wall on steel struts, the paint-splotched surface transforming a forklift pallet into an artist's palette.

Overall, the show's most consistently compelling works are Julia Rommel's abstract paintings, such as "Blitz." Rommel stretches and re-stretches linen in rectangles of different sizes. The creases formed in the material establish interior drawing along the paintings' margins, and finally she paints those linear edges and shapes in bright hues.

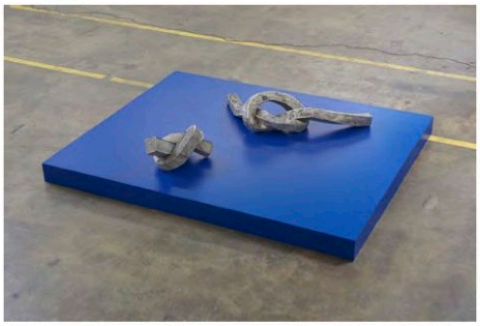
The result is a considered composition that records itself coming into being. In part, "Seven Reeds" contemplates the determined power of work within any work of art.

Overduin & Co., 6693 Sunset Blvd., Hollywood, (323) 464-3600, through Dec. 20. Closed Sun. and Mon.

Contemporary Art Daily

"SOGTFO" at François Ghebaly

April 7th, 2015



Nevine Mahmoud, Tied chunks with color box, 2015.
Image courtesy of François Ghebaly, Los Angeles.

SOGTFO (Sculpture Or Get The Fuck Out) is a critical play on the misogynistic acronym TOGTFO (Tits Or Get The Fuck Out), a prompt directed at anyone claiming to be female within online boards, chats, and forums. This prompt, which bridges "accepted" adolescent immaturity and the most menacing forms of misogyny, points to the pernicious "made by and for men" sentiment that persists in cultural realms both high and low.

Under such hegemonic primacy, male artists tend to be elevated far above their female peers, and the notion of genius is largely reserved for men. This bias resides most resolutely in the discourse surrounding the practice of sculpture, in which an emphasis on grandeur functions as the new phallus of nations, churning out massive works for even more massive sales floors, collections, and institutions.

This exhibition argues against the predominantly patriarchal imagination that has defined sculptural form, and it aims to reveal the energy, intensity, and originality being forged by artists who exchange the emptiness of grand gestures for complexity, criticality, humor, and meaningful gravitas.

Without discrediting or disregarding history, the exhibition makes a case in and for the present—a time when the market has nearly consumed every aspect of the maker—by turning our attention to five contemporary artists whose gestures in form embody the now and point to the new in Sculpture. Spanning three generations, the show introduces emerging artists Kelly Akashi, Nevine Mahmoud, and Kathleen Ryan, alongside established artists Andrea Zittel and Amanda Ross-Ho, illustrating a shift in mentorship and aesthetic lineage that argues against longstanding—and all-too-gendered—systems of artistic valuation and authority.

SOGTFO is curated by Charlie White, with accompanying texts by Sarah Lehrer-Graiwer and Charlie White.

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