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Rebecca Warren

Press Packet

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REBE
WAR

Words
OLIVER KOERNER VON GUSTORF

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In the 1990s, when REBECCA WARREN began making sculptures out of unfired clay that looked like alien clones of Robert Crumb comix and the late sculptures of Willem de Kooning, people thought she'd lost it before she'd really begun. While her contemporaries were founding factories and turning into entrepreneurs and pop stars, it looked like Warren was going in the opposite direction, back to a more traditional, modernist approach. Now, 30 years later, the clock is starting to tick to her tune. Her latest exhibition, *The Now Voyager,* ventures into time travel, trauma, and utopia. In a rare interview with *Oliver Koerner von Gustorf,* she reflects on wrestling in that weird space since adolescence, why Degas's dancers made her cry, and how attention provides all forms, answers, and meanings

HELMUT CRUMB, 1998, clay on stacked, painted MDF plinths
Clay: 56 × 51 × 38 cm; stacked plinths: 143 × 36 × 36 cm

Previous spread: THE VISITORS, 2020, hand-painted bronze on painted MDF plinth
Bronze 1: 296 × 12 × 14 cm; bronze 2: 248 × 10 × 10 cm; plinth 44 × 146 × 50 cm

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Rebecca Warren hasn't really done much to describe or categorize her art. Although eloquent, she is wary of discussing it. She is considered one of the most important contemporary British sculptors, perhaps even the most important. If you read up on her or ask around, Warren's work is zealously revered, yet it remains an enigma to the general public, just like the person behind it. She doesn't like interviews, nor studio visits, and has surrounded herself with a small, loyal staff for years. Secluded in her London studio, she works on her mind-bending sculptures, reminiscent of corporeal planets; of twisted, knotted limbs; of mother-of-invention Minnie Mouse deities; of dinosaurs; of Giacometti totems parasitically encrusted with breasts, bellies, flags, or mushrooms; of spun-out Degas ballerinas; or lumpy, dysfunctional families.

My head was pounding. It hadn't been easy to arrange a phone conversation. About two weeks after I'd visited Vienna to see Warren's exhibition *The Now Voyager* at Belvedere 21, after we'd already had an entire email discussion, I found myself in the grip of Omicron. "How are you doing?" asked Warren in this gentle, unpretentious voice I'd previously only known from online videos. "I'm fine," I lied. She said she could imagine how I felt, because she'd also had Covid, only earlier in the summer.

She'd caught it when she went to see the Abba avatars. "Where did you go?" I asked, my brain still foggy. "Well, to the Abba Arena." Warren is a fan and just had to go see the new show. She is an absolute music and cinema geek, with a correspondingly encyclopedic depth of knowledge. And you can tell that she perceives Abba more as a pop-cultural *Gesamtkunstwerk*, like Kraftwerk, and that she loves them for exactly their camp, polished, industrial, artificial style. Warren said she *should've known*, with all those people coming from the airport, adding, after a short pause, "Now I can't listen to Abba anymore." I almost fell off the couch laughing. Only hours later did I realize that both the concert and Abba's latest album are called *Voyage*, and this isn't the only connection to Warren's *Now Voyager* exhibition in Vienna. The Abba show is so hyperreal that it becomes surreal; their virtual comeback takes you simultaneously into the past and the future, both of which overlap each other like layers. *Voyage* doesn't simply resurrect the young versions of Agnetha, Björn, Benny, and Frida as 3D renderings with the help of Industrial Light & Magic (who also do CGI for Marvel and *Star Wars*). Rather, the company created retro-futuristic "Abbatars."

With the help of motion-capture suits, the over-70-year-old band members recorded every single part of the concert for weeks—but only their movements. The choreography itself is transposed onto younger incarnations to create the final digital band. Something eerily familiar emerges from this mashed-together time soup, as prefabricated expectations are fulfilled in an almost pornographically predictable way. Yet at the same time there's something unexpected about it, a morbid, cloned-together glamour of the third kind.

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YES, OLGA, 2007, hand-painted clay on painted MDF plinth
Clay: 85 × 58 × 72 cm; plinth: 90 × 43 × 43 cm
Left: EUGENE, 2012, hand-painted bronze on painted MDF plinth
Bronze: 218 × 37 × 33 cm; plinth: 56 × 56 × 56 cm

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THE NOW VOYAGER exhibition at Belvedere 21, Vienna, 2022

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Of course, this resonates with Warren's *The Now Voyager*. The exhibition pulls out the rug from under you in similarly radical fashion, sending visitors time-traveling with completely different, utterly low-tech means. The title of the show echoes a line from Walt Whitman's "The Untold Want": "The untold want by life and land ne'er granted / Now voyager sail thou forth to seek and find." And classic cinephiles or camp homosexuals will be reminded of the fantastic melodrama *Now, Voyager* (1942), where Bette Davis falls in love on a cruise, has a glow up, and frees herself from her cold, imperious mother—don't we all want that? So this ensemble of sculptures, the heterogeneity of which Warren compares to that of the interstellar alien guests at the famous space bar in the first *Star Wars*, is all about departures and new beginnings. This departure might be in- or external, physical or transcendent, realistic or fantastic. And it is supposed to take place now, of all times, while we are all stuck, in the pandemic, in wars, in natural disasters, while art seems to have little to say or contribute.

I told Warren how impressed I was by Vienna's Belvedere 21. Originally designed by the Viennese architect Karl Schwanzer, the light-flooded space is emblematic of postwar architecture. But somehow it is also a ghost house haunted by our old belief in the inevitable progress of rational modernity.

Between and against massive walls that Warren designed for the exhibition, painted countless shades of pink, that organize, open up, or close off Belvedere 21's originally open space, her sculptures and neon collages look like an alien Abbatar version of a modernist exhibition. It's as though some extraterrestrial force, like in the horror sci-fi flicks *Annihilation* or John Carpenter's *The Thing*, had hijacked the DNA of modern art and sculpture, of postmodernism and pop culture, to combine them into some totally novel hybrid, something non-human and hyper-cultivated, simultaneously archaic and futuristic.

Right at the start, *Transformer* (2022) sticks up in the air, belly- or breast-like. At first it looks to me like a Stone Age fertility goddess with a canine Mickey Mouse head, only to turn, on closer approach, into more of a stretched-out woman's leg wearing high heels, straight out of underground comix. Every single one of Warren's sculptures is a shapeshifter, changing with your every move. You could see something reptilian, bird-like in the spherical eyeball or breast shape of *A Saint* (2022), for instance, a nipple, a pimple, something squeezed out of a hole, but then there's also something hunched or dripping about it, something that has the feel of a body belonging to an old saint simmering in Hieronymus Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (c. 1503–15). *D* (2022), meanwhile, is the abbreviated name of a sculpture frozen in a pirouette like a little ballerina with a long braid. If you keep looking at the bronze, a face might stare back at you that's reminiscent of the *Star Wars* prequels' Jar Jar Binks, only pancaked like roadkill. Walking around these sculptures, you flash through completely different eras and contexts: childhood cartoon time, hell time, trauma time, cubism, Düsseldorf, 1980s Cologne, dinosaur time, 3,000 years into the future, Robert Crumb's 1960s, the Cold War, the *fin de siècle*, tick, tock, tick, tock.

EVERY ASPECT OF BITCH MAGIC, 1996
Mixed media, 132 × 30 × 30 cm

Left: THE NOW VOYAGER, 2021–22
Hand-painted bronze on MDF trolley on painted MDF plinth
Bronze: 191 × 70 × 70 cm; plinth: 27 × 120 × 120 cm

The Now Voyager (2021–22), the eponymous female figure which almost strides out of the exhibition hall, extends a huge, lumpy hand, as if its body is emerging from the primordial soup, still soft and morphing as it steps forward into a new age. Of course, it also recalls *Clamdigger*, de Kooning's original 1972 clay figure that he cast in bronze in 1976, but it's perhaps also an allusion to the feeling of Warren's own hands. Connections to the mainly male sculpture of (postwar) modernism are everywhere. Yet at the same time, these pieces, which were sculpted from unfired clay and then cast in bronze, also repeatedly play through Warren's own repertoire: the Minnie Mouse hair bows, the breasts, and the chunky shoes that have been appearing in her work for decades now. In two pieces—*Stalker* (2010–22) and *And Who Would be My Mother (of Invention)* (2013–22)—Warren even incorporated old clay sculptures into the new ones, so that, like an Abbatar, the interval between two creative moments is fixed in one and the same form.

The Now Voyager speaks of Warren's own production as a strange, alien, even magical experience that must constantly be re-reflected from different perspectives. I asked Warren if she'd ever felt alienated or outcast when she was a teenager in the 1980s, before her studies. She did: "I definitely felt adolescent alienation, but ultimately my particular version of that alienation was my wanting to know about art—but I had no means of knowing even what the question was. And I have been wrestling in that weird space ever since."

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FEELINGS exhibition at Matthew Marks Gallery, New York, 2009
Right: CLOUSEAU (detail), 2014, hand-painted bronze on painted MDF plinth
Bronze: 237 × 52 × 48 cm; plinth: 32 × 52 × 47 cm

In fact, when Warren appeared on the London art scene in the late 1990s, she must have seemed like a total outsider. Born in 1965 in Pinhoe, Exeter, she studied at London's Goldsmiths' College, which also played an important role for Young British Artists such as Damien Hirst and Sarah Lucas. But Warren had a fundamentally different relationship to art. In interviews, she has repeatedly emphasized how much she felt blocked by the post-conceptual approach taught at Goldsmiths, and that shaped the art world at the time—the idea that art starts from a concept, a thesis, a theory that is then executed, quasi-illustrated, and implemented in the work. In the middle of Tony Blair's Cool Britannia, in a Western art world where artists were increasingly becoming entrepreneurs and self-promoters, collaborating with companies and founding their own art factories, at a time when studio art, the artist's magical touch, and affect-charged expressiveness were all completely out, when everything had to be smooth, smooth, smooth, Warren made her first big splash with, erm, raw clay.

In 1998, without further ado, she reconstructed a quite funny cartoon from a Robert Crumb comic called *Girls, Girls, Girls* (1972), in which Crumb's lustful gaze reduces one of his typically busty women with gigantic buttocks to her lower half: high heels, calves, ass, the legs connected at the top by a piece of flesh indicating labia. Warren turned it into a clay figure about 60 centimeters high, placing it on an MDF base. The result resembles an archway, and, in front of it, on the same board, she placed another female lower body, at a smaller scale, consisting only of buttocks and slightly knocked legs on which a pulled-down pair of panties snags. This figure recreates a Helmut Newton photograph. The inspiration for that rough approach toward Newton's high-end pictures was a photographic work by Martin Kippenberger, whom Warren also admires, *Helmut Newton für Arme* (Helmut Newton for the poor, 1985). In it, Kippenberger staged himself wearing a headscarf and hideous folkloric skirt in front of hideous curtains and a flower arrangement in an orange milk jug. That double sculpture, which Warren calls *Helmut Crumb* (1998), was a big hit, but it didn't only provoke enthusiasm: "When I started making things in raw clay, no one else was. People came to my first show and said my work was disgusting—and that I had lost my mind. I was on my own with that, but I was unafraid, as I was used to that feeling."

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The unfired clay stood in stark contrast to the idea of the perfect commodity surface, the finish of high-end artificial products. In addition, Warren showed wall-mounted display cases made of MDF containing small clay figures, *objets trouvés*, painted wood, partial neon signs. Like the raw clay, the cases embodied an unfinished sculptural process, a precarious, improvised visual language that approached things carefully, shakily, uncertainly. These types of wall works were also present in Vienna. They act like archaeological containers, memories of a future when mysterious hieroglyphs relay the legacies of bygone lives, bygone cultures. You can see them as pared-down scores, cryptic alphabets of forms and objects, sentences and arguments that still need to be thought further through. At the same time, Warren's MDF and neon works, and her handling of pedestals and walls, echo the pared-down West German art of Imi Knoebel, Blinky Palermo, Charlotte Posenenske, Isa Genzken, perhaps even something of Sigmar Polke's 1960s paintings: the hardware-store aesthetic, and the way these postwar generations translated the utopian spirit of Bauhaus and the Russian avant-garde into post-minimalism and West German consumer culture with an industrial yet transcendent approach. Warren might play a similar relay role—only for the digitized 21st century.

"I'm trying to find the place where the work itself is guiding me towards it, from its remote and strange place of origin," Warren said. Her practice, which doesn't start from a fixed idea, but from experimentation with materials, experimentation without a fully defined goal, seems completely contemporary today—as does her combining completely divergent strategies and formal approaches. But back then, before the 2008 financial crisis, when art, business, and popular culture partied together as a hedonistic gold rush set in, the raw, unfinished, and sexual aspects of Warren's sculptures were seen as their distinguishing features, and she was quickly seen as a figurative artist, a provocateur who questions the male modernist canon. "I think this generalization, that any woman on the scene is necessarily breaking down gender barriers and clearing men out of the way and establishing women in their place, represents a completely outdated attitude," Warren said. "In any case, it doesn't help me or my art."

How complex her approach to sculpture really is becomes clear looking at *Bunny* (2002) and *Pony* (2003), works alluding to Edgar Degas's almost lifelike *La petite danseuse de quatorze ans*, which the artist made around 1880 after the young Marie van Goethem, a Belgian dancer at the Opéra de Paris. I tell Warren how incredibly wonderful and at the same time disturbing I find Degas's depictions of the Opéra's dancers and procuresses, the men with their top hats lurking backstage for prey. Degas realistically captured the overlap between opera and brothel, but he also created a David Lynch hell for little girls luminously glowing in powder and pastel tones. There's

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SHE exhibition at Maureen Paley, London, 2003

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something sadistic in his work, especially in the tutu-clad wax sculpture of the little dancer, which was later recast in bronze almost 50 times, a complete lack of empathy combined with a pursuit of absolute perfection and beauty. In Warren's translation of the dancer, she appears like a raver on Robert Crumb steroids, more proletarian, grown up, and confident, but at the same time petrified, cast in lava, preserved by the hot rays of Degas's infernal psychedelic sun. Over the years, these dancers have appeared in her work again and again. With 2005's *Pas de Deux* at the Matthew Marks Gallery, Warren dedicated an entire exhibition to such performers: in *The Twins* (2004) and *Come, Helga* (2006), she duplicated the dancers into couples, just like avatars shaped after people, dance steps repeated, alternative futures running parallel.

But what captivated her so much about Degas's sculpture? "My initial connection to that sculpture was that I heard that Degas had carried it around like a homunculus talisman. That made me wonder, 'Well, what is that about?' He sort of clung to it—and so my interest was in this weird magnetic relationship that happened between the sculptor and the sculpture. It is like some sort of parable of intense, mad love." How can you deal with such a relationship without automatically becoming a feminist, I asked her. "His work does have that hardcore duality," she replied. "The complex beauty of Degas's dancers made me cry when I saw them at the Met. They make me think deeply about important fantastic sadness."

What a fabulous answer, I thought. Looking at her work over the last 20 years, it's completely ahead of its time in its non-binary, non-dualistic thinking, in its grandiosity and uncertainty, in its humor, utter seriousness, and poetry.

Perhaps Warren's time has really come, now that we're all so thoroughly unsettled. Her work leaves a lot of room for embarrassment and shame, and that's crucial to her, Warren said in an interview about her Turner Prize nomination in 2006. In fact, if you look at the lumpy figures mounted on boards with wheels—with titles such as *And Who Would Be My Mother or Homage to R. Crumb, My Father*—that she showed in 2003's *She* exhibition at Maureen Paley in London, her groupings often resemble the therapeutic practice of family constellations. This approach involves carefully positioning people in a room to stand in for the subject's family members and thus to visualize their relationships and traumas. You might look at the grouping of *The Now Voyager* the same way. I asked her if there was any link to therapy. "Yes, I think that there are some affinities," Warren replied. "Also because these are my beings, and they are therefore to some extent alive. I have been instrumental in making that happen. I find I love these things when I have made them. They have become lovable beings for me." "But what about the masculine, modernist dogma that art must never be therapy, but always needs a superstructure?" I asked rather boldly. "I'm not convinced that such a dogma fully exists, or that it permeates everything in that way. I think that the important structure for art is the training of attention in a certain way at everything. And that attention provides all the forms, and answers and meanings."

