

BERLIN

“Them”

Schinkel Pavillon // June 13–July 26

ELABORATING A GENEALOGY of material-based feminist practices, “Them” at the Schinkel Pavillon brings together work by seven artists spanning several generations, though without the historical linearity this often implies. The exhibition traces shifting notions of embodiment, materiality, and abjection, from the emergence of bodily feminist practice in the 1960s and ’70s (emblemized by Carolee Schneemann’s *Meat Joy*, 1964), to more recent practices that push the gendered body toward the mass-produced and the machinic.

Much of the work in “Them” is displayed in the main room of Schinkel Pavillon, atop a series of large, swirling white platforms designed specially for the occasion; the floor, too, is partially covered by a curving yellow surface, softening the edges of the octagonal space. The exhibition centers around the work of Alina Szapocznikow, whose small corporeal sculptures, furniture-objects, and a series of photographs of chewing gum sculptures are dispersed throughout the space.

Szapocznikow’s lamp-sculptures—compositions of translucent polyester resin forming pieces of flesh, illuminated breasts and lips—break apart the body and reassemble it as abject home-design objects. In another small sculpture, *Sculpture (Fétiche IV)*, 1971, a wooden platform supports an assemblage completely covered in black-painted cloth—actually stockings and lingerie—through which semi-recognizable forms (a breast, a hand) emerge. Often considered surrealist, her sculptures in fact posit a gendered understanding of what it means for materials to be or behave bodily.

Rather than attempting to represent the body, and in doing so imply its physical and conceptual coherence, the artists in “Them” conceive of the body, especially the female body, as fragmented, instrumentalized, or dispersed. Szapocznikow’s corporeal fragmentation is echoed in Aleksandra Domanovic’s “SOHO (Substances of Human Origin)” series, 2015, in which three pairs of sculptural arms—referencing the “Belgrade hand” of the early 1960s, the first prosthetic hand with a cybernetic sense of touch—protrude from the wall, reaching out toward the viewer. The first pair of arms is matte brown, with hands clasped almost as if in prayer, while the other two are rendered in a shimmering, metallic bronze, their surfaces and functions no longer recognizably human. In one set, a hand extracts a tooth from the back of the other; beside it, a robotic right hand squeezes gel onto the flat surface of a hand-turned-ultrasound wand, emphasizing the gendered dimension of posthumanism’s fusion of body and technology.

Anicka Yi further abstracts corporeal materiality from its human form. Her *235,681K of Digital Spit*, 2010, collapses synthetic and natural materials—a plastic handbag, hair gel, and cow intestine—into a transparent, gelatinous whole, amorphous yet contained. And Alisa Baremboym’s two *Grapeshot* sculptures, both 2015, in which three layers of peach-tone ceramic spheres are arranged atop a resin base, simultaneously suggest a collection of identical body parts and the violence of the shrapnel for which they are named.

The artists in this show, exclusively women, pursue the fragmentation of the body into parts and their dispersion into the environment, into the objects and processes normally conceived of as surrounding the body rather than constituting it. For earlier generations this environment is primarily domestic—as with Szapocznikow’s lamp-sculptures or Sarah Lucas’s *Bunny Gets Snookered #3*, 1997, a drooping female figure assembled from stuffed nylon stockings and the red wheeled chair on which she lounges, in a literal integration of body and furniture—and as such reflects a conception of femininity tethered primarily to realms of domesticity and the flesh. Yet



the inclusion of more recent works complicates a narrow reading of the concerns of late 20th-century feminist practice, drawing attention to the possibilities embedded in materials themselves. The newer work propels gender into an expanded network of digital, scientific, and biocapitalist processes—a move from the governance of the body as subject to the production of subjectivity in both its embodied and intangible forms. Within this network of processes, the boundaries of the self—and in particular those selves who do not enjoy the presumed neutrality of maleness—have become unclear: who, or what, are we? Where do we end and they begin? For these artists, a provisional answer seems to lie precisely in this ambiguity; they are the other-woman, at once woman and other: object and subject, material and image, machine, animal, self. —Dana Kopel

Katja Novitskova
FROM TOP:
Approximation (Snail), 2014.
Digital print on aluminum,
87 x 57 in.

Installation view of “Them” at Schinkel Pavillon, 2015.