

NEW YORK

Rebecca Warren

Matthew Marks Gallery

Like Gerhard Richter, Rebecca Warren slips effortlessly between modes and media, producing goofy, biomorphic statues in reinforced clay, fraught with intimations of choice female parts, as well as sharp and planar geometric abstractions in steel that hint at the forces balancing, pushing, and pulling the body. Warren takes on a vast sculptural heritage in the curvaceous works, reaching back as far as the *Venus of Willendorf* to remind us that the exaggeration of sexual attributes

belongs to our earliest surviving sculptural tradition and that such amplifications were only periodically revived—think of Greek and Roman Priapic sculpture—before the rise of the avant-garde.

Circa 25,000 years ago, sex and fertility were extremely serious business—in fact, they were among the most urgent factors determining whether or not our species would survive. However, in the age of Gaston Lachaise—one of the artists to whom Warren is indebted—the female body became subject to gross distortions in an effort to discover new forms and meanings, place male sexual longings and fears squarely center stage, and shock the bourgeoisie by upsetting accepted standards of taste. Although much has been made of Warren's appropriation of the misogynistic imagery associated with Rodin, Picasso, de Kooning, and R. Crumb, it is worth recalling that female artists as different as O'Keeffe, Bourgeois, Neel, Kusama, and Benglis turned sex into a viable subject decades ago, taking over terrain previously considered an exclusive, heterosexual male hunting ground.

When treating overtly sensual subject matter, Warren uses malleable material and leaves—like Richier, Giacometti, and Fontana—ample evidence of her hand. The haptic dimensions of voluptuous bodies are thereby underscored. "Feelings," the title of her recent exhibition, referenced emotions and the sense of touch, as well as the various ways in which the former can be tied to the latter. *L* (2009) relates both to Crumb's deliciously politically incorrect über-women as horns of plenty and Boccioni's proto-Fascist *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space*. The bottom half of a voluptuous woman strides vigorously forward on tall platform shoes, her efforts apparently in vain since her body-fragment stands on top of an MDF sheet on wheels. The wheels, which rest on top of a dark brown horizontal pedestal, deconstruct the illusion—this clay figure obviously cannot move, for this is art, after all, and not nature.

Perseverance in the face of futility seems to be the message here, a particularly pertinent one in the world of art. Plain-looking pedestals made of white-painted, medium-density fiberboard are an important compo-



bar standing in for the ridge of the nose. Watch it boys, Warren is back with a vengeance.

—Michaël Amy

WARREN: © REBECCA WARREN, COURTESY MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY, NY

ment in much of Warren’s sculpture, particularly in a work like *Ren* (2009), in which dark steel plates hang over the pedestal in a hard-edged take on Dali’s limp watches and Benglis’s equally sexually explicit pours.

Warren confronts a very different, and younger, sculptural tradition in her abstract steel works—Picasso’s Synthetic Cubist sheet metal guitar, which found eloquent re-expression in Anthony Caro’s work of the ’60s.

Above: Rebecca Warren, *Nanon*, 2009. Reinforced clay on painted MDF plinth, 185 x 85 x 65 cm.

Here, Warren tackles another male preserve, namely high formalist abstraction. In these works, the abject and the grotesque make way for considerable structural elegance. *LUH 1322* consists of a sheet of metal raised on top of a short vertical white base and leaning against the wall. A thin vertical slat of steel resting on the ground presses against both the edge of the base and the sheet, as if pinning the latter to the wall. Referencing Richard Serra’s *Prop* (1968)—tough-guy sculpture *par excellence*—it evokes highly stylized tribal masks and shield-like heads reaching from Cycladic idols to the sculpture of Ernst and Moore, with the vertical