I was reminded of one of Warren's most mysterious and important works, *Every Aspect of Bitch Magic*, in which she summed up her ideas about sculpture back in 1996. On a white MDF base, she placed a shell, a shard of green glass, a pair of underwear, a safety pin, a cardboard box, a jar with a hairband around it and a dead bee in it—she'd received the latter from a friend as a gift. On the base, she installed a wooden frame for a plexiglass case, which was never added, and against the cardboard box she leaned an envelope over which she had stretched a pair of panties, gently padding the crotch with dryer lint. The envelope, in turn, was stuffed with slides of Warren's work. The result looks like a haiku-turned-sculpture, a magic spell, an Emily Dickinson poem—"I heard a Fly buzz—when I died"—a poetic Abbatar somehow embracing the most variegated states and times. Human time and bee time coexisting as one.

Time and again, Warren's art has been described as a-linguistic, undecipherable, the antithesis of the postmodernists' toying with literality and meaning. In light of *Every Aspect of Bitch Magic*, I recall a later essay by the British art critic John Berger on translation: "True translation is not a binary affair between two languages but a triangular affair. The third point of the triangle being what lay behind the words of the original text before it was written. True translation demands a return to the pre-verbal. We read and reread the words of the original texts in order to penetrate through them, to reach, to touch the vision or experience which prompted them." That's another way to understand Warren's sculptures, as reverse translations into something pre-verbal. Her otherworldly sculptures take us out of our comfort zone. They trigger us. Perhaps they teleport us back to repressed visions or experiences we have no other means of grasping. Or maybe they take us into the future and anticipate events that are only a millimeter ahead of us. Nothing is too embarrassing or unspeakable for them. Decorated with pompoms, bellies, giant breasts, platform shoes, thin and sacred like totems, they become our companions, turn us into Now Voyagers, travel with us through these difficult, hellish, exposed times toward our own important fantastic sadness.

THIS IS THE DAY, 2017–22, hand-painted bronze on painted MDF plinth
Bronze: 10 × 63 × 46 cm; plinth: 14 × 120 × 110 cm

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THE BROOKLYN RAIL
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

ArtSeen

Rebecca Warren: *V*

By Louis Block

The English *lung* is derived from an early German phrase for "the light organ"—so named because in a stewing pot of offal, lungs float while the rest sinks. Lungs are airy in both life and death, holding vital atmosphere then bloating with putrid gas; it's no wonder their inner workings resemble trees caught up in a cycle of decomposition and rebirth. So, rounding the modulating volumes of Rebecca Warren's bronzes, there is a sensation of halted breath, as if each successive facet of the sculptures represents petrification in a different register, from taxidermy to grand monuments. Their sensitively touched surfaces, like the dabs of color in Childe Hassam's flag paintings, are acknowledgements of wind, stubbornly permanent.

Rebecca Warren, *A Glyph* (detail), 2020. Hand-painted bronze on painted MDF pedestal, 74 7/8 x 17 x 14 1/8 inches. © Rebecca Warren. Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery.

Warren's forms live somewhere between dimension and flatness, curling and wagging in profile view as if they could become inflated; but they are cast in heavy metal, and pigments drip down their faces like guano on a lone roost out at sea. *Jumper* (all works 2020) is optimistically skybound: a cow turning its nose to the sun or a toe mid-kick on the dancefloor, while *Kutoff* is weighed down by its drippy maw, evidence of either satiation or a crippling wound. Warren is comfortable in this anthropomorphic register, where each visible touch only bolsters a piece's animated energy. The titular sculpture braces the viewer with its shield-like front, but then, the form

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curls and darkens into its stem around the side, so that the whole thing is caught in an act of metamorphosis. And what an appropriate title: *V.*, its intersecting lines like two branches extending from the center or limbs collapsing into loam, migratory birds crossing overhead or a raptor's dive into the ocean. The viewer becomes a celestial body, circling the subject and subjecting it to time, a verdant shoot growing tall, then blackened by necrosis, and rising again out of the dirt. The skinniness of Warren's sculptures allows for multiple lives; stepping around them and blinking creates a visceral zoetrope.

If these are lungs on pedestals, then their spongy tissue seems used, prodded, and wrung out. *Sibyl* is the only piece that strays from the organic, and it is more like a garment or flag caught on a limb than a sentient being. Its rectangle acts as a canvas for Warren's graffito, a circle crossed through by a diagonal line. Other works are decorated with small characters: circles, arcs, and slashes, but their meaning is immediately subsumed by surface—heat winning out over gesture and gravity so that the picture plane is always mottled. The reckoning of mark with form is most accomplished in *The Visitors*, where black and white lines stumble up the lengths of two slender columns. The lines' strange harmony seems to invoke the proto-alphabet of cavemen in a way that the other marks don't; when the gestures conform to their substrate, they are effective, but when they begin to ideate, they seem to dissolve.

Warren has a long history of working with doubles and with the imperfection of repeats, both in the infinite variation of hand building and in the confusion of editioning when cast forms are hand painted. In *The Territory*, two bronze casts rest on identical towers of crates-become-pedestals, deviating only in their patinas of clay and pigment on wood. As for the bronzes, which look like

Rebecca Warren, *V.* (detail), 2020. Hand-painted bronze on painted MDF pedestal, 72 1/4 x 13 3/4 x 13 inches. © Rebecca Warren. Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery.

Block, Louis. "Rebecca Warren: V." *The Brooklyn Rail,* May 2021.

Rebecca Warren, *The Territory*, 2020. Hand-painted bronze on painted MDF pedestal, 83 5/8 x 88 1/4 x 25 3/4 inches. © Rebecca Warren. Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery.

flattened lobes or flags at half mast, their surfaces are crisscrossed by brushstrokes of blue, black, and sienna. What are these imperfect twins? Windsocks, compass needles, or—like Felix Gonzalez-Torres's *"Untitled" (Perfect Lovers)* (1991)—markers of difference? Is the body present in the air between, busy stacking those boxes and painting the bronze? After all, assemblages seem arbitrary until they are doubled.

Primeval and metamorphic, this language is a departure for Warren, and represents a new way of engaging with the body. Where her former sculptures were concerned with the grotesque, and touch was an incessant reminder of the distorting gaze transforming every bulbous outcropping into breast or phallus, these forms are more intimate. Warren's desire to create alien shapes is so intense that she has removed all exterior markers of the human body; but imagination fails to create a new paradigm for life, and organic shapes retain their associations with the body. This is what convinces me of the forms' interiority: stripped of all appearances, they are undeniably human. Like skin, color lays atop feeling, and the slowly shifting volumes of bodies breathe in and out, creating lightness in a heavy medium.

Contributor

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Louis Block is a painter based in Brooklyn.

Block, Louis. "Rebecca Warren: V." *The Brooklyn Rail,* May 2021.

BROWN

DATE

May 19, 2021

'Large Concretised Monument to the Twentieth Century' installed on Brown's College Green

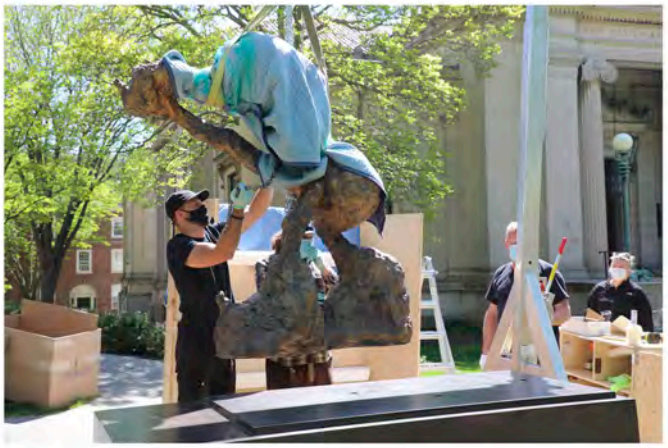
The University's public art collection will host British artist Rebecca Warren's huge bronze sculpture, a comment on gender, identity and the role of monuments in public space, for the next five years.

"Large Concretised Monument to the Twentieth Century" will remain on campus through 2026. Photo by Nick Dentamaro/Brown University

PROVIDENCE, R.I [Brown University] — Passersby venturing across Brown's College Green in recent days may likely have noticed a striking new addition to the University's public art collection. Installed prominently near Friedman Hall on Friday, May 14, a 6-foot-tall bronze sculpture by distinguished contemporary sculptor Rebecca Warren now greets students, staff and faculty as they walk onto the green from George Street.

"'Large Concretised Monument to the Twentieth Century' installed on Brown's College Green." *Brown University News*, May 19, 2021.

The British artist creates bronze, clay and steel sculptures that are not so much literal transcriptions of the human body, but rather seem to reflect the messy vigor and vitality of being alive, often with a sensual flair.



A team of workers carefully install the sculpture May 14 on the College Green. Photo by Stephen Crocker/Brown University

Dietrich Neumann, a professor of the history of art and architecture who chairs Brown's Public Art Working Group, says that "Large Concretised Monument to the Twentieth Century" — with its exaggerated, knobby and vaguely humanoid figure — is no exception.

The artwork presents a visceral, boisterous comment on the roles of gender, identity and the male gaze in the 20th century, he said, and adds a dynamic and humorous counterpart to Henry Moore's "Reclining Figure No. 2 — Bridge Prop" and Giuseppe Penone's "Idee di Pietra," two nearby installations on the College Green.

It's also sure to provoke discussion, especially after a series of spirited events during the academic year about the role of monuments in public spaces.

"By calling the piece a 'monument,' Warren questions what we have habitually put on pedestals in public space," Neumann said. "Her piece thus provides a provocative contribution to our intense debates about monuments on campus last year, which we hope to continue as students return."

Warren prioritizes texture in her work and is known for her tactile, visceral three-dimensional forms. Photo by Nick Dentamaro/ Brown University

In response to the installation, Brown's David Winton Bell Gallery will exhibit "Spectrums: Gender in the Bell Collection" through July 18. "Spectrums" contains myriad interpretations of gender that are not always "concretised" or reified, but rather embodied and performed in unexpected ways. Brown community members enrolled in the University's COVID-19 testing program can make a reservation to view the exhibition.

Neumann said that additional programming, including a discussion with Warren, will be scheduled

"'Large Concretised Monument to the Twentieth Century' installed on Brown's College Green." *Brown University News*, May 19, 2021.

during the 2021-22 academic year. A loan to Brown's public art collection, the sculpture arrived through the generosity of an anonymous donor and will remain on the College Green through 2026.

"Large Concretised Monument to the Twentieth Century," which Warren created in 2007, has been displayed in the New York City Civic Center and London's Chiswick Park, among other locations.

The sculpture comes to Brown through the work of the Public Art Working Group in collaboration with the Corporation's Subcommittee on Public Art, both of which are dedicated to making public art part of the day-to-day experience of campus and to enriching the cultural, intellectual and scholarly life of the University and the broader communities.

"'Large Concretised Monument to the Twentieth Century' installed on Brown's College Green." *Brown University News,* May 19, 2021.

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artcritical
the online magazine of art and ideas

Thursday, April 8th, 2021

Making Modernism Her Own: Rebecca Warren at Matthew Marks

by **Robert Taplin**

Rebecca Warren: V at Matthew Marks Gallery

March 18 to May 1, 2021
22 West 22nd Street, between 10th and 11th avenues New York City, matthewmarks.com

The nine relatively small bronzes in Rebecca Warren's current exhibition hold the generous spaces at the Matthew Marks Gallery with remarkable authority. Warren has taken the traditions of modernist sculpture and turned them to her own purposes. The bronzes are roughly modelled and painted in a manner reminiscent of Giacometti or more recently, Bryan Hunt or William Tucker. The shapes are mostly a loosely planar leaf or pod suspended from a stem or trunk. The primary shape droops or waves or slumps with an extra support and, in one case, has a hole in it. Several of the pieces look like a placenta still on an umbilical cord or a piece of underwater plant life. They are all energetically painted on the raw bronze with lots of blues, white, and sparing amounts of red and green, often employing drippy vertical lines in contrasting colors and an occasional crude circle or oblong. One piece, titled "A Glyph," has what could be read as a snowy landscape with a door or window painted on one side.

Rebecca Warren, The Territory, 2020. Hand-painted bronze on painted MDF pedestal, 83⅝ × 88¼ × 25¾ inches, 1 of 2 casts, each painted uniquely. Courtesy of the artist and Matthew Marks Gallery

Warren has also adapted Brancusi's innovation of giving the pedestal nearly equal status with the sculpture. Each of her pieces has a precisely designed pedestal, constructed of MDF and painted in pastel shades of salmon or in one instance a deep brown. The pedestals are like miniature stages or desks, with sometimes a small step in front or a backsplash in the rear. They set the piece at a precise height and assert their frontality, while encouraging a backstage view. As with David Smith, the edge view is active but subordinate. Two pieces are doubles, using two identical or similar casts set side by side. To this viewer's eye, they are less successful but they do help to round out the show and hold the space.

As Postmodernism recedes in the rearview mirror, it is quite thrilling to see a sculptor forthrightly embrace the modernist tradition and make it her own, and in such a stylish fashion. "The only way out is through" rings true.

Installation shot of Rebecca Warren V at Matthew Marks Gallery, New York, 2021.

THE NEW YORKER

ART

Rebecca Warren

Flags at half-staff, Neolithic axes, drooping roses, and human figures can all be found in—or, at least, projected onto—Warren's new hand-painted bronzes, on view at the Matthew Marks gallery. The British sculptor's touch is fresh and noncommittal (she models the objects in clay first), and the nine pieces here might have been made yesterday, found on Mars, or recovered from a dig. (The artist is clearly aware of her modernist forebears, such as Giacometti, but her attitude toward them feels blithely referential, rather than reverential.) The choice of brown and petal-pink pedestals—objects so specific that they read as minimalist sculptures in their own right—is a love match with the pieces that they support. Warren has been working along similar lines for almost three decades, juxtaposing haptic modelled forms and sleeker methods of display; here, she reaches new heights of unfussy grace. The glossy multicolor surfaces of her bronzes render them almost as sumptuous as they are aloof—gifts from an untroubled, unconscious mind.— *Johanna Fateman (matthewmarks.com)*

Fateman, Johanna. "Rebecca Warren." *The New Yorker,* April 12, 2021, p. 5.

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Smith, Laura and Rebecca Warren. "Rebecca Warren: 'From the Mess of Experience.'" *Tate Etc*, Autumn 2017, cover, pp. 52–59.

Artist Interview

In the run-up to Rebecca Warren's *All That Heaven Allows*, the inaugural exhibition for Tate St Ives' new gallery, Tate Etc. visited her east London studio with the show's curator to talk about clay, steel, pompoms, Warren's wide-ranging influences (from Rodin to disco) and shaking off her art school training

Rebecca Warren

'From the mess of experience'

Smith, Laura and Rebecca Warren. "Rebecca Warren: 'From the Mess of Experience.'" *Tate Etc*, Autumn 2017, cover, pp. 52–59.

Smith, Laura and Rebecca Warren. "Rebecca Warren: 'From the Mess of Experience.'" *Tate Etc*, Autumn 2017, cover, pp. 52–59.

LAURA SMITH Your work in sculpture is so varied, from your clay and bronze figures to your use of neon and collage, and the miniature worlds of your MDF vitrines. How does all of this begin?

REBECCA WARREN I don't really know where it comes from. From a sort of strange nowhere. Then gradually something comes out into the light. There are impulses, half-seen shapes, things that might have stuck with you from decades ago, as well as more recently. It's all stuff in the world going through you as a filter...

LS So, how does this filter deal with such a broad range of influences? When I look at your work I am thinking about Willem de Kooning or Minnie Mouse simultaneously, or about Alberto Giacometti and The Michael Zager Band (whose 1977 disco hit *Let's All Chant* you've used as the title for one of your recent sculptures).

'I realised that I didn't have to fear things that I liked. I didn't need permission to like them.'

RW Things of any kind come up from below – much more than they are dropped from above by me. That's how they have to work, otherwise they're add-ons, dubious justifications... You discover what bits of the world keep nagging at you and fascinating you because they won't leave you or your work alone. In my case, there are lots of things, including artists' works from the fairly distant and recent past – Rodin, Picasso, de Kooning, etc. And there have been Helmut Newton's photographs and Robert Crumb's cartoons... and a whole lot of other stuff – the New York Dolls, Bowie... The Michael Zager Band's *Let's All Chant* probably surfaced because of its insane glam – overcooked to an unusual degree: *'Your body, my body, everybody move your body...'*

LS Yes, and these things often find their way into your studio, physically – from a picture of an enraged-looking Maria Callas to a photograph of a cat by Peter Fischli and David Weiss on the cover of *Parkett* magazine. What's the importance of surrounding yourself with these images or objects in the place where you work?

