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Hannah Levy

Pendulous Picnic

January 23 - February 29, 2020

Casey Kaplan is pleased to announce Hannah Levy "Pendulous Picnic," the artist's first solo exhibition with the gallery.

Levy's sculpture both incite and repel touch. By manipulating texturally incongruous materials such as silicone and steel, Levy produces tactile structures that arouse an acute bodily awareness. Her references are broad: medical equipment, hardware, prosthetics, vegetables, and furniture are anthropomorphized through welded curves and cast appendages that relate to the human form. The scale of recognizable, everyday objects is often distorted to the point of absurdity, resulting in uncanny configurations that have lost their original function. Expanding upon the visual language of artists such as Eva Hesse, Louise Bourgeois and Meret Oppenheim, Levy's sculptures are defined by their materiality and bodily consciousness.

For this exhibition, Levy presents a series of new works formally inspired by domestic décor and objects of recreation. Through these referents, her sculptures engage the aspirations and insecurities embedded within our designed environments. All of the works contain competing dualities - erotic and sterile, seductive and repulsive, humorous and disconcerting - to subvert the concept of "tastemaking" perpetuated by interior and industrial design.

In the main entryway gallery, three large-scale works hang from the ceiling on thick, metal chains. The elaborate sculptures recall distorted chandeliers – once symbols of wealth and nobility, that have since devolved into cheaply-produced and often gaudy commodities. In Levy's adaptation, the metal sculptures are shaped by exaggerated, sensual curves and adorned with flesh-like silicone, reflecting a perverse eroticism often hidden in modern design. Oversized and presented low to the ground, the sculptures confront the viewer with their own physicality and elicit a corporeal discomfort through both tactile and formal means. One work is furnished with a series of alarmingly sharp hooks, indulgently pierced with over a dozen silicone cast gourds. Another holds a large, silicone pool inflatable with distinguished air valves that take on suggestive connotations at this exaggerated scale. While amusing, the works' humor is belied by a latent anxiety that permeates throughout the exhibition.

In contrast to the extravagance of the chandeliers, a series of modestly-scaled fixtures, recalling light sconces, line the walls of the gallery. Each metal armature is welded into a curved point and holds a cast asparagus in lieu of a candle or lamp. The plump, tactile silicone is pigmented in anemic shades of beige, accentuating a homogeneous, flesh-like quality. Enlarged several times over, the asparagus rests languidly over the nickel plated steel - limp and phallic. On the floor lays a large, free-standing sculpture, embellished with menacing metal springs and taught, stretched silicone. The structure appears familiar, but the scale remains awkwardly undetermined – smaller than an outdoor trampoline, but larger than indoor rehabilitation equipment.

Levy transitions into a two-dimensional plane within the remaining gallery space, engaging recurrent themes through different means. In this room, a photograph portrays a manicured set of hands baiting a fishhook with a live worm. Recreational fishing is a pastime with both blue-collar and aristocratic affiliation. In contrast with this subject matter, the sleek, commercial aesthetic of the photograph suggests the very notion of gratuitous leisure might be illusory. The haptic focus of the image intensifies the tactility which binds all of the works in the exhibition and acknowledges the persistent desire to touch in an increasingly virtual world.

All of the works in the show conflate flesh and steel, encapsulating the bodily integration of the once external machine. With a keen material sensibility, Levy's sculptures reflect the internalization of our built and bought environments. Each component exists with the potential to be consumed, in a perverse metabolic cycle that questions the very nature of consumption - both biologic and cultural.

Levy (b. 1991, New York) received her MFA from Städelschule, Frankfurt in 2015. She has held recent solo exhibitions at Fondazione Coppola, Vicenza, Italy (2020); C L E A R I N G, New York (2018), Mother's Tankstation, Dublin (2018); Fourteen30 Contemporary, Portland (2017); White Flag Projects, St. Louis (2016) and Galerie Parisa Kind, Frankfurt (2015). Additionally, her work has been exhibited at museums internationally, including: G2 Kunsthalle, Leipzig, Germany; Yuz Museum, Shanghai; Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Denmark; Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk; MoMA PS1, New York; the Frankfurter Kunstverein, Frankfurt; SCAD Museum of Art, Savannah; Palais de Tokyo, Paris; Lever House, New York and Museum Für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt. In May of this year, Levy will unveil a major new public work, commissioned by High Line Art and Friends of the High Line, New York and on view through March 2021.