

Genesis BELANGER

Artforum,
Genesis Belanger

%041 %2023

Garrett Bradley, *Safe*,
2022, HD video, color,
sound, 20 minutes.



A second segment presents a split screen. Dappled pink light generates mutating cylindrical shapes on the left side. On the right, the woman from the first film rolls down a hill, grass sticking to her hair and dress. Helicopter blades continue to thunder. She is captured in black-and-white, her eyes closed, face expressionless. The scene elicits a curious kind of protectiveness. What kind of private abandon are we witnessing? Is this violence or play? Then the light begins to pour and curl like smoke, drifting across the entire screen until the woman is subsumed. As the light recedes, her body is revealed once again, still tumbling.

In the third part of *Safe*, the woman stares down the camera. The film lingers on her face as she blinks in slow motion, mouth tight, eyes clouded with sadness or anger. Her features are blurred, out of focus, ghostly streaks of another self that the camera can't quite stabilize. A soundtrack of footsteps and sirens continues to reverberate. On the left side of the screen, objects—bouquets? parcels?—fall at blink-and-you-miss-them intervals. Faster and faster, getting closer, then disappearing. If moving images can stun, this was a haunting paralysis.

—Daniel Culpán

Luigi Pericle

ESTORICK COLLECTION OF MODERN ITALIAN ART

Luigi Pericle left the world behind in 1965. He was riding high on two waves: His cartoon character, Max the Marmot, had been serialized in *Punch* and was big in Japan, and—thanks to a well-connected admirer, a young Englishman named Martin Summers—his abstract paintings had been touring Britain's civic galleries. But he put a stop to both careers. Just shy of fifty years old, he moved to the Swiss community of Monte Verità, renowned for decades as a home for theosophists and utopians who danced in the nude. There, he worked until his death in 2001 on paintings that only visitors saw; these remained in his house until it was sold in 2016. Recently, a selection went on view at London's Estorick Collection in a show subtitled, aptly, "A Rediscovery."

The exhibition was divided in two: one room before the break and one after. Call it hindsight bias, maybe, but change had been in the cards. Pericle's paintings in the early 1960s appear choked and ruminative. The series "*Creazione che penetra l'inerzia*" (Creation Penetrating Inertia), ca. 1963–64, runs hefty curves into rigid lines; they looked like details from hard-edge Kandinskys, if subsumed in bluish murk. Pericle's studies in india ink—often monochromatic, airier, and formed of

repeated strikes and loops—are plainly indebted to his knowledge of Eastern calligraphy. He was hunting for a foreign logic, and he would search as far as the seams of the stars. The artist collected astrological charts, alchemical books, and esoteric texts; he became fluent in the mystic philosophies of Paracelsus and Sri Aurobindo. He owned a Reichian "orgone energy accumulator" and, just as uselessly, a Cold War bug-detecting kit. Much was made here of his interests, a hinterland where curiosity and paranoia met, and that meeting did result in some visually gripping things: A fastidious radix chart, drawn in ball-point pen on cardboard, seemed in a welter of symbols and numbers to make the whole universe align.

On the walls of the second room hung works dating from 1966 on, and these were the most spellbinding things in the show. In Monte Verità, Pericle started to paint in mixed media on Masonite, and there's little evidence that he ever changed his medium again. These paintings were squarely composed, showing darkness entrenched around centered blocks that resemble obscure, elemental reliefs. Their surfaces had a pitted and shadowed texture, as if they were craggy sculptural works—but closer inspection revealed the finish to be almost photographically smooth. (Mysteries abound not only about Pericle's beliefs, but about the exact details of his technique.)

A first glance can only be partial. This painting leaned toward "totem," that one toward "building" or "aerial plan," but light and shade receded and flowed, and nothing seemed to exclude anything else. These works weren't decodable symbols; they were more like willful mysteries. It made sense to later learn that Pericle loved 1970s and 1980s sci-fi films—*Alien*, *Blade Runner*, *Star Wars*—since his paintings conjured *Nostromo*'s corridors, or Deckard's apartment walls. It wasn't just how they were imperfectly recursive, as if they were wall panels created en masse and then fitted to someone's indoor pipes and vents; it was also their weathered style, which lent them an aura of nostalgia expressed in a moment that's still beyond our own. This was the mode of the future perfect, and one of its themes was eerie: The next world also will have passed. "Art," Pericle wrote (in Italian) in a 1970s note, "is like an instrument endowed with clairvoyance," adding that it has "*il presentimento degli accadimenti futuri*." That *presentimento* of future events could be a "foreknowledge" or "foreboding." With Pericle, it's rarely clear what exactly the difference was.

—Cal Revelly-Calder

Luigi Pericle, untitled,
date unknown, mixed
media on Masonite,
16 1/2 × 11 1/4".



PARIS

Genesis Belanger

PERROTIN

The powdery, soft-toned Surrealist ceramic sculptures of Genesis Belanger round off with pillowy curves and blush with bubble-gum colors. Just what is it that makes her work so different, so appealing?