RW I collect pictures and notes that have some potential, or are funny, or help rather than hinder. The studio is where the mess coagulates into certain kinds of realities. Nothing else happens in there, which makes a studio quite a strange place in the general run of the world, like a slightly crazy shrine to your own thought processes. The *Parkett* cover was a turning point for me, because when I first saw it I realised that art could be a picture of a cat standing on a rainy pavement. I realised that I didn't have to fear things that I liked. I didn't need permission to like them. I had to unlearn the 80s Goldsmiths' (where I did my BA) ethos, where we were supposed to believe in a certain kind of conceptualism that proved itself to be detrimental to creative thinking and action. I would never put pictures on my studio walls in case they were wrong! When I met artist Fergal Stapleton (during my MA at Chelsea), he told me that I could start with the material itself, and begin my relationship to some kind of inchoate idea or impulse in that way. I could choose a material, and the art would tell me what it might be as it developed in that material. This was a crucial breakthrough.

LS Could you say something more about your relationship to the materials you use – clay, bronze, steel, pompoms, paper, neon. What is your attraction to each material and how do they relate to one another?

RW I have always varied materials in order to keep things open, and not get stuck. Sometimes I use paper in collages and constructions. I like impermanence, lightness. There's also an element of early learning when using paper – of scribbling, tearing, discarding. It's nice to bring those things to the centre sometimes.

I first used neon in collaboration with Fergal Stapleton in the early 90s. We didn't want to use it in a way that stuck too closely to its normal use – making words, declarative phrases (as those who immediately followed us – into the exact same neon shop! – did). We liked its other qualities, as a material, an element in a field. I still use it like this. At first I couldn't afford it, so I would use bits they threw out, which for some reason was mainly the letter O. So a lot of my early vitrines had Os in them. Neon glows and spreads the colour. Where that colour ends is hard to define. That's a thing I like. I often paint the neon glass, or half-obscure it with other elements in a collage or a vitrine. It's a strange material, half-seen, even when you look straight at it. Its nature is incidental, mystical light.

Steel has its unshakeable macho connotations – but that's not all it's got. I like to paint it sometimes, to mess about with it, to put a pompom or some other little element on it. It's a ground and it's the thing itself. It's heavy and dark and in the way and very present – like a bad shadow.

You can polish nice highlights into bronze. If you paint it, it becomes made of paint throughout – or the paint has form – or the two impact each other at odd mental angles. Some of my work is made to be cast in bronze, some is made to stay as clay. I first used clay in 1998 with *Helmut Crumb* followed by my show *The Agony and the Ecstasy* at Maureen Paley, London in 2000, which consisted predominantly of clay works. Using clay was extremely unfashionable at that time. People laughed at me and thought I'd lost my mind. But I knew I had found something quite powerful and real for me.

Pompoms are so gorgeous, why *wouldn't* you have them in your art?! Put onto other materials, they destabilise the inherent qualities. They reduce weight. They float, they

Smith, Laura and Rebecca Warren. "Rebecca Warren: 'From the Mess of Experience.'" *Tate Etc*, Autumn 2017, cover, pp. 52–59.

Rebecca Warren's
east London
studio, July 2017

Smith, Laura and Rebecca Warren. "Rebecca Warren: 'From the Mess of Experience.'" *Tate Etc*, Autumn 2017, cover, pp. 52–59.

Smith, Laura and Rebecca Warren. "Rebecca Warren: 'From the Mess of Experience.'" *Tate Etc*, Autumn 2017, cover, pp. 52–59.

land. They're like dustballs. They're decorative and intrinsic at the same time. When you put any of these things together, if you follow some need in these relationships, they can go off into strange places…

LS You've talked in the past about pushing and pulling and manipulating clay, which you then solidify – along with your own fingerprints – in bronze. This feels like something very different to the less conscious, more chance circumstances in which the collages are made. Do different materials change the way you work?

RW It's all manipulation. The human hand can do a lot of things. Exact levels of consciousness and chance are indefinable. There's always a tension between doing and being done to – or channelling. It's all one, since even the most deliberate act is made from the dark unknown stuff beneath the surface of your mind.

LS So is there an autobiographical aspect to your work?

RW I don't think it can be otherwise. It's all happening in the machine of your head, the person, from the mess of experience. You can't make someone else's art. It is surprising how you can be reminded that you were always going to end up doing this stuff anyway. My mum recently showed me all these drawings I did as a kid of twin ballerinas standing on a box. I had forgotten about them, but there they are in my grown-up art: doubled ballerinas on their shared plinth. Strange!

LS For me, there are also always allusions to various cultural (both high and low) clichés of femininity in your work, which you twist and distort in ways that are pointed, or funny, or exaggerated, or heart-breaking.

RW I like to mix things up, turn things on their heads. I'm not a stickler for thinking there is, or isn't, a categorical difference between high and low, so I mess around in there too. In the end, you like the things you like, and, if you like the whole of something, that's noticeable. I like the whole of Rodin and Iggy Pop, for instance, and almost the whole of the Todds (Solondz and Haynes, film directors)... When I was drawn to clay, I was also drawn to Crumb and his way of getting to his own desirable forms without worrying about disapproval. Cartoons boil everything down to essential

Rebecca Warren
Helmut Crumb 1998, reinforced clay on two stacked, painted MDF plinths, clay, 55.9 × 50.8 × 38.1 cm

Rebecca Warren
Let's All Chant 2017, painted steel and pompom, 119 × 340 × 235 cm

Rebecca Warren
Los Hadeans (III) 2017, hand-painted bronze and pompom on painted MDF plinth, 226 × 100 × 68 cm

curves. It was a useful – and risky – place to start when I was trying to get an understanding of my own ideas. I used to worry a lot about meaning and where it should come from. Initially I wanted my work to be robustly female, to push that side of things, and this helped in that it allowed me to make anything at all! Starting out, I was holding onto the idea that I needed these anchors to make things. That's pretty much cured now and I've gone on without any need for these qualifiers. Ultimately, I realised that my brain just doesn't work like that. I gradually discovered that, for me, art is made from freedom and openness to possibilities. Hopefully the realities in all this and the actual answers to these questions emerge in precise forms in the art that I make.

LS How do you think these ideas will emerge in what you are making for Tate St Ives?

RW For St Ives, I've revisited *Let's All Chant* 2017, which is a large, pink steel work. It seemed like it could have another life in another venue. (The earlier version was shown at Matthew Marks Gallery in LA.) I've made four new large bronze sculptures. They're recognisably from a certain family of my work, but there's always some new form or idea at play. They seem quite pagan, like standing stones. Putting them on the floor without plinths will make them very present in a different way. I've also revisited *Los Hadeans* 2017, another series of bronze sculptures – painting them differently – and this will be the first time anything from this family has been seen in the UK. I've made new clay work and new collages. There are also collages I made a while ago and have never shown till now. It occurred to me that these works are only realised fully once they're shown. Till then they're full of a kind of latency – latency peculiar to themselves. I wanted to resist just making giant things for a big room. Everything is always made at its finished size, never scaled up from maquettes. Always hand-eye, hand-eye.

LS Apart from the scale of the new gallery at Tate St Ives, has the location and history of the town affected your decisions when making and thinking about the exhibition?

Smith, Laura and Rebecca Warren. "Rebecca Warren: 'From the Mess of Experience.'" *Tate Etc*, Autumn 2017, cover, pp. 52–59.

RW St Ives is at the edge of the land, so it's like a sort of concentrated sump of all sorts of things – gentility, excellence, bland strangeness – a lot of things. There's something very pagan in there too. I went there to see how it is, to try and pick up something from it – St Ives' history, the ghost of Hepworth. It was nice to look again at Hepworth. A continuity of that history is always in play in circumstances as dense as these: here were the post-war modernists, the post-Picassoists, working out and enjoying new possibilities. We're post that, two and three generations later. Each generation has more to go on – or more to ignore. Once I had sort of taken in St Ives, I tried to forget it… I wanted to avoid pastiche and generalisation. St Ives is quite a mad place in a way. It's the end of the world, the bottom of the Earth, down and down. The title for the exhibition came to me quite early on – *All That Heaven Allows* (from Douglas Sirk's 1955 film of the same name). Optimism and limitation. No matter what, this is as far as you can go.

LS You once said that it takes quite a lot of balls to stand in front of one of your sculptures and say, 'I made that'. What did you mean by that, and do you still feel the same way?

RW You make the art you make, not the art you think you should make, or the art you wish you could make… There is a point when you have to accept what it is that you actually can do. I think I'm a bit out there on my own with the things I make. I think my level of commitment to the actual demands of the art itself, the forms themselves, is unusual. It can run away with you and you have to accept it. It can take you by surprise and not be the thing you expected. In the early days my sculptures weren't crated – just wheeled out to the lorries. So there'd be blokey shippers pushing the sculptures by their curvy extremities: many opportunities to be mortified!

It's all made from what you take in. And you have to make it all from a good unconscious place, not your ego. I have followed the art where it leads. Something in the various scales and general appearances can be quite awkward and so quite worrisome to stand next to and boldly claim them as your own. After all, this is me. This is my mind, my life. They are exposures of my intimate relations to art and the world.

Rebecca Warren: All That Heaven Allows, supported by Tate St Ives Members, Tate Members and the Rebecca Warren Exhibition Supporters Group, Tate St Ives, 14 October – 7 January 2018.

Rebecca Warren lives and works in London. She talked to Laura Smith, Curator, Tate St Ives. Photography of Rebecca's Warren's studio by Hugo Glendinning. An extended version of this interview will appear in the exhibition catalogue *Rebecca Warren: All That Heaven Allows*, published by Tate St Ives in October.

Smith, Laura and Rebecca Warren. "Rebecca Warren: 'From the Mess of Experience.'" *Tate Etc*, Autumn 2017, cover, pp. 52–59.

Smith, Laura and Rebecca Warren. "Rebecca Warren: 'From the Mess of Experience.'" *Tate Etc*, Autumn 2017, cover, pp. 52–59.

ARTFORUM

LOS ANGELES

Rebecca Warren

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

View of "Rebecca Warren," 2017. Photo: Sean Logue.

In the Hadean period, the earliest geologic era in earth's history, the planet's defining characteristic was its hot, molten surface, which would ultimately cool and harden to create the relatively stable terra firma we enjoy today. Much later, following the arrival of *Homo sapiens*, the Bronze Age would see the advent of metal tools, after which the sturdier iron supplanted bronze; the alloy would thereafter become the medium of choice for artisans and sculptors. British artist Rebecca Warren recently produced a series of painted bronze sculptures titled "Los Hadeans" (all works 2017), whose spindly forms, like cattails gone to seed, call to mind both amorphous protean globs and the blue-chip bronze figurative works on which they are commonly seen as riffs. Yet Warren has remarked that her titles are intentional red herrings, and her "Hadeans," invariably described as Giacomettiesque, on closer inspection reveal themselves to be rather squirrelly and coy, diverging from both Giacometti's pathos and the primordial Sturm und Drang of their namesake period.

One of these sculptures includes a diminutive yarn pom-pom of the sort that one might make at summer camp, which linked it to other likewise adorned pieces among the works on display across Matthew Marks's two Los Angeles galleries. *Los Hadeans (III)*, a lanky shape with two legs, a headlike lump crowned with a spire, and a flat plane

Kron, Cat. "Rebecca Warren." *Artforum* 56, no. 1, September 2017, pp. 335–36.

extending from its midsection that brings to mind a matador's flag, has a pom-pom affixed where the figure's right eye might be. The adjacent work *Let's All Chant* also featured a pom-pom, in this case pertly perched on an angular, table-like structure of shiny painted steel, held in place by a skinny pink beam that sliced across the room and rested against the table's surface. As the only non-"Hadean" work in this gallery, the piece underscored the signature tension in Warren's practice between the lumpily figurative and the sleekly planar. In both modes, Warren leans heavily on art-historical precedents. Her figures reference not only Giacometti but also Futurist sculptors such as Constantin Brancusi and Umberto Boccioni, while her boxy structures are more anodynely minimal—save for their plushy additions. Yet all of Warren's citations, from the explicit to the generic, seem chosen to serve as heroic foils for her deliberately flippant surface treatments and embellishments. Indeed, *Let's All Chant* is painted in a color I must resignedly describe as "millennial pink"—the much derided yet omnipresent hue of 2016.

While this somewhat forced dialectic of competing formal languages dominated the works on view at the gallery's North Orange Grove location, those at the adjacent Santa Monica Boulevard space demonstrated the artist's knack for nuance. Here, a similarly spare figure, *Nini,* was on view alongside two medium-size, fuzzball-sporting monoliths (*Early Sculpture* and *Old Age*) and a curious wall work titled *All That Heaven Allows*. Neon tubing contorted into a squiggled S links this composition's two centrally positioned pom-poms, both attached to a peach-painted MDF support, while a third pink pom-pom sits on the work's upper-left edge.

Pom-poms are funny, but they're also sad—abject things shaken from the sidelines or impotently tethered to caps. In *All That Heaven Allows*, Warren lets the kitschy melodrama of Douglas Sirk's eponymous 1955 film creep in, but there is also some of the subdued despair of Todd Haynes's 2002 remake, *Far from Heaven*. The result is a deceptively complicated work, full of human contradiction. This piece transcended the hyperbolically hellish connotations of an underworld before the Bronze Age as much as it did the constellation of references that threatened to overtake many of the show's other inclusions. In so doing, it single-handedly shifted the exhibition's tone from one of sardonic referentiality to a melancholic reflection on our postmillennial present.

—*Cat Kron*

Kron, Cat. "Rebecca Warren." *Artforum* 56, no. 1, September 2017, pp. 335–36.

ArtReview

Rebecca Warren

Matthew Marks Gallery, Los Angeles 22 April – 17 June

Seven of the sculptures from the series *Los Hadeans* (all works 2017) in Rebecca Warren's exhibition take their names from a geologic era known as the Hadean period, which passed roughly 4.5 billion years ago. It may not be wise to take these names at face value. In interviews, Warren has claimed a preference for 'misleading titles', which can lead the viewer up the interpretive garden path. Yet, with their inchoate limbs and rough, textured surfaces, Warren's ambiguous forms do look like protohumans recently emerged from the primordial soup (even though the Hadean period only saw the rise of single-celled organisms). Made in clay, then cast in bronze, the twisted postures and gnarled forms of the sculptures bear a resemblance to ancient bog bodies, believed to be victims of pagan sacrifice and long since mummified in peat.

It is in the sculptures' intimations of gesture that their most recognisably human traces can be found. See the thick, splayed fingers issuing forth from the back of *Los Hadeans (II)*, and the hands-on-hips pose of *Los Hadeans (VII)*, whose head, crowned by what looks like a bun, is turned away to face the wall. The proud stance of *Los Hadeans (III)* could be that of a Viking warrior, proffering his shield, or a matador waiting for his bullfighting cape to be run through. There is a violent intensity to the figures' angles and amorphous, fleshlike lumps, which have been forcibly hand-wrought by Warren – her fingerprints remain visible on the surfaces of the works.

The exhibition also includes a number of welded-metal sculptures featuring sharp, polished angles, which are at odds with *Los Hadeans*. These include *Early Sculpture*, a grey patinated steel pillar that rises to eye-level,

Los Hadeans (III), 2017, hand-painted bronze and pompom on painted MDF pedestal, 226 × 100 × 68 cm. Courtesy the artist and Matthew Marks Gallery, Los Angeles & New York

and *Let's All Chant*, a geometric composition of flat, intersecting metal planes painted in a gleaming candy-pink. If Warren's figurative works recall Umberto Boccioni and Alberto Giacometti, then these steel works look back to artists such as Richard Serra and John McCracken, among others.

While Warren cribs, liberally, from her artistic forebears, she is no slavish copyist. In her hands, the weighty arsenal of sculptural materials and strategies – bronze and steel, figuration and geometry – is lent a personal

Maloney, Ciara. "Rebecca Warren." *ArtReview*, Summer 2017, p. 127.

touch by hand-painted criss-cross patterns and messy splotches in ice-cream tones of mint, vanilla and strawberry. Several works sport cheery pastel-pink and -blue pompoms, and the head of *Three* is topped by a fetching bow. Even the cool, minimalist form of *Let's All Chant* acquires an animated quality, with its diagonal plane, poised between stillness and movement, resting on a pompom. That animation is underscored by the work's title, which it shares with the 1977 disco classic by the Michael Zager Band that exhorts the listener to 'move your body'.

Set next to the exaggerated, overtly sexualised bodies of her early sculpture, the amorphous figures of *Los Hadeans* would be unrecognisable as work by the same artist. Her shift away from the grotesque, which began almost ten years ago, has been replaced by a more subtle anthropomorphising seated in allusions to clothing, to skin tone and to body language. By adding this relatable detail to otherwise antediluvian anatomies and abstract forms, Warren crafts a subtle intelligibility within otherness, a kind of training ground for recognition, which is very welcome today.

Ciara Moloney

Maloney, Ciara. "Rebecca Warren." *ArtReview*, Summer 2017, p. 127.

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ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS

Dallas

Rebecca Warren

DALLAS MUSEUM OF ART
1717 North Harwood
March 13–July 17

Satire, cleverness, and absurdity are at the core of Rebecca Warren's art. Humorously undercutting platitudes from different sculptural genres, Warren both mocks and participates in the lineage of art-historical standards. In *Reclining Figure*, 2011, she toys with the monumental sculptures frequently installed in public spaces and outside corporate headquarters. Using steel, she miniaturizes an assembly of geometric forms that, at a colossal scale, would be a bombastic trope of public-art installations. Warren emasculates the sculpture further by including a pom-pom as a kind of ridiculous adornment. In part because of their diminution, the sculptures feel like elaborate mousetraps or fragments from an ineffectual Rube Goldberg machine.

Rebecca Warren, *Reclining Figure*, 2011, steel and pompom, 18 1/2 x 43 1/4 x 13 3/4".

In her bronze works, Warren harkens to precedents set by artists such as Alberto Giacometti, Willem de Kooning, Franz West, and even Dr. Seuss. Pushing clay around, much like a gestural painter slops paint, Warren crafts skinny totems. These comic phallus shapes are also meant to be loosely defined figures. In *Pas de Deux (Plaza Monument)*, 2016, a work not specifically part of the exhibition but a newly installed commissioned piece outside the entrance to the museum, Warren offers two dancers standing side by side. Interrupting the bronzes' upward thrust are bulbous lumps that imply the curvature of hips, the flaps of ears, or the looping shapes of flared nostrils. Painted in splashy washes and pastel drips, these lumpy ballerinas are ornamented in a cartoon luster that adds to their whimsy and irreverence.

— *Matthew Bourbon*

Bourbon, Matthew. "Critics' Picks: Rebecca Warren." *Artforum*, May 31, 2016.

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MOUSSE

Oehlen, Albert. "Material Object." *Mousse*, April/May 2016, pp. 140–53.

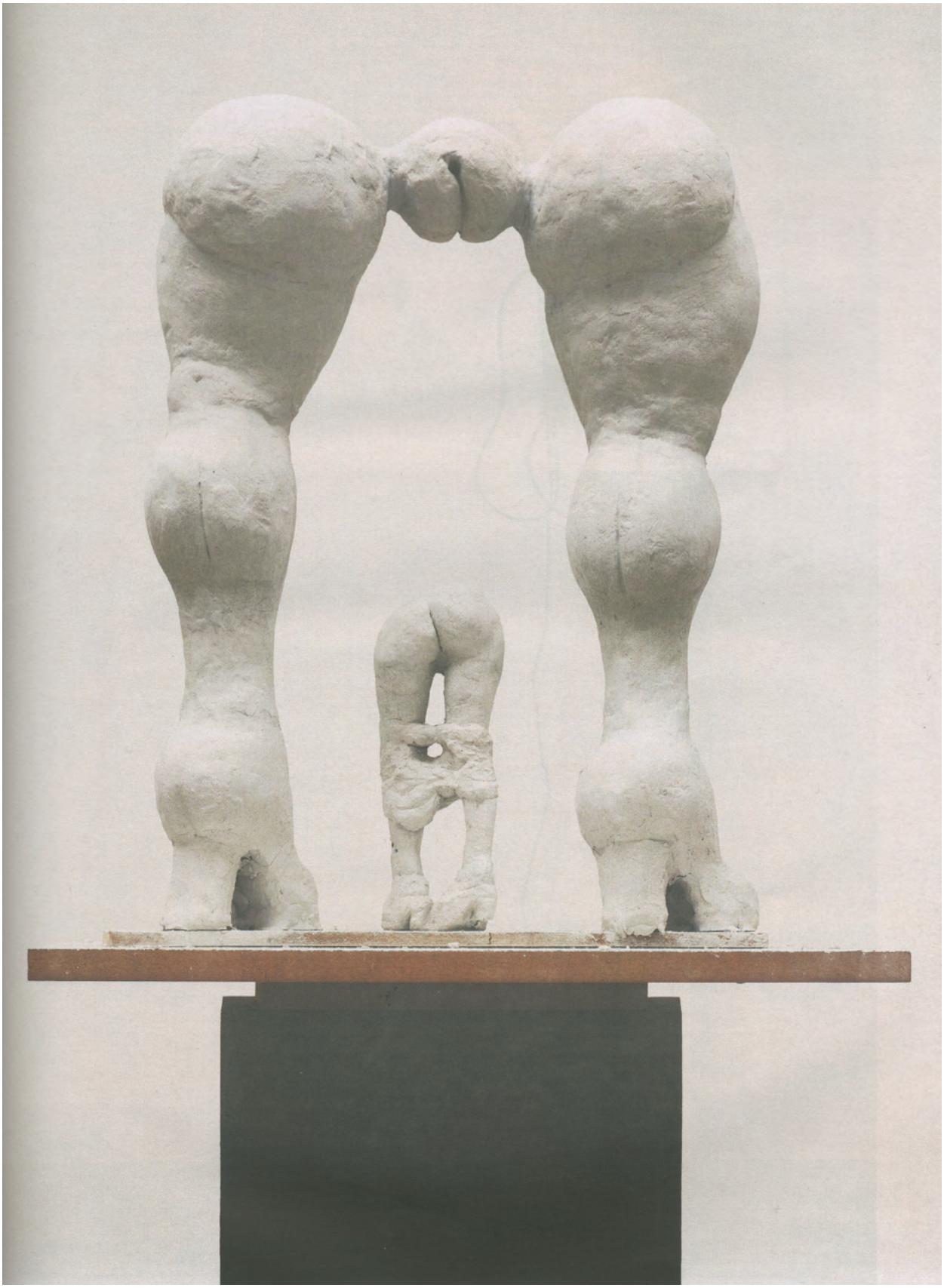
The word "Disneyfication" is commonly associated with the process of taming the urban landscape in the interest of sanitized social regimentation, compartmentalization, and, most specifically, the guided transformation of basic forms of human exchange and leisure into economic transactions. But let's shy away, for a moment, from the canonical meaning and toy with the idea of using this same term to imagine a hypothetical mineral evolution—a continuum leading amorphous, inorganic matter to mimic the shape and the postures of characters populating 20th century comics and animated cartoons.

If such a process existed, Rebecca Warren's sculptural work might be the perfect lens to document the "tipping point"—the moment in which such a transmutation between states occurs: when a volume of clay grows walking legs wearing enormous shoes, or a previously inert bronze turns into a corpulent ballerina on the verge of flying off her pedestal. The British artist is interested in representations and declinations of the feminine, drawing from references located in different periods in the history of the fine arts, illustration, and pop culture. From the mixed hints at sexual androgyny evident in the first wave of glam rock by artists such as the New York Dolls or Rod Stewart, to the imposing curviness exposed by the femmes fatales of the American cartoonist Robert Crumb, to the pointy nudes by Pablo Picasso, her sculptures sometimes resemble puzzling fertility deities, both seductive and perturbing, perhaps making an implicit, subtle comment on the male point of view inscribed in (and the sedimented authority emanating from) the original set of visual references. Even the most abstract works possess a liminal quality, deriving from a sense of unfinished-ness and dynamism, that contributes to the impression of a transitional state of something very alive.

The other half of the conversation is the German painter Albert Oehlen. After studying under Sigmar Polke until the early 1980s, Oehlen adopted a mixture of figurative and abstract painting, leaning decisively toward the latter by the end of the decade: work that was provocative in nature, as evident in the allusion to the ultimate German historical taboo in *Morning Light Falls into the Führer's Headquarters* (1982), or trying to force the limits of conventional bourgeois taste, as in *Self-Portrait as a Dutch Woman* (1983), which his friend and kindred spirit Martin Kippenberger welcomed enthusiastically as an absolute landmark of "bad painting". Oehlen's international reception has been influenced by the tendency of others to associate him with the Neue Wilde neoexpressionist movement, although he has always maintained a critical distance from it. Throughout a career spanning three decades as a master of abstraction, Oehlen has experimented with, and left behind, formal and technical constraints—such as the use of a limited palette of colors, using his fingers for painting, and his pioneering use of early computers—to constantly express and exhaust the freedom of the medium. (Francesco Tenaglia)

Oehlen, Albert. "Material Object." *Mousse*, April/May 2016, pp. 140–53.

Oehlen, Albert. "Material Object." *Mousse*, April/May 2016, pp. 140–53.



Oehlen, Albert. "Material Object." *Mousse*, April/May 2016, pp. 140–53.

REBECCA WARREN AND ALBERT OEHLEN IN CONVERSATION

ALBERT OEHLEN If you had to destroy one of your works in a famous collection, which one would it be? And how would you do it?

REBECCA WARREN It would more likely be one of my sculptures destroying someone else's work by accidentally falling on it. Perhaps it might even destroy a few others on the way down.

AO You started as a painter. Do your sculptures come from there or from looking at other sculptures?

RW Much of my very early work was engaged in a search to find its own real nature. I'd steal things from anywhere, really—books, magazines, album covers, cartoons—and then see if it could wear it. Sometimes I have made work by pretending to be someone else (Richard Serra's wife, for instance). But also my sculptures often come out of a bucket of clay, and they only get as far from there as they need to in order to convincingly claim freedom and separation from that bucket. I didn't start as a painter but I always wanted to be able to paint, so, in answer to my ambitions as a painter, my sculptures can turn into lumpy, unruly 3D canvases.

AO In the 1980s it looked like all the good sculptures were coming from painters. Willem de Kooning, Georg Baselitz, A. R. Penck, and others seemed more entertaining than full-time sculptors such as Richard Long, Lynn Chadwick, Tony Cragg, Rachel Whiteread, or Stephan Balkenhol. Would you agree?

RW I'm not so sure about this particular distinction, although I am a big fan of Baselitz, de Kooning and Penck. For my money, they were definitely able to master both sculpture and painting. In recent years, it seems to me that the reverse is happening: a lot of painters are making questionable sculpture and additionally have the license to go ahead and do it. I suppose the impulse is similar to my own painting-on-canvas ambitions, though I don't inflict the results on the world. Better to stick to what you are good at.

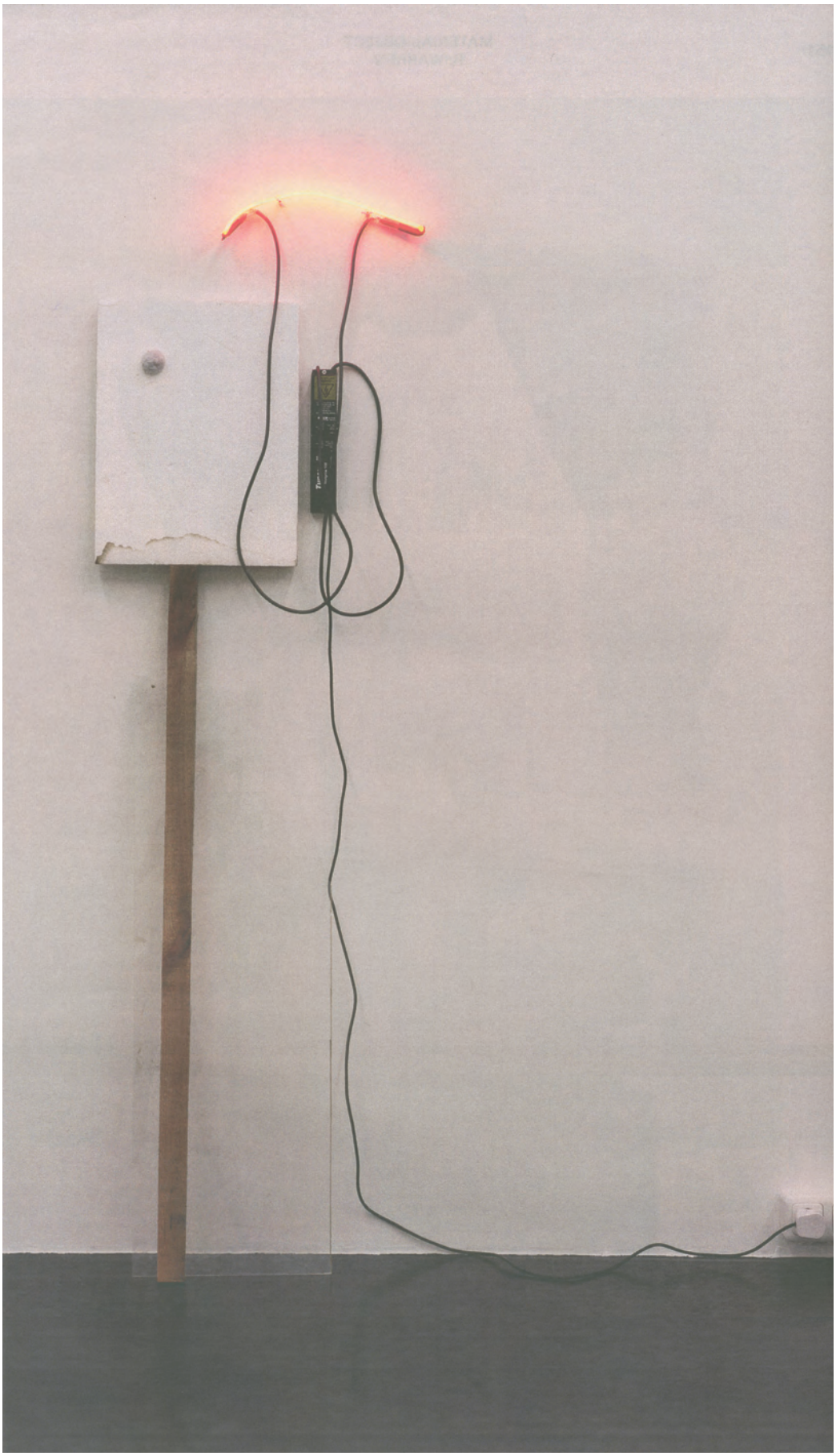
AO Making sculptures involves a lot of physical work, technical issues, material, weight. Do you enjoy that?

RW Sculpture tends to differ from painting in the number of technicians involved. I don't weld or make the molds or casts. I enjoy my part, which comes before all of that—well, when it's not making me anxious, that is. It's nice to send something made of clay off in a van and it comes back cast in heavy bronze. Sometimes it can be quite alarming, though, as not everything in the process is predictable.

Oehlen, Albert. "Material Object." *Mousse*, April/May 2016, pp. 140–53.

Oehlen, Albert. "Material Object." *Mousse*, April/May 2016, pp. 140–53.

Oehlen, Albert. "Material Object." *Mousse*, April/May 2016, pp. 140–53.



Oehlen, Albert. "Material Object." *Mousse*, April/May 2016, pp. 140–53.

AO Can you give me an idea of what you do with your hands when you work?

RW My hands are big! They make gestures and shapes in the air. They follow the winding paths of my thoughts. They imitate visions. I am a mime artist.

AO Are you alone in your studio?

RW I don't let many people in there. I have a lot of contact with my artist friend Fergal Stapleton. His perspicacity is always indispensable.

AO Women talk a lot about weight. Voluminous men are better dancers. Are there natural benefits that help in being a sculptor?

RW Yes, women do talk about weight—isn't it boring! And large men can be good dancers. Natural benefits that aid in becoming a sculptor? You have to want to. But quite *why* you'd want to, I don't really know.

AO Do your sculptures look at you? Do you look through them?

RW Yes, there's regard this way and that. I find that I love my sculptures. They live (live, I tell you!). They are my friends. I don't know how this happens. Is that a bit sad?

AO 1961 Piero Manzoni made a "living sculpture", and five years later Timm Ulrichs made the "first living artwork". You still work with clay and bronze. Is there progress in sculpture?

RW Possibly, but probably not really. I'm suspicious of progress in art. If humans progress, it's along a modest range from the bestial to the civilized. How is art supposed to progress beyond this range? Seems like a bad idea to me.

Albert Oehlen was born in 1954 in Krefeld, Germany. He graduated in 1981 from Hochschule für Bildende Künste, Hamburg. From 2000 to 2009, he was a professor of painting at Kunstakademie Düsseldorf. Oehlen's work has been exhibited in several solo and group exhibitions including "Albert Oehlen: Home and Garden," New Museum, New York (2015); and "Albert Oehlen: An Old Painting in Spirit," Kunsthalle Zürich, Switzerland (2015). Oehlen's work was also included in the 2013 Venice Biennale.