REVIEWS

Perhaps it's how her carefully composed tableaux of modern life coalesce into bodies, while her bodies snap cleanly into objects. Despite the curling tongues and snaky fingers' sensual allure, these chopped-up parts are so pristinely severed that it's hard to imagine them as human forms at all, lacking as they do our wet-work anatomy's particularly messy viscera. There's a tender tension between the clearly fucked-up horror show of a chaise longue (*Nude in Repose*, all works 2022) or gurney (*Minor Procedure*) stacked with dismembered limbs and torsos of women and the sweet, pretty way these bits of people are crafted from such pleasing hues and material.

The artist titled her recent exhibition "Blow Out," a phrase that wields more than a few twisting meanings: a damp breath snuffing a candle flame, a popped tire, a storm losing its force, a decisive defeat, a particularly nasty fight, a truly rocking party, and (lest we forget the gallery is a retail space) a gargantuan sale with cut-rate prices. Altogether, these scattered definitions are not such a bad description of postindustrial life in our late-capitalist, early-climate-catastrophe times, and Belanger in one way or another touched on the lot in this display. (The last line of a 2011 poem by Sharon Olds protruded anew in this context: "Know, as you would be known / Blow, as you would be blown.")



View of "Genesis Belanger," 2022. From left: *Masculine Still Life (Keeping It Together)*, 2022; *Minor Procedure*, 2022. Photo: Claire Dorn.

Alongside watercolors and gouaches in a separate room, Belanger composed her distinctive *vanitas* here, dividing her usual pastel porcelain hell into a trio of spaces: a grocery store, a postparty conversation den, and an operating room. The grocery store featured *Healthy Living*, a silvery shopping cart plumped up (or rather only half staffed) with an odd assortment of consumer items that were hard not to see as a bunch of soft cocks: the potted cactus flopped just so, the sordid bundle of asparagus flaccidly limp, a bunned hot dog supinely curled, an open carton of milk with a less-than-virile straw bent weakly earthward. Behind the cart hung *Impulse Buy*, a section of tiled wall sporting a pair of kitchen shelves with some condiment bottles, a few open boxes, a spoon balancing a couple of sugar cubes, and three oranges in a hanging sack with a vaginal slice cut from each.

The chopped body on the pale-teal sofa of *Nude in Repose* in the den was variously an explicitly feminist take on female objectification, according to a quote from the artist on the gallery website. Rippling

from its cushions, the quaintly checkered picnic blanket of *Not One Single Regret* undulated with half-eaten fruits. In *Self Reflection*, popped balloons along with a lopped-off hand and chopped-off head were arranged just so, not far from lush bouquets of *To Many More, to All Your Future Endeavors* and *I'm So Proud of You*. Also nearby were the anthropomorphic lamps of *Flicker in the Ether* and *I Don't Believe in Ghosts*. In the operating room, a quartet of waiting women's feet peeked out from under a curtain in *Your Privacy Is Very Important to Us*, while the aforementioned gurney plunked with body parts stood beside *Masculine Still Life (Keeping It Together)*, a table mustered with a tumescent cactus, a tape dispenser with a lolling tongue, and another popped balloon—a burst of continuity with the previous chambers.

For all their contemporary resonance, Belanger's subjects and color smack of a midcentury moment when a huge part of what makes up contemporary Western life took shape. Yes, classic Pop—from Richard Hamilton on—handled all these same issues. But here those formative aesthetics were soaked in the acid despair of unsublimated bourgeois desires and sharply touched by the last three waves of feminism. All of it was regarded by the artist with a clean commercial cool, a conscious reflection on a capitalism that knows how to churn despair and dismemberment into another appealing product.

—Andrew Berardini

LYON

Biennale de Lyon

VARIOUS VENUES

"Blamelessly fragile" is how Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath, the curators of the Sixteenth Biennale de Lyon, describe our world in their introduction to "Manifesto of Fragility," a vast exhibition encompassing twelve venues and including more than two hundred artists. Bardaouil and Fellrath, who were recently appointed codirectors of Berlin's Hamburger Bahnhof, have focused several curatorial projects on the Middle East and continued to do so in Lyon by smartly drawing out the city's connections to Beirut, formed by the nineteenth-century silk trade and the 1920 French mandate.

The show's structure was tripartite. The most straightforwardly executed segment was "Beirut and the Golden Sixties," which spread across two floors of the Musée d'Art Contemporain de Lyon. This self-contained touring exhibition, which had already appeared at Berlin's Gropius Bau this past spring, included many dazzling works by Etel Adnan, Huguette Caland, and Simone Fattal, among others. Contextualized by documentary footage, photography, and exhibition ephemera fleshing out the history of specific galleries and scenes, several of the displays highlighted the intersections of bodies with the city, queer relationships, and tenderness and pain. Nicolas Moufarrege's extraordinary embroidery painting *Le sang du phénix* (The Blood of the Phoenix), 1975, with its Doric columns rendered in silken threads, around which slippery fragments—blood, eyes, birds—seem to spill, was emblematic of one of the main themes of the biennial as a whole: how contemporary destructions of earthly life will appear when seen against the ruins of antiquity.

On the museum's upper floor was a heavier-handed exhibition, "The Many Lives and Deaths of Louise Brunet." Brunet was a Lyon-naise silk worker (*canut*), who was involved in a workers' uprising in 1834 and was later recruited by a French silk producer to work in Beirut. The myriad items that opened the exhibition—opulent silk designs, factory architecture plans, and thematically related artworks—connected this past life to contemporary issues concerning migration, labor struggles, and international trade. To contextualize