Rebecca Warren is a British artist living in London. From 1989-1992 the artist studied Fine Arts at Goldsmiths College, University of London. In 2014 she was made a professor of painting and sculpture at Kunstakademie Düsseldorf. In 2016 she has the solo shows "The Main Feeling" at the Dallas Museum of Art, together with a sculpture commission for the new Eagle Family Plaza in Dallas and a sculpture commission to be included in the group exhibition "The Body Extended: Sculpture and Prosthetics" at Henry Moore Institute, Leeds.

Oehlen, Albert. "Material Object." *Mousse*, April/May 2016, pp. 140–53.

THE BROOKLYN RAIL
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

REBECCA WARREN *Why Do Birds Suddenly Appear?*

by Kara L. Rooney

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY | SEPTEMBER 13 – OCTOBER 25, 2014

Time has vindicated the art world's longworn prejudice against clay as craft. These days, one sees it everywhere—throughout Chelsea, the LES, and Brooklyn galleries; center stage at the profusion of art fairs and biennials; as the subject of major retrospectives and museum exhibitions; and especially entrenched within the studio practices of emerging and mid-career artists. To put it bluntly, clay is hot. Few are as adept, however, at working with the material's libidinous qualities as British artist Rebecca Warren. Featuring two of her wall vitrine sculptures as well as a fresh cadre of free-standing forms, *Why do Birds Suddenly Appear?* is Warren's first solo show in the U.S. in over four years, and arguably also one of her best.

Rebecca Warren, "Ooo," 2014. Hand-painted bronze on painted MDF pedestal. Sculpture: 93 × 21 5/8 × 19 3/4 "; Overall: 115 1/2 × 21 5/8 × 19 3/4 ". ©Rebecca Warren, Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery.

The loci of the show are eight slender, totemic sculptures whose lumpen surfaces have been hand-fashioned in clay, cast in bronze, then painted and modified by Warren. Their implied reference to bodies in space—part Giacometti, part Bourgeois—is undeniable, registered in the work's attenuated "limbs," bulbous protrusions, and various misshapen silhouettes that reach, at times, as high as 9 feet into the air. Ranging in hue from fleshy pinks to deep lavenders and a variety of indigo tints, and including painterly references such as grid formations and wet-into-wet brushwork, Warren reveals each piece's individual characteristics, sometimes humorous, at others art historical, as a means of lightening the burden of material solemnity. "Basquiat" (2014), is painted almost completely

green, a thin white line running down the center seam of the sculpture. About half way down, a large rounded breast abruptly protrudes from the otherwise phallic shape, its voluptuous fullness a sexually charged antagonist to the heroism ascribed to Neo-expressionist painting. “Ooo” (2014), takes a slightly different position, its contiguous blend of free-flowing painterly drips and plush blue pom-pom content to exist as they stand—free from art historical reference and basking in sheer, unmediated materiality.

While these recent standing works maintain specific references to the artist’s well-known earlier figurations (earning her a Turner Prize nomination in 2006), the new pieces embrace a more sophisticated and refined quality without sacrificing that same air of whimsy and humor. As always, Warren is not afraid to get her hands messy and her material handling of the psychically charged spaces of the id and the ego, the feminine and the masculine, *imagos* and *logos*, maintains the improvisatory, even rebellious nature of clay while couching the medium within the larger traditions of painting, sculpture, and space.

These same interests appear in other works on view, particularly the diptych wall relief, “You are Quiet, I Will Be Too” (2014). Here, Warren turns her attention away from overt material concerns to wrestle with issues of identification and spatial relationships. Not dissimilar to Carol Bove’s investigations into the conditional arrangement of objects and their attendant readings or Rachel Harrison’s cryptically charged assemblages, Warren juxtaposes quotidian materials such as pom-poms and paper on two bifurcated, narrow steel shelves. Slender vertical strips with pom-poms attached offset the extreme horizontality of the relief, and inject a level of intimacy and private speculation alluded to in the title of the work. “Autumn Winter” (2014), on the other hand, exudes the stark aura of minimalist concerns, its only tell the tiny white pom-pom that interrupts the 2.75-inches-wide plank of wood that hovers, ghostly, over an even thinner plinth of vertically leaning steel. Also a diptych, and positioned almost directly opposite “You are Quiet,” the piece acts as a counterbalance to the aforementioned’s sensitivity and grace.

Two final objects, “The Glasses I” and “The Glasses II” (both 2014), round out the language of opposition that underscores the thematic content of the show. The two hulking boulders, both painted bronze, act as mobile interlopers in the otherwise ethereal setting of the space. Each object is displayed on an untreated wooden platform with wheels, their implied weight offset by the mobility of the base support. Herein resides the balletic encounter between form and structure, figure/ground, object and idea: one can only know the former through the presence of the latter, Warren seems to say. A philosophical stance this show proves seductively difficult to deny.

Rooney, Kara. “Rebecca Warren: Why Do Birds Suddenly Appear?” *The Brooklyn Rail,* November 5, 2014.

frieze

Rebecca Warren

Rebecca Warren
2010
Installation view

The Renaissance Society, Chicago, USA

Rebecca Warren's first museum show in the US explored precisely what makes sculpture 'sculpture': the process of giving shape to matter. The London-based artist anticipates the temptation to sweep these sculptural forms into a neat art-historical tradition; her emphasis is not on rationality but on the chaos of production and the unruly interpretations the works induce.

At first glance the space appeared divided between Warren's two materially distinct approaches to sculpture. On the right, three steel constructions composed of planks and blocks stood comfortably apart, accentuating their horizontal or vertical characteristics. To the left, eight plump, mangled and dizzyingly coloured unfired clay mounds sat on top of waist-height plinths that, while scattered in arrangement, remained harmonious with the grid of the linoleum floor. One steel work seemed to have drifted over to the left side: *Reclining Figure* (2010) was barely visible behind two plinths, lethargically propping itself up. Was this a stand-off between the soft feminine touch of handcrafted clay and aggressively masculine industrialized steel?

Far from delicate, Warren's heavy clay mounds carry the memory of being tugged, pulled, pressed and kneaded like dough. Hand-painted colours playfully dance around their raw curves and indentations, reminding us that these are not meteorite-like masses torn from a greater whole but embryonic sculpture holding 'the promise of shape'. Incomplete forms spur fanciful imaginings of plants, humans, clouds, insects and more. The colours are suggestive of a child in an arts and crafts class haphazardly applying a messy palette, as well as an artist steadfastly refusing to pleasure viewers' senses. Warren has said that when seeing a 'lovely surface' in her work she likes 'to interrupt that with a bit of ugly paint or tartan or a tail or a tit'. Ugliness is a qualitative device for the artist to make her aesthetics more awkward, less familiar. Warren believes all details to be integral: the classical geometric forms of her white plinths, for example, tame the 'madness' of her clay explosions. The artist uses turntables of almost exact dimensions to the plinths when producing the works, and presented at human height, the viewer can comfortably look at them at eye-level.

In the steel works, *Large Male* and *Vertical Composition III* (both 2010), the parts match standard lumber sizes, including the 2x4 plank and the brick-sized building block, and are primarily joined together like scaffolding with wedges and bolts typical in woodwork rather than metal welding. A single fluffy pom-pom sits on each piece. They have domestic echoes, most obvious in the white pom-pom that sits

Cooke, Erica. "Rebecca Warren." *Frieze,* January/February 2011, p.133.

on *Function V* (2009) as a bowl would on a table. Finding formal resemblances to other artists' work is fruitful in pinning down Warren's peculiarities. Present in *Large Male* is both David Smith's strategy of reigning in abstraction with anthropomorphic titles, as well as the precarious balancing of four unattached lead plates in Richard Serra's 1969 *One Ton Prop (House of Cards). Vertical Composition III* features planar elements that echo Theo van Doesburg's architectural principles, as well as the possibility of expansion, contraction and collapse as seen in the nesting ovals of Alexander Rodchenko's *Spatial Construction No. 12* (c.1920).

In the centre of the room was a bronze from 2003 entitled *Cube*. Earlier than any of the other works shown here, Cube was also singular in being the only piece that was mobile. Sitting on a wooden platform with over-sized industrial wheels, this stucco-textured sculpture, with irregular edges, unfixes itself from the potential purity of its geometric shape, instead playing with the possibility of irrational movement: workmanship on wheels.

In conjunction with this exhibition Warren produced three new site-specific bronzes for the roof of the Art Institute of Chicago: *There's No Other Way* (2010), *Bow* (2010) and *The Main Feeling* (2009–10). Totemic in shape, instead of figurative references she involves her immediate environment: the Chicago skyline. Always cognizant of maintaining a human scale in her works, Warren casted these sculptures from fibreboard constructions that she made by hand. Closer to the look of wet clay than bronze, the works seem to defy gravity – looking at them, the feeling is perhaps not so dissimilar from the public's reaction to the first skyscraper erected in Chicago in 1895.

Erica Cooke

Cooke, Erica. "Rebecca Warren." *Frieze,* January/February 2011, p.133.

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY
523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

Flash Art

REBECCA WARREN

MATTHEW MARKS - NEW YORK

Juxtaposing exaggerated parts of female anatomy with slabs of cold steel, Rebecca Warren makes her mark in big-boy, macho-male territory. In what at first glance looks like a historical two-person exhibition, Warren seeks subtle ways to incorporate the past with ironic flourishes.

The show is comprised of two distinct bodies of work all produced in 2009. The seven angular works are slabs of steel with white MDF plinths and have a '70s feel. The pieces use precarious balance *à la* early Richard Serra or Anthony Caro. *P-D* (2009), a low construction of steel rectangles welded at dynamic angles, contains the incongruous addition of a soft pom-pom.

Four totemic sculptures are perched on white pedestals. Made of clay or bronze, their undulating surfaces are modeled by hand and reminiscent of the '50s. Bulbous exaggerated forms of female anatomy, mostly thighs, calves and breasts, rest atop each other with cartoon like presence. Like fetish fertility figures, they have a comically depreciative take on the female form that brings to mind Lisa Yuskavage. These sculptures also reference heavyweights; de Kooning, Franz West and Robert Crumb.

The largest female figure, *L* (2009), is made of white clay and modeled from the waist down. With a wide stance and wearing weighty platforms shoes which ground and elevate, *L* struts dynamically atop a board on wheels, and seems to say: "Out of my way."

Warren straddles worlds. Like a poker player who knows all the cards, she plays both sides. Through self-conscious referencing she exploits dichotomy: hot and cold, tactile and slick, human and urban, figurative and abstract. A comic chameleon, Warren assimilates lessons of the past, but the strength of these sculptures lies in their old-school relation of volume to space.

Gregory Montreuil

REBECCA WARREN, Nanon, 2009. Reinforced clay on painted MDF plinth, 185 x 85 x 65 cm. Courtesy Matthew Marks, New York. © Rebecca Warren.

Montreuil, Gregory. "Rebecca Warren." *Flash Art*, January/February 2010, p. 91.

ArtReview

Rebecca Warren

Serpentine Gallery, London
10 March – 19 April

It's true to say that, over her career, Rebecca Warren has worked from positions of assumed power, channelling all that is egomaniacal, grandstanding and preposterous – and by that I mean thrilling and excellent – about the art of the past in order to make sparks fly in the here and now. But she is no mere conduit. *Helmut Crumb* (1998), the earliest piece in this restrained survey, stands out because it remains the most explicit example of quotation by an artist who has done her best to hide, then lose, her crib sheet. Based on a Robert Crumb cartoon of a schematized female lower half, and one of Helmut Newton's photographs of an Amazonian model in dishabille, the sculpture conflates images of objectification. Yet as much as it's a critique of two different but equally misogynist mindsets, it is an admission that those mindsets, rather like the Devil and his tunes, are gifted some of the most delicious imagery. Therein lies the humour of *Helmut Crumb*; perhaps its tragedy, too.

It is testament to Warren's intellect that *Helmut Crumb* didn't spawn an entire battalion of lookalikes. Instead, as you wander round the Serpentine's airy rooms, you sense that she has been unmaking this instant hit for the past decade. Warren's oft-chosen medium, clay, obviously has some bearing on affairs; malleable, suggestive, it is also physically resistant to encumbering ideas one might have for it. *We Are Dead I–VIII* (2008) – a series of recalcitrant busts – are masterfully indecipherable when compared with earlier works like *The Mechanic* (2000), a more rococo, saucy scene that revolves on a pistachio-coloured plinth. The situation is visited in miniature in Warren's wall-mounted vitrines. In an early incarnation like *Journey into the Heart of the Night* (2000), the Perspex case is stuffed with nameable objects such as a soft toy bunny, a clay skull and a miniature bottle that reads 'Absinthe', whereas *The Living II* (2007) attains its mysterious energy from the partial orchestration of off-cuts and leftovers or, as the artist puts it in the catalogue, a 'bit of fluff next to a hole, next to a thing'.

We Are Dead IV, 2008, painted reinforced clay on painted MDF plinth, 79 x 46 x 31 cm exclusive of plinth. © 2009 the artist. Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery, New York

The newest pieces here are welded-steel versions of bits of wood knocked together in the studio. They have the look of Anthony Caro's sculptures from the 1960s. Two have had their authority undermined by the addition of small pompoms, which seem to be there as a way of reeling the viewer in. What the metal pieces already seem to aspire to is the same sense of irresolution contained by the recent clay pieces. How that sense might manifest itself – individually or in combination with other works – could keep Warren busy for the next week or the next decade. Either way, it gives what may have been a tidy retrospective a finale of enlivening possible trajectories.

Martin Coomer

Coomer, Martin. "Rebecca Warren." *ArtReview,* May 2009, p. 108.

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PARKETT

Mad and Ugly

NEAL BROWN

Rebecca Warren often seems to be in character in her work and this, in combination with the wryly detached or separated quality of her intonation, facilitates her success. Abstracted from the gravity of sensible analysis, the tragicomedy of life's misshapen pleasures and problems can then float deliriously free in the outer space of the artist's brave psychology. In this way, Warren overcomes the problem of how an artist, especially a female artist, can negotiate intimate bodily images while, at the same time, resisting an autobiographical interpretation. Everyone knows that to reference Edgar Degas, Pablo Picasso, Auguste Rodin, and Robert Crumb in your work, as Warren does, is to summon hard-core males whose artistic genius includes (subject to certain interpretative qualifications) rampant sexual triumphalism. But Warren holds her esteemed giants of art in critical abeyance, which is not that of Stockholm syndrome, nor that of the attitudinal fearlessness characteristic of the UK's current aristocracy of female artists like Sarah Lucas and Tracey Emin. Warren's interest in the trademark conquests made by the male artists that she gathers together—gender outrages of unlikely breasts and bodily objectification—seems to be in their reductive physicality as much as anything else, from which she squeezes something more universal and tragic than just sexual triumphalism.

Warren's narrative includes childhood themes shaped within the white, virginal clay she uses; it is a special, self-setting kind of clay related to the earthy brown clay of the potter but which never needs be fired in a kiln, and so it retains the delicate "skin" quality of its youth. The pretty pastel colors that the artist sometimes applies to this unsullied whiteness, the effete ribbons her figures sometimes wear, and the doll, toy, or cartoon quality that pervades many of her works, all relate to (a usually female) childhood. Materially, the white clay is

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NEAL BROWN is an artist and writer based in London. He is the author of *Tracey Emin* (Tate 2006) and was curator of "To the Glory of God: New Religious Art" at the second Liverpool Biennial.

Brown, Neal. "Mad and Ugly." *Parkett*, no. 78, 2006, pp. 32–37.

REBECCA WARREN, COME, HELGA, 2006, reinforced clay, paint, plinth, perspex, 84 5/8 x 24 x 60 7/8" / KOMM, HELGA, verstärkter Ton, Farbe, Sockel, Plexiglas, 215 x 61 x 154,5 cm.

Brown, Neal. "Mad and Ugly." *Parkett*, no. 78, 2006, pp. 32–37.

REBECCA WARREN, HOMAGE TO R. CRUMB, MY FATHER, 2003, reinforced clay, MDF, wheels, 83 7/8 x 32 1/8 x 32 1/8" / HOMMAGE AN R. CRUMB, MEINEN VATER, verstärkter Ton, MDF, Räder, 213 x 81,5 x 81,5 cm.

Brown, Neal. "Mad and Ugly." *Parkett*, no. 78, 2006, pp. 32–37.

related to children's modeling compounds but, stylistically, in Warren's hands, more to the anarchic little Plasticine sculptures, piles of mess, and spent chewing gum that children like to leave behind. Such discord is epitomized in Warren's appropriation of Degas' famous little ballerina (LITTLE DANCER AGED FOURTEEN, 1880–81), who she subverts in her own THE TWINS (2004) and COME, HELGA (2006) by displacing the ballerina's delicate, modest stance with a gauche, lumpy physicality, twice over.

As happens to lots of people, for lots of reasons—some biological, some socially ordained, some accidental—things go wrong when puberty signals the change from auto-acting childhood to the reacting self-consciousness of adolescence and adulthood. The consequences can include self-doubt, shame, insecurity, sadness, and fear. Although women are particularly diminished by gender expectation and fashion magazine perfectionism, there is a kind of disillusionment, if not perceptual collapse, that people have of their bodily selves that is not gender specific, and which relates to a lack of self-acceptance. This breakdown of bodily self-esteem affects men as well as women, for whom disordered equivalences between erotic or romantic sexuality, physical appearance, and identity can become overwhelming. These manifestations can be tragically comic, as well as catastrophic, and aspects of such dysphoric breakdowns can be seen in Warren's DEUTSCHE BANK (2002), PRIVATE SCHMIDT (2004), and LOG LADY (2003). Art—clay—is a very good way of interpreting or emphasizing bodily physicality, and the frenzied buttocks, vulvas, nipples, clitoral folds, and penises of Warren's work are part of a mad, discontinuous, physical hyphenism. Warren works her soft clay into something that is exultant, orgasmic, libidinous, fleshy, autoerotic, and pleasurable; her figures and plinth pieces are then fingered and improperly squeezed into something that is compulsively chaotic, masturbatory, fat, ugly, disgusted, repressed, incontinent, excretory, bestial, bulimic, collapsed, hung-over, unidentifiable, abject, debased, and self-critical. In other words, her work is a highly adjectival chaos of bodily regard: the pleasurable—less significant than the dysphoric.

Complex psychological inter-correlations between the Picasso that Warren summons in pieces like SHE (2003) and the Rembrandt that Picasso repeatedly summons in etchings from his 347 SERIES (1968) create an unlikely convergence between these three artists on the theme of failure. Picasso's 1968 etchings collectively depict wild, sexual, and other fantasies, in which he uses esteemed artists, such as Rembrandt, as avatars, casting himself as a voyeur. Rembrandt's own self-portraits equate to tragic physicality, the pain of his life's duress, deaths, and failures becoming the "gold" of his art, created from the mining of ignominious physiology—like Picasso, Rembrandt did not care for obvious beauty and can still shock people with his interest in what is considered "ugly." Picasso's depictions of Rembrandt within his etchings (he depicted Rembrandt many times during his career) were not just the honoring of an artist he revered; they were also meant to employ Rembrandt as a character player in the struggle between desire, propriety, ability, and failure. This was especially so towards the end of Picasso's life, as the artist's libido strutted and then crawled its way to the impotent death it feared so much. Rembrandt was, for Picasso, the acceptable representation of failure—the failure that Picasso so wished to avoid himself.

In HELMUT CRUMB (1998) and HOMAGE TO R. CRUMB, MY FATHER (2003), Warren references Robert Crumb, whose cartoons are another complex adjunct to this theme. Crumb's relationship with sexual failure and triumph is a horribly frank and funny one, which includes as much diminishment of women as any misogynist male (or misanthropist female) could wish for, but which also includes highly eroticized, appreciative affirmation of

Brown, Neal. "Mad and Ugly." *Parkett*, no. 78, 2006, pp. 32–37.

REBECCA WARREN, PRIVATE SCHMIDT, 2004, reinforced clay, MDF, wheels, 72 7/8 x 35 7/8 x 35 7/8" / SOLDAT SCHMIDT, verstärkter Ton, MDF, Räder, 185 x 91 x 91 cm.

the particular bodily types that are regarded so disfavorably in females these days: wide hips, thick goose-thighs, big bottoms, and general big-bonedness. Elements of many sexual *paraphilias* can be seen in Crumb's work, such as *Saliromania*, which is the deriving of erotic pleasure from soiling or spoiling the object of desire. (This may include tearing or damaging their clothing, covering them in mud or filth, or otherwise disheveling them—a fetish that can also involve the defacing of statues or pictures of attractive people, especially celebrities, and the forming of collections of defaced art.) Crumb, as a cartoonist, also summons ideas of *Schediaphilia* (more humorously known as *Toonophilia*), which is love or sexual arousal towards cartoon characters. Crumb's work, unlike Warren's, includes visceral hatreds, often towards conventionally beautiful women and the highly esteemed status they enjoy, and it is possible to consider Warren's appropriation of him as allusive of the need, or not, to "earn" or "deserve" love in this world—for men as well as women—much of it centered around exaggerated ideas of beauty.

Warren's work (as she has described it herself) is "mad and ugly" and conflicting feelings of the loveable and unlovable run throughout it. These feelings could include those of being unlovable but sexually desired, and of being attractive but deliberately repellent—both of these states being purposeful disruptions of the usual sense of things. A similar contrary principle can be seen in Warren's vitrines which, although usually peripheral to her work—they are always shown on the walls, never in the center of her exhibited works—display irregular aspirations. The strange contents of these containers are devoid of sense, purpose, or known

Brown, Neal. "Mad and Ugly." *Parkett*, no. 78, 2006, pp. 32–37.

value, but are accorded a condition of damaged importance. They are highly deliberated presentations, to which a hard-won neutrality of intonation is critical—a "mad neutrality," as important to her as a supposed even-handedness is to the institutional curator.

Even the wheeled plinths that support so many of Warren's larger sculptures are implicated in her sense of contrary failure. The wheels imply carefree movement (skateboarding, roller-skating or whatever) but also emphasize the heavy fatness, bodily weight, and inertia of her figures, which would need to be overcome in order for movement to be possible. Inability and, by extension, disability could be invoked by this—possibly creating a familial relationship between the wheeled plinths and wheelchairs. And themes of disability could relate to the idea that Rembrandt's SLAUGHTERED OX (1655)—a nude amputee, if ever there was one—is an art-historical antecedent for the potent category of expressive bodily limblessness in art, which would include works by Picasso, Warren, and Francis Bacon.

There are stylistic points of comparison between Warren and Bacon. These include a shared emphasis on reductive bodily physicality and truncated monstrousness, as well as similarities between Bacon's spermy, Vaseline smearings and Warren's slippery sexualizing of clay. That there could be "a female Francis Bacon" is a strangely appealing idea to consider, both in the abstract and in respect to Warren's work. But it wouldn't be correct to attempt to describe Warren as this impossible person. Unlike Bacon, her work is self-deprecating and not grandiose, and is infinitely wittier. More importantly, the idea of love—damaged and dysfunctional as this love might be—is not extinguished, and, in spite of all the debauchery and outrage, is characteristically the voice of Rebecca Warren.

REBECCA WARREN, DEUTSCHE BANK, 2002, reinforced clay, MDF, wheels, 29 1/8 x 29 1/8 x 29 1/8" / verstärkter Ton, MDF, Räder, 166 x 74 x 74 cm.

Brown, Neal. "Mad and Ugly." *Parkett*, no. 78, 2006, pp. 32–37.

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PARKETT

PRESSURE ZONE

MARTIN HERBERT

BoBo came home in bad shape. Cigarettes had been stubbed out on his body, hot tea spilled down his back. His previously sharp contours had gone soft and incoherent, due to endless sluicings of water over his powdery skin. Parts of him had been snapped off and tossed in the box alongside his ravaged body when the technicians sent him back from the foundry. To be fair, it wasn't their job to take care of him—he was, after all, merely the raw clay cast for a bronze sculpture, and assumedly expendable—and, to be fairer, he'd arrived in bad shape, thanks to the ministrations of his maker, Rebecca Warren.

The resultant bronze, BOBO (2006), Warren's latest stab at the medium, makes that clear enough. It is, on one level, a burlesque of a commemorative statue, the subject wearing a patriarchal beard, a serious expression, and his neck angled just so: dreaming of posterity. But some inner ridiculousness or pomp (and here it is perhaps worth noting that while Warren won't say where the title came from, "BoBo" is a moderately recent neologism designating a "bourgeois bohemian") appears to be rising up and wrecking his big moment, making him appear hysterically unworthy of an everlasting memorial. His body is contorted and gnarled like ancient roots. His single foot—faint shades of Giacometti—is clodhopping, huge, its big toe pointing skyward. He seems to be wearing a skirt and a conical party hat. A final bathetic touch: His warped, outstretched arm supports a precariously balanced twig.

In Warren's art, however, what you can hold onto in iconographical terms counts for less than what you can't, and what matters most are the implications and effects of her refusals. When she got back the ruined cast of BOBO, for example, she began working back into it, piling more febrile, finger-worked masses of clay onto its already-exploited armature—generally speaking this is not done, but Warren never saw a restriction she didn't immediately want to transgress—and the result was given a title intentionally difficult to pronounce: DOU DOU CHÉ (2006). The lower half, particularly the huge foot and upraised toe, is recognizable from its predecessor. From thereon up, however, the figure has turned appreciably ladylike, notwithstanding the tartan cloth covering her chest. She wears a bow in her hair, which has been colored; this, as with the applied textile, feels like something of a formal no-no. She is a touch more graceful than BOBO, but still a wreck.

As such, she joins the parade of unlovely female figures that have emerged from Warren's studio since 1998's HELMUT CRUMB, an architectonic merger of imagery by counterculture cartoonist

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Herbert, Martin. "Pressure Zone." *Parkett*, no. 78, 2006, pp. 44–51.

REBECCA WARREN, DOU DOU CHÉ, 2006, bronze, 47 1/4 x 15 3/4 x 17 3/4." / Bronze, 126 x 43 x 37 cm.

Herbert, Martin. "Pressure Zone." *Parkett,* no. 78, 2006, pp. 44–51.

REBECCA WARREN, "Dark Passage", 2004, exhibition view Kunsthalle Zurich, from left to right: LOG LADY, THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD, TEACHER (M.B.), PRIVATE SCHMIDT / Ausstellungsansicht, von links nach rechts: BAUMSTAMM-FRAU, DAS LICHT DER WELT, LEHRER (M.B.), SOLDAT SCHMIDT.

Robert Crumb and the photographer Helmut Newton that bluntly objectifies the female form. Malignly wishful representations of women by male artists have long been in the foreground of her art (as, to an extent, have others by Hollywood cinema: see the 2003 series collectively entitled *She*, after the 1965 film starring Ursula Andress, and the gold-painted recumbent figure SAPERSTEIN, 2004, named in tribute to the Satanist doctor in *Rosemary's Baby*). One extended engagement has been with Edgar Degas' wax fetish of a pubescent ballerina, the LITTLE DANCER AGED FOURTEEN (1880–81), which was never cast by the artist during his lifetime but kept close to hand in his studio. Its phantasmal presence—proportions inflated into Crumb-like voluptuousness—haunts Warren's PONY (2003) and the double sculpture THE TWINS (2004), and is distantly echoed in DOU DOU CHÉ and several other recent bronzes. It is insufficient to say, however, that as a female artist appropriating such imagery she is

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simply charging these males with a predatory sexism. Her art is not *a priori* analytic in that way (and nor can those practitioners' undeniable artistry be so easily separated from their attitudes—a confliction that propels Warren's own art). Rather it is a tool for treating external forces with some kind of disguised grace under pressure, whether they be those of sexual inequality, the seductive authority of an artistic forebear who may also appear unreconstructed, or the latent conventions of art-making.

In responding to these anxieties, Warren's practice, while it seems superficially aggressive, might be more correctly read as a sophisticated, modular system of circumventions and defenses against them—and against a symbolic possession through total comprehension. Take LOG LADY (2003), a headless and armless cracked-clay female figure wearing what appears to be a billowing skirt, a densely branched log balanced on her gravity-defying breasts. Crumb, the notorious woman-decapitator (see, for example, his 1991 comic strip *A Bitchin' Bod!*, which even the cartoonist claims to find discomfiting), is once again in there. So is David Lynch's television series *Twin Peaks* (1990–91), in which the Log Lady was a character, one brimful of secrets. Beyond this, in intent the work remains something of an enigma—indeed, you could almost imagine it in a De Chirico painting—resisting positioning in a conceptual schema. Aspects of it seem on the cusp of transformation, as when one begins to discern miniaturized legs in the dress. LOG LADY seems monumental but also, due to the seemingly fragile medium, on the verge of falling apart; she sits there, a quandary. The sculpture rests on chipboard fitted with castors, as if its own lack of conceptual fixity, its mobility, were being analogized on a material level.

You don't know, as you never really know with Warren, what this work expresses about her feelings on any of its reference points, or on gender politics, but you can sense her own current not-knowing and desire for clarification, perhaps aided by making such an obtuse object. A work such as this is, on one level, a hand raised, requesting forbearance while she works it out. In the meantime, Warren places you in the midst of flux and provisionality. In 1914, Sigmund Freud (whose photograph appeared on the cover of her Kunsthalle Zurich catalogue in 2004, and who is not only one of many looming father figures in her art but also, of course, formulator of the Oedipus Complex) characterized his psychoanalytic method in terms of "remembering, repeating, and working through." This doesn't seem irrelevant to Warren's reactive, performative methodology. For a

ROBERT CRUMB, from A Bitchin' Bod! / Ein Hurenstück!, 1992. (COPYRIGHT BY ROBERT CRUMB, 1992)

Herbert, Martin. "Pressure Zone." *Parkett,* no. 78, 2006, pp. 44–51.

REBECCA WARREN, PONY, 2003, reinforced clay, acrylic paint, plinth, 37 x 10 5/8 x 22 1/2" / Verstärkter Ton, Acrylfarbe, Sockel, 94 x 27 x 57 cm.

long time, her work has involved something resembling an inquisitive inhabiting of artistic practices of the past—trying them on for size and often trying several on at once, as if rifling through a dress-up box found in a dusty attic.

There are signs, however, that she's starting to drop these borrowed mantles. For evidence one might note the increased prevalence in her oeuvre of the parallel stream of small-scale sculptural arrangements—mixtures of preserved studio detritus, swirls of neon, and crafted chunks of clay—that Warren inaugurated in 1996 with EVERY ASPECT OF BITCH MAGIC. A slightly later example, BITCH MAGIC: THE MUSICAL (2001–03) serves to illustrate how these fragile systems work. With its apparently painstakingly arranged, almost painterly composition of painted clay forms and a loop of rosy neon inside a glassed plinth, it at first suggests some kind of feminine voodoo or gris-gris. But it can also be interpreted as a set of narrative feints in relation to sculptural display, as a confidence trick (What are these unlovely fragments worth, after all?), and, furthermore, as a display of bloody-mindedness: Warren, as so often, coyly places one part of the grouping on top of the glass, rather than inside it.

But this is also a model of layering which the work consequently performs in terms of tone: Spend time with BITCH MAGIC ... and a mood of protectiveness and sympathy towards its constituents comes through; you can imagine Warren having somehow saved them from oblivion, irrelevance, lack of use,

REBECCA WARREN, BUNNY, 2002, reinforcd clay, plinth, 28 7/8 x 15 x 13 5/8" / Verstärkter Ton, Sockel, 73,5 x 38 x 34,5 cm.

Herbert, Martin. "Pressure Zone." *Parkett,* no. 78, 2006, pp. 44–51.

just as she saved BOBO's cast from the studio dustbin. These are tender emotions, and Warren clearly wants them to be a facet of her work. In order to smuggle them in, however—because, appearances to the contrary, there are powerful criteria concerning what is and isn't acceptable in a work of contemporary art, and part of Warren's renegade praxis is to expose them—she has perforce become a tactician.

This demonstrative autonomy inflects her figure sculptures too. They have become increasingly twitchy with life (compare the clean contours of HELMUT CRUMB with the raw and frantic surfaces of the fellatio scenario, THE PEARLS OF SWITZERLAND, 2004, seemingly produced from rolled and ripped up lengths of clay), their handcrafted surfaces privileging a fervent and nowadays verboten expressivity. That mortal connection, you feel, is something that Warren—who began to make art when the ruling dogma of detachment held that one had an idea first, then phoned up an artisan to realize it—loves and wanted to rescue. To accommodate it, she needed to set up an acceptable, superficial lattice of irony and abjection in relation to earlier art. Progressively, however, that armature is being dismantled, albeit without sacrificing an iota of the work's slippery ability to evade narrow categorizations. DOU DOU CHÉ et al may contain fleeting afterimages of other art (some of them impressively opaque: BOBO's balanced twig, for example, stems from similarly incongruous juxtapositions Warren saw in Rodin's studio), but they are finally answerable only to themselves.

All of which suggests that the artist has, to some extent, "worked through" her artistic crushes, shifting her focus to other pressures—what's expected of her as an artist in mid-career with a recognizable "style," for example; or what one should or shouldn't do with a particular medium; or how a female artist should represent the female form. It is in her response to this last example, and the friction she thereby sets up, that Warren's profoundest objective might, I believe, be glimpsed. Think again of Degas' LITTLE DANCER, of the advanced art of his era as a whole, its edge now blunted by familiarity and all that came after; try, so far as it is possible, to imagine that earlier era in all its bright and dangerous newness. If Warren's sculptures desire to echo anything from the past, it is that moment: the electric frisson of the modern in its nascence, transliterated here through the most irreducible aspects of the contemporary—a potent cocktail of ugly female strength, formal grotesquery, radical ambivalence of attitude, and generalized inconclusiveness—and leading to fundamental uncertainty punctuated by awkward laughter. To echo that moment and ensure that it reverberates for as long as possible remains an exhilarating problem—for her, and for us.

REBECCA WARREN, BOBO, 2006, bronze, acrylic paint, branch, 51 1/8 x 14 1/8 x 13"/ Bronze, Acrylfarbe, Ast, 130 x 36 x 33 cm.

Herbert, Martin. "Pressure Zone." *Parkett,* no. 78, 2006, pp. 44–51.

REBECCA WARREN, The Turner Prize, exhibition view, Tate Britain, 2005 / Ausstellungsansicht, Turner-Preis.

Herbert, Martin. "Pressure Zone." *Parkett,* no. 78, 2006, pp. 44–51.

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PARKETT

TRYING IT ON I SUPPOSE

CATHERINE LAMPERT

A few years ago, when I encountered Rebecca Warren's sculptures in the venues where serious art is exhibited and debated, it was a pleasure to witness their frolicking, reckless qualities. But it was natural to be nervous; something that is hand-made and invites intimacy might prove an anachronistic confection, one that is especially upsetting if the viewer has an abiding attachment to the observation-based, figurative sculpture of Rodin, Giacometti, and others. Subsequent exposure to the tall, standing figures set in rows like chorus girls at Matthew Marks Gallery in late 2005 gave me enough reason to suggest a studio visit in connection with a film Jake Auerbach and I were planning to make—its subject: living British artists talking about Rodin (part of the exhibition I was curating for the Royal Academy).[1] When we finished recording for the film, the single common experience amongst our eight participants turned out to be that they had all responded emphatically to Rodin (and the Musée Rodin in Paris) when they were teenagers; however, as they'd developed and thought about their own options, they'd each begun to see this artist-giant as too expressive and too emotional. When Warren was a student at Goldsmiths College from 1989 to 1992, she explains that "life-drawing wasn't encouraged, it was old-fashioned … expressionism was talked about in a disparaging way."[2] Nevertheless, a few years later, she began to look seriously at Degas, Rodin, and Rosso, principally in reproductions. (I can imagine Rebecca thinking to herself, "That's not bad.")

As soon as Rodin received his first public commission in 1880—monumental doors for a planned decorative arts museum—he decided to model figures, each about forty centimeters high, that would illustrate narrative episodes from Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. In a matter of five years, he had assembled some two-hundred figures, drifting ever closer to Baudelaire's archetypal erotic, degraded lovers. Visitors to the studio on the rue de l'Université would have seen someone intoxicated with the spirit of spontaneous creation—a "countless host of damned women came into being and writhed in his fingers. Some of them lived for a few hours before being returned to the mass of reworked clay."[3] Nevertheless, in his well-organized studio, with its complement of technicians, many figures were cast in plas-

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Lampert, Catherine. "Trying It On I Suppose." *Parkett,* no. 78, 2006, pp. 58–63.

REBECCA WARREN, HUNDEMEISTER (Dog Master), 2004, reinforced clay, acrylic paint, 19 1/4 x 9 x 8 1/4" / verstärkter Ton, Acrylfarbe, 49 x 23 x 21 cm.

Lampert, Catherine. "Trying It On I Suppose." *Parkett,* no. 78, 2006, pp. 58–63.

REBECCA WARREN, P.E., 2005, bronze,
62 1/4 x 26 3/8 x 24 3/4" / Bronze, 158 x 67 x 63 cm.

REBECCA WARREN, LIGHT OF THE WORLD, 2004,
reinforced clay, acrylic paint, pom pom,
44 1/8 x 13 3/8 x 13 3/8" / LICHT DER WELT, verstärkter Ton,
Acrylfarbe, Pompon, 112 x 34 x 34 cm.

ter, the piece-molds sometimes re-filled with fresh clay, the originals and the variations remaining in Rodin's possession for the rest of his life.

Retrospectively, we credit Rodin's work with both advancing and destroying the integrity of figurative sculpture. Depending on one's argument, one is apt to isolate examples of Rodin's focus on process, his exploitation of the expressive power of fragments, the simulation of movement and a kind of burgeoning cubism, his myopic eyes and the successive profiles they recorded. The liberties that Rodin took with his figures brings to mind the painted facets and *insouciant* sexual markers that Warren has been imposing on her new bronzes and her "doubles" (the first cast's twin—its adaptation). On the other hand, Rodin avoided claiming formal or gender-bound milestones; indeed, he continually and sincerely protected himself and his ambition from ridicule and censorship by repeating, like a mantra, that his core daily experience came from what was "real," or what he observed while watching models pose. They were "nature"—various, amoral, and suggestive as trees, rocks, and animals.[4)] Rodin's rapport with individual models led him to record a specific moment involving one of his favorite girls, Adèle Abruzzesi, who was encouraged to remain still while holding a most vulgar crouching pose—one hand on her breast, the other on her foot—a gesture readily understood by a French audience as a metaphor for orgasm. Stepping into the female experience of arousal was thus Rodin's goal. At the end of his life, he made another CROUCHING WOMAN (1895)—a lumpy pseudo-

dancer with split legs. Our eyes and feelings travel over this work's rugged, pruned terrain, peering in through the gapping knife-cut aperture under the left arm and contemplating the brutal, but tender, contortions in the sculpture's face.

It is impossible for Warren, or perhaps for any intelligent living artist, to treat the making of figurative images as a wholesome, centered occupation.[5] Warren uses the word "ludicrous" to describe her treatment of her subject, as did Willem de Kooning in a 1960 interview with David Sylvester. The critic questioned whether the impetus to paint the *Women* series came from a moral decision, a theoretical decision, or only desire. De Kooning skirted around such ponderous notions, protesting how "that word 'figure' becomes such a ridiculous omen." "It's really absurd to make an image, like a human image...but then all of a sudden it was even more absurd not to do it," said De Kooning. "Indeed, the ludicrous personage hijacks the creative process," he continued. "I put it [the woman] in the center of the canvas, you know, because there was no reason to put it a bit on the side—do you see what I mean? So I thought I might as well stick to the idea that it's got two eyes, a nose and mouth and neck ... I felt myself almost getting flustered. ... the idea that it really is very funny, you know, to get stuck with a woman's knees, for instance." De Kooning downgraded content—making it more "a glimpse of something"—before adding a further disclaimer: "It's very tiny, very tiny, content." The character of both De Kooning's women and Warren's is a bit brazen; when we circle her figures we understand what De Kooning meant when he fancied being in conversation with them in the studio, "like they were ladies of Gertrude Stein. Like one of them would say: how do you like me?"[6] When Warren sees her figures return from the foundry a bit battered and coarse, she builds in the changes before they re-emerge.

With hindsight, De Kooning admitted that his images of women were somewhat "vociferous and ferocious," especially those women sporting grins achieved by collaging mouths cut from printed mass media, for he agreed that this feature made them appear more "like Mesopotamian idols ... astonished about the forces of nature." Tate curator Clarrie Wallis, writing in the Tate Triennial catalogue, found Warren's SHE (2003)—a figure with ample breasts and buttocks—reminiscent of "Mesopotamian fertility figurines."[7] Warren accepts that she amasses "all sorts of influences from all sorts of different places...trying [them] on for size ..." One might see her approach as using some delay and refractory tactics, and this is literally the case, as a work will be positioned so that its back faces the entrance to the gallery. Being less self-conscious is, in Warren's words, simply "better."[8]

Pots boiling

In the studio, Warren likens her activity to watching several pots boiling at the same time. In the gallery, it is a struggle for even the most aware visitor to absorb the collective identity of the series. Going from one figure to the next in the Tate's Turner Prize show (a context of general restlessness), reading names in her works' titles (WILLIAM, PAULINE, DOU DOU CHÉ), I found that, due to their quality and finesse, her works demanded even more thorough viewing than in the studio. The gawky, ostrich-like figures stood on narrow plinths—some pinkish, others white—set at heights where the heads of the tallest were visible above the crowd of museum-goers. The unpatinated bronze, rubbed with wax, looked garish, like jewelry, bumped and twisted, deliberately superfluously—until a random look brought a flash of something. It occurred to me that the armature of these upright figures—a steel pole—was analogous to the creatures on carousels, pumping up and down. One can appreciate an innate flair in Warren's sensibility—the sporty, acrylic-patterned fabric she uses for capes, the passages of applied makeup.

The forms in her unfired clay pieces are more tumbling and soft, like bouquets, with poetic names. One is titled GARDEN OF MY SPOUSE (2006) but I am reluctant to elicit facts about this work. After all, it is art, so its associations can be evocative for me without merely belonging to the artist's stream-of-consciousness. Here I glean a special quality, that of Arshile Gorky's *Garden in Sochi* series—take, for example, the nostalgia of the most resolved gouache, one with a yellow ground, sharp slipper shapes, and floating objects.[9]

REBECCA WARREN, LOULOU, 2006,
painted reinforced clay, plinth, 16 1/2 x 13 3/4 x 13" /
bemalter verstärkter Ton, Sockel, 42 x 35 x 33 cm.

Critical projection

One of the few especially clichéd reviews of the Royal Academy exhibition I curated was written by Germaine Greer, entitled "Are Rodin's bronzes erotic? Hardly—but they do tell us a lot about the sculptor's womanizing." Greer asserts that "sculpture is monumental, immobile and, in our necropolitan museum system, out of reach. Its silent statement is that of a *Playboy* bunny. 'Look, fantasize, but don't touch.'" Greer imagines a squalid session, where Rodin poses the model he has chosen to represent IRIS (1890/91) on her back (which is correct), and then "models her, with head and left arm missing, in clay," intimating that the amputation was done in the presence of the model/victim, rather than what really happened—the more risky editing of a form already cast and marked by seams and plaster drips. Greer leaves readers with the advice that "intimidation is not usually associated with the raising of desire."[10] Living on one's nerves and conflicted emotions can offer rich possibilities for artists, but biographical voyeurism can cast their protagonists in trivial roles. One hears a fresh, non-feminist note in Warren's language, as she occasionally has admitted: "I'm interested in making sculpture that perhaps looks like it was made by a male artist"—using the word "pervy" as an incentive.[11]

Michael Craig-Martin taught artists of Warren's generation at Goldsmiths College (although Warren was not there during Craig-Martin's tenure) and has spoken of the outstanding 70s artists who were his contemporaries—especially Bruce Nauman—who, as he sees it, marked a significant change: "Art isn't about representing things, it is about acting things out." They acted out "the problem of being an artist in the world."[12] Occasionally such an art-historical emphasis concertinas into the critic-friendly strategy of referencing. Lately, I've detected a reluctance to be constricted by twenty-first century "referencing" disclaimers. A curator of similar age to Warren describes her as being "at odds with the position of mastery and authority assumed by her predecessors." Although Warren herself maintains that it may be pointless to aspire to be a virtuoso modeler, it seems just as disingenuous, in her case, to pretend to be indifferent to the quality of the forms.[13] I recently overheard a Tate tour guide facing the Warren vitrines intoning names as if by pedigree: "She positions herself within a tradition of artists ... Beuys, Cornell ..." Warren explains that these influences can indeed be "overwhelming, but it is pointless to try and hide them ..." Warren describes herself as a "book flickerer," but in conversation, when she mentions something that arrests her attention, you nod and see it in your mind. Take, for example, how for a magazine feature on portraits of women, she selected an image of Maria Callas being served a writ from a Diane Vreeland book—and then a clay monsteress appears.

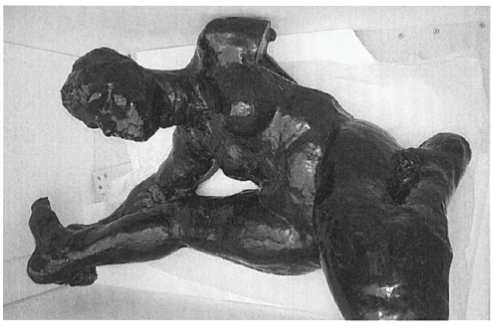
As she becomes a better and better artist, Warren's teasing engagement with hindrances and palliatives is honed. Different zones—Perspex a size too small—time marked by titles like *2001, 2002, 2004, or*

2005—it's as if the installation scheme anticipates the mores and ethos proffered by a particular art institution. *Un condamné à mort s'est échappé* (1956), Robert Bresson's film, is amongst those to which Warren relates. A man sentenced to death by the Gestapo escapes, or goes where the wind takes him. In the cinematography, the details are exaggerated and sounds reverberate. A slow developer, Warren wants to keep her options open while trying to "get to the bottom" of what it means to make art. "I've not found it an easy thing to achieve. At first. You get some kind of love, in some sense, from the things that you're doing."

1) "Rodin at the Royal Academy," 26 September 2006–1 January 2007 and then the Kunsthaus Zurich, 9 February–13 May 2007.
2) This quote and subsequent ones not given other references are from the recording in Warren's studio on 18 May 2006 for *Rodin: The Sculptors' View,* directed by Jake Auerbach, and notes from a previous conversation in the studio on 11 April 2006.
3) Hughes le Roux, "La Vie à Paris," *Le Temps,* Paris, 20 June 1889.
4) A typical quote is "Nature offers symbols and synthesis on the breast of the strictest reality. It suffices to know how to read them," Camille Mauclair, *Auguste Rodin. The Man—His Ideas—His Works,* trans. Clementina Black (London: Duckworth and Co., 1905), p. 53.
5) "amplifying it, exaggerating the hole and the bumps so as to give them more light," Rodin, *Le Journal,* Paris, 12 May 1898.
6) David Sylvester, *Interviews with American Artists* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2001), pp. 48–53.
7) Clarrie Wallis, Tate Triennial 2006, "New British Art," Tate Britain, 1 March–14 May 2006, p. 138.
8) Rebecca Warren speaking on the film produced by the Tate for the Turner Prize 2006.
9) Arshile Gorky, GARDEN IN SOCHI, 1940–41, gouache on board, 22 x 28", purchase with bequest of C. Donald Belcher, High Museum of Art, Atlanta.
10) Germaine Greer, "Are Rodin's bronzes erotic? Hardly—but they do tell us a lot about the sculptor's womanizing," *The Guardian,* 9 October 2006, p. 24.
11) Tate Turner Prize film, 2006. One thinks of the dismal male physiques and libido in John Coplans, Paul McCarthy, etc., Nevertheless the British critics rail against her subject matter, Adrian Searle "bored," by her "big-assed and -breasted clay floozies," (*The Guardian,* 3 October 2006), several complaining about a "feminist message." Julian Keeling, in his article, "Shapes of things to come," *Harper's Bazaar,* November 2006, p. 200, explains with charm that his efforts to turn the conversation into personal territory are rebuffed "with a discourse on art" or another distraction.
12) Michael Craig-Martin, "The Power of Now," *The Guardian,* 14 October 2006, p. 11.
13) Lizzie Carey-Thomas, Brochure, *Turner Prize 2006,* Tate Britain 2006.

AUGUSTE RODIN, standing figures and THE GATE OF HELL, Musée Rodin, Meudon / Skulpturen und HÖLLENTOR. (PHOTO: COURTESY OF IVOR HEAL)

WILLEM DE KOONING, LARGE TORSO, 1974, bronze, 36 x 36 x 26 1/2" / GROSSER TORSO, Bronze, 91,5 x 91,5 x 67,3 cm.



AUGUSTE RODIN, CROUCHING WOMAN, ca.1895, bronze, 20 3/4 x 13 3/8" / KAUERNDE FRAU, Bronze, 53 x 34 cm. (PHOTO: COURTESY OF IVOR HEAL)

Art in America

Rebecca Warren at Matthew Marks

Rebecca Warren's New York solo debut, this show featured new cartoonily expressionistic sculptures made of unfired reinforced clay on a considerably smaller scale than the works for which she has achieved renown in her native U.K. Trolling the sculptural tradition of expressive figuration for iconic depictions of the female form to grapple with and caricature, the artist has previously confronted Rodin, Picasso and Boccioni, among others. Possibly Dubuffet and certainly William Tucker also feed this work. Warren's relation to her influences is so upfront that it becomes her content.

The stars of this show were some nutty little dancers, most under 4 feet high. *Madeleine* and *Courteille* are take-offs on that mixed-medium freak of art history, Degas's *Dancer, Aged Fourteen*, and they are modeled with the exuberant directness and tactile authority of de Kooning's *Clamdigger*. In each piece, the dancer's big toe protrudes from her gigantic platform heels, her tutu is reduced to a tiny apron and the ribbon in her hair is tied in a bow bigger than her head. Two of her nearly identical sisters are paired under Plexiglas in *The Twin*. *Clark* is a high-stepping cancan dancer with enormous bow-bedecked pumps, bulging calf muscles, flying skirts and flopping breasts. Warren presumably had the Frenchman's *Grande Arabesque* in mind for her *Grand Cru*: one foot is firmly planted in a shoe like a cinder block, and the other points skyward. Her torso arches down, her arms sweep the plinth, and the ruffles of her tutu, splayed like enormous frantic petals, divulge her fluttering labia.

For some years, Warren has also constructed boxy assemblages. Here, two wall-mounted vitrines seemed ancillary to the modeled clay sculpture, although the smaller, *Pas de Deux*, lends its name to the show. In it, a circle of red neon the size of a softball illuminates a little landscape of lumps of clay and chunks of wood, bits of Styrofoam, twigs and a fuzzy pompom. *In the Bois* is similar, an archly wan accumulation of studio detritus and neon, all 16 feet of it: Joseph Cornell meets Keith Sonnier. Determinedly elliptical, comparatively reticent, the assemblages court the arbitrary but are a bit too artful really to put themselves across.

Reminiscent of cartoon fistfights where the odd foot, nose or elbow emerges from a scribbly whirl of lines are three masses of unpainted clay sporting breasts, limbs, lumps and flowers. About 3 feet high, they are positioned at eye level on white pedestals. The clay in *Louis* has a slightly dry appearance; in *Europa* rough furls seem to have bloomed from deep crevices and clefts. *In the Last Ditch I Think of You* is more generalized and cloudlike, its components abstract but for one conspicuous, large-nippled breast. *Sporting Lady* and *Cologne* are smaller, and brushily painted in tints of green and pink over a blackish base coat in a way that emphasizes their turbulent surfaces. With clay, the most earthbound of materials, Warren evokes a roiling formlessness.

—Stephen Maine

View of Rebecca Warren's exhibition "Pas de Deux," 2005; at Matthew Marks. (Review on p. 183.)

Maine, Stephen. "Rebecca Warren." *Art in America*, May 2006, pp. 183–84.

ARTNEWS

Rebecca Warren

Matthew Marks

In her recent exhibition "Pas de Deux"—the title refers to a dance choreographed for two performers—Rebecca Warren paired her trademark lumpy sculptures with airy vitrines, playing roughness against refinement and weight against buoyancy.

Rebecca Warren, *In the Last Ditch I Think of You*, 2005, reinforced clay and plinth, 70" x 33½" x 30". Matthew Marks.

Warren says her work is inspired in part by Degas's paintings of ballerinas, but the frenzied texture and aggressive sexuality of her figurative sculptures were more reminiscent of de Kooning. Made from unfired clay and showing the artist's fingerprints, these dense, patched-together works (all 2005) sported multiple breasts and phalluses and exaggerated, almost cartoonlike limbs and facial features. With its oversize ears, feet, and toes and its elongated nose, *Clark* resembled Jughead from the "Archie" comics. Another piece, *Courteille*, was a woman with a huge vulva and buttocks—practically a Hottentot Venus—standing in contrapposto, gazing upward. *In the Last Ditch I Think of You*, a single mass of protruding breasts, nipples, petal-like folds, and phalluses, resembled a caricature of a librarian in profile, her hair teased into a ridiculous curly 'do.

But most intriguing were Warren's intimate vitrines, which contain found objects such as bark, twigs, Styrofoam balls, wood shavings, and bits of clay scattered around partly obscured neon lights. In one, a red pom-pom nestled within folded, unfired clay seemed more explicit than any body part. The feeling of such understated works as *In the Bois* was that of a dressing room strewn with personal effects cast off in a moment of passion; their quiet eroticism provided a fine accompaniment to the intensity of the sexy, swaggering sculptures that dominated the room.

—Rachel Somerstein

Somerstein, Rachel. "Rebecca Warren." *ARTnews,* March 2006, p. 134.

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY
523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

The New York Times

Rebecca Warren

Pas de Deux

Matthew Marks Gallery
523 West 24th Street, Chelsea
Through Dec. 24

Rebecca Warren's obstreperous forays into clay operate in a decidedly pre-Minimalist mode, mocking art's pretensions with juicy abandon. This British sculptor's New York gallery debut is impressive, although the color that Ms. Warren often lavishes on her objects is in regrettably short supply. The display includes extended wall vitrines lightly strewn with sculptural fragments, found detritus and occasional bits of neon that suggest a kind of abject situation — architectural or stage-set models or neglected displays of antiquities. There are also large, messy orbs — portrait busts redone as heads of cabbage whose gouged and kneaded forms include the odd snout-like breast, crude roses and occasional phalluses. Smaller orbs tend to be brusquely painted; "Sporting Lady" includes a bit of tattersall, while bits of deep red highlight the black of "Invention of the Daguerreotype."

Most plentiful are a row of large, lurching, leering figurative forms, reminiscent of de Kooning's sculptures, that gradually reveal themselves to be female dancers, complete with bows, braids, floppy tutus and bulging toe shoes. The exception is "Clark," which may be a dancing couple in acrobatic Fred-and-Ginger mode, or perhaps Superman wearing a woman as a cape. For all their wildness, Ms. Warren's efforts have their own kind of rigor and a strong sense of independence. Her artistic precedents include John Altoon, Niki de Saint-Phalle, Mary Frank and possibly the early work of Claes Oldenburg and Georg Baselitz. That's a very interesting, overlooked lode to mine at the moment.

ROBERTA SMITH

Smith, Roberta. "Rebecca Warren." *The New York Times,* December 16, 2005.

THE NEW YORKER

ART

REBECCA WARREN

Warren's cheeky take on Beaux-Arts sculpture elevates and exaggerates the clay sketch to delightfully absurd proportions. Globby fired-clay figures wobble in "Pas de Deux"; others sport bombastic monikers like "Grand Cru" and "Europa." Together, the small, humpy mountains nod to amorphous efforts like Rodin's initially ridiculed portrait of Balzac. "Invention of the Daguerreotype," a heap of clay painted black, makes a particular plea for ceramics, the perennial bastard child of sculpture, in the age of mechanical reproduction. It also serves as a posthumous defense of artists who liked their forms lumpy rather than slick and finished and Salon-elegant. Through Dec. 23. (Marks, 523 W. 24th St. 212-243-0200.)

"Rebecca Warren." *The New Yorker,* December 5, 2005, p. 19.

PARKETT

GREG HILTY

Rebecca Warren: SHE

EVERY ASPECT OF BITCH MAGIC (1996) was one of Rebecca Warren's earliest artworks to come to wide public attention and it remains a touchstone for what has followed. I observed her install the piece in an exhibition, "Material Culture," which I co-curated with Michael Archer at the Hayward Gallery in London in 1997. The show considered different approaches to the object in British art of the past two decades. Even among such a deliberately heterodox assortment, Warren's approach commanded special notice. She had created the work in her bedroom over a period of three months. This biographical information is relevant since the work's contents and meanings are intimate and compacted. She started with a white plinth onto which she placed and replaced a selection of objects that were variously to hand. These included a jar containing a dead bee that a friend had brought to her. A scrunchie (an elastic band used to hold back hair) was stretched over the jar for safekeeping. Other items that came to rest on the plinth's surface included a shell, a shard of green glass, a pair of underpants, and a safety pin. Warren constructed a wooden frame as a sketch for a Perspex cover. She never made the cover but kept the indicative frame. On it rested a large white envelope over which she had stretched another pair of

REBECCA WARREN, 10–4, 2000,
unfired painted clay and plinth, 7 1/8 x 7 1/8 x 11 7/8" /
ungebrannter bemalter Ton mit Sockel, 18 x 18 x 30 cm.
(PHOTOS: MAUREEN PALEY INTERIM ART, LONDON)

GREG HILTY is a curator and writer and currently Director of Visual Arts & Literature at Arts Council England in London.

Hilty, Greg. "Rebecca Warren: SHE." *Parkett,* no. 70, 2004, pp. 6–11.

underpants, its crotch gently padded with fluff from a washing machine. The envelope itself was also padded out with slides of the artist's work.

Description is not criticism and accumulation is in itself not art. Warren's accretion of apparently incidental elements, just described, nevertheless conjured up both the completeness and the "bitch magic" of her title. The work betrays an urge to art that predates that of mimesis or symbolism: the impulse to endow raw matter with spirit or meaning and so to transform it. Such a process, which might as well be called "magic," depends as much on the nature of the transformative act as on its objects. Warren took pains to make her collection as simple as she could while avoiding the simply mundane. Her efforts were repeated in the exhibition installation, which took about a week. Warren clocked in daily at the gallery to spend hours tweaking the relative position of her sculptural ingredients. One sensed strongly that she was searching not for any formal or conceptual resolution to the piece but rather a conclusion of the opportunity available to work on it. This is not a trivial motive. It was clear that she took her role as a creative maker seriously and that the work would not be finished until the role was over, rather than the other way around.

Last summer, Warren unveiled her latest work in her second gallery show at Maureen Paley Interim Art in London. The show was intriguingly titled "SHE" and was introduced with two overt references. First, the 1887 novel of the same name by Rider Haggard and the Hammer Studios film based on it, starring Ursula Andress as the eponymous embodiment of female power and beauty. Second, a black and white photograph reproduced on the exhibition's invitation, showing Sigmund Freud among a gathering of besuited and bespectacled professional colleagues. Neither reference explains the works shown but both act as allusive counterpoints. The show comprised six large sculptures in unfired clay. These sculptures are approximately life-sized and female but wildly free in their anatomical exaggeration, abbreviation, and expressiveness. Breasts, buttocks, and hands appear as prominent focal points. Heads seem to have fallen victim to evolutionary redundancy. In spite of or because of their deformities the figures possess an uncanny psycho-physiological rectitude and a purposeful energy. Their surfaces are rough and at times seem barely modeled from the raw blocks of clay out of which they emerge. "SHE" unashamedly evokes and engages with a powerful history of expressive figurative sculpture stretching from Degas and Rodin through Boccioni to Fontana, taking in Picasso and the German expressionists for good measure. Warren seems to want to grapple with this lineage of male masters on their own terms, rather than women sculptors of the female form such as Elizabeth Frink. Warren's references to popular culture and to psychology show that she is culturally conscious, but neither irony nor critique is a significant motive behind these works. They can be elucidated by comparisons but they cannot be read as essays. They are not hewn from lard or chocolate nor will they disintegrate through sustained exposure to the climate of East London. Their most up-to-date feature is their placement on studio trolleys. This gives the sculptures an added measure of dynamism (they could scoot off anywhere) and informality (they are not rooted) but was initially a practical step on the part of the artist (they cannot otherwise be moved).

REBECCA WARREN, HELMUT CRUMB, 1998, installation view, "It's a Curse, It's a Burden" at The Approach, London, 1999.

Hilty, Greg. "Rebecca Warren: SHE." *Parkett,* no. 70, 2004, pp. 6–11.

REBECCA WARREN, EVERY ASPECT OF BITCH MAGIC, 1996, mixed media, 52 x 11 7/8 x 11 7/8" / LUDERMAGIE IN ALL IHREN ASPEKTEN, 132 x 30 x 30 cm.

Immediately engaging and persuasive as they are, these sculptures challenge us to place them in a contemporary context and to connect with the signs sent out from EVERY ASPECT OF BITCH MAGIC seven years earlier.

Clues are provided by two groups of works that relate closely to that work and to *SHE* respectively while also possessing their own integrity. Examples of each were displayed together, for the first time, in Warren's exhibition last autumn at the Donald Young Gallery in Chicago. The first is a series of collages, approached like the surface of the BITCH MAGIC plinth turned vertically and hung on the wall. Their contents are perhaps more abstract and even more allusive than those of the earlier work: pieces of wood, wire, pompoms. They evoke however the same mental landscape of everyday arcana, the resonance of abstracted conversations where much is revealed by talking about small subjects close to hand. The emotional range of these works is extended in wall assemblages like FRAUENSCHADE or F.S.1 (both 2003) that introduce a more sculptural third dimension along with features including small neon lights. The piece that connects them all is BITCH MAGIC: THE MUSICAL (2001–2003), a delightful reprise of the early work but this time with the absurd sumptuousness of a full-length Perspex sheath and sharp injections of color: the electric red of a neon tube and a pompom, a gold-painted plaster off-cast that lies like a molten ingot on top of the Perspex cover. With more than a hint of wry self-awareness Warren the bedroom magician parades her skills as a gallery virtuoso.

The second relevant group consists of a series of unfired clay figurines, collectively titled TOTEMS (2002). They resemble the *SHE* series in their material and free modeling but are smaller, designed for display on plinths and decorated with painted glazes. Rather than single figures they suggest pairs or

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groups, though engaged in such close erotic coupling that they more often appear unitary clumps of merged matter. Color is used in a manner privileged to porcelain as erogenous indicator, more spice than sustenance. Warren has continued making work in this vein since her surprising 1998 presentation of the piece HELMUT CRUMB, an appropriately obscene hybrid inspired by Helmut Newton and Robert Crumb. The genre was further developed in "The Agony and the Ecstasy," her wide-ranging playful first show at Maureen Paley Interim Art in 2000. The somewhat larger single figures DEUTSCHE BANK (2002–2003) and BUNNY (2003) later paved the way for the *SHE* series and for the similar group of three works, TEACHER (M.B.), TEACHER (R.), and TEACHER (W.), all 2003, included in her Chicago show.

Warren maintains an odd but revealing fiction about these figure works. She would like us to imagine them as having been made by a mildly perverted teacher at a regional English art college. This image conveys (rightly or wrongly) the impression of both artistic and sexual frustration. Repression and liberation characterize and justify most erotic art, both good and bad. Somewhere in between are the films of Russ Meyer, particularly his *Supervixens* series in which spectacularly over-endowed women maintain a droning narrative of withheld desire while periodically bursting out across the screen and each other. The particular relevance to Warren's work is that they do so against a background of blasted desert landscapes strewn with run-down shacks and jeeps and populated with feckless men who talk big but deliver little. While by no means the same as Warren's world, Meyer's mundane mythologizing helps illustrate the profound layers of desire and restraint that run through her work.

Warren's alter ego is a curiously powerful and positive proxy for a young woman artist working today to invoke. It carries certain resonances of Salvador Dalí's obsession with "putrefaction" in the mid-twenties; Warren's posture, like Dalí's, consciously mingles disdain and admiration for her artistic antecedents. This in turn leads to sophisticated, if apparently aberrant, strategies for producing new work faced with all that have come before. Dalí wrote, in terms that seem directly relevant to Warren's artistic project, "Form is always the product of an inquisitorial process of matter—the specific reaction of matter when subjected to the terrible coercion of space choking it on all sides, pressing and squeezing it out, producing the swellings that burst from its life to the exact limits of the rigorous contours of its own originality of reaction."[1] However Warren defines the physical and historical contours of her originality, her impetus to exceed those limits remains consistently compelling.

1) Salvador Dalí, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*, trans. Haakon M. Chevalier (1942), (London: Vision Press, 1968), p. 3.

REBECCA WARREN, BITCH MAGIC: THE MUSICAL, 2001–2003, mixed media and plinth / LUDERMAGIE: DAS MUSICAL, diverse Materialien mit Sockel.

Hilty, Greg. "Rebecca Warren: SHE." *Parkett,* no. 70, 2004, pp. 6–11.

REBECCA WARREN, "SHE," 2003, installation view at Maureen Paley Interim Art, London; clockwise from left: HOMAGE TO R. CRUMB; MY FATHER; SOUTH KENT; NO. 6 / im Uhrzeigersinn von links: HOMMAGE AN R. CRUMB; MEIN VATER; SOUTH KENT; NR. 6.

Hilty, Greg. "Rebecca Warren: SHE." *Parkett,* no. 70, 2004, pp. 6–11.

REBECCA WARREN, TOTEMS, 2003, self-hardening clay; height: a) 23 1/2", b) 22", c) 25 1/2" / selbsthärtender Ton; Höhe: a) 60 cm, b) 56 cm, c) 64,8 cm.

Hilty, Greg. "Rebecca Warren: SHE." *Parkett,* no. 70, 2004, pp. 6–11.