

PRESSBOOK

Genesis BELANGER

Renaissance

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RENAISSANCE

EXPLORING THE BEAUTY OF AGE. INSIDE & OUT



06

Senses

SEDUCTIVE SCULPTRESS



Reception, 2019. Wood, wool felt, stoneware, porcelain, 36 x 72 x 28 in (91.5 x 183 x 71 cm). View of the installation Holding Pattern, New Museum, New York, 2019. Courtesy the artist. Photograph: Pauline Shapiro

Interview by **Stephanie Chan**

Genesis Belanger's sculpture is at once playful and unnerving. She presents colourful tableaus that spill out like Dadaist crime scenes, inviting you to guess what's happened here – challenging you to name the emotions rattled loose within you by disembodied body parts and bowls of suggestive fruit. In her world, when you finish a martini and gaze into the abyss of its empty bottom, you find pupilled olives gazing back at you.

Belanger's work investigates how messy and complex emotions can be. She mimics the grammar of glossy full-page advertisements, sculpting alluring shapes out of warmly textured clay that almost beseech audiences to reach out and touch them. Simultaneously, these sculptures set off a cascade of feelings, memories, and impressions. Her sculpture is a smorgasbord of bright foods – rainbow donuts and ripe bananas – both innocent and lascivious.

These conflicting emotions interrogate the sources of our attraction to objects as consumers, inviting us to wonder if what we want is what we actually want or if it's something that's been cleverly sold to us by ingenious design. Concepts like food, which are necessary for survival, are layered with need and want and shame, colored by our own preconceptions and biases. She turns the things that we desire into synecdoches of ourselves. These things that we want ultimately come to define us, displayed like totems of identity.

Nothing encapsulates this as much as 'Holding Pattern', a scene that distills the essence of the subject into a series of items strewn across a desk. "I do think of my installations as being narratives and portraits," said Belanger. Each of her sculptures is in constant flux depending on who is viewing them, but they also tell a story, one that's recognizable to anyone who lives in a modern world that's fixated on an endless buffet of things.

Even as we recognize and perhaps reject coveting these objects, they are undeniably attractive. A cigarette ripples across the table, draped across an ashtray and approximating postcoital bliss.



Center Piece, 2018. Stoneware and porcelain, 20 x 10 x 11 in (51 x 25.5 x 28 cm). Courtesy the artist and Mrs. Gallery.

A bright overly processed sausage is luscious with a perfect curve, fitting neatly between two perfectly manicured nails. A tube of lipstick twists up into a serpentine tongue, elegantly balancing the perfect, platonic ideal of a pill on its tip. The martini with olive eyes doesn't need to wink; it watches you calmly, as though it knows that you – and it – are one and the same.

Stephanie Chan: You've said that you've used elements of advertising and that industry's visual language in your work. What is that you find fascinating about advertising?

Genesis Belanger: I am fascinated by how the advertising industry brilliantly employs visual language to manipulate our desires and influence our spending. The fluidity with which this is done (from hand soap to neighbourhoods) points to a deep understanding of human psychology. At this current moment, we seem to be learning a lot about how susceptible we are to bias and manipulation. Perhaps by looking at the industry that wrote the play-book, we can access an understanding of how our base instincts impact our decisions.

SC: What inspires your art?

GB: My work is often inspired by politics. I start with something that's happening in the present. Something that makes me angry. I take a breath, and do some research. I trace the origins of my contemporary strife backwards



Above
All Talk, 2017. Stoneware and porcelain, 12 x 5 x 7 in (30.5 x 12.7 x 17.8 cm). Courtesy the artist and Mrs. Gallery.



Right
Elegant Balance, 2018. Stoneware, porcelain, 7 ½ x 7 ½ x 7 in (19 x 19 x 18 cm). Courtesy the artist and Perrotin. Photograph: Pauline Shapiro

and read as much as I can, hoping to make sense of what currently appears to be unjust bulls**t. This dive into history often results in an intensification of my outrage, and I become not only angry, but weighed down, and the only thing I can do with this burden is make a joke of it. I think humor offers an outlet for anger. Humor makes heavy things light enough to tackle. It provides space for difficult conversations.

SC: There's an interesting interplay between the organic and the man-made in many of your sculptures. Can you talk a little bit about how you approach the relationship between the two?

GB: I am trying to make the space between the body and a man-made object small and slippery. I am hoping to reflect our habits of reducing and compartmentalising ourselves and others based on the things we own and wear. There is something absurd about the way we judge and sort each other by our habits of consumption. I'm taking this to its extreme and making bodies that are objects and objects that are bodies.

SC: Some of your work, like 'Holding Pattern' and 'NADA' forms a portrait of a person, and many of your sculptures feel almost like found objects that once belonged to someone. Can you talk more about the ideas behind these objects and how you curate them?

GB: I do think of my installations as being narratives and portraits. In my installation 'Holding Pattern', a desk



Tape, 2019. Porcelain, 12 ½ x 5 ½ x 3 ½ in (32 x 14 x 9 cm). Courtesy the artist and François Ghebaly Gallery. Photograph: Pauline Shapiro



View of the installation Cheap Cookie and a Tall Drink of Water, Mrs. Gallery, New York, 2017. Courtesy the artist and Mrs. Gallery.

littered with the tropes of busy work, (a phone, calculator, cup of pens) collide with the indulgences that make drudgery tolerable (junk food, candy, liquor and pills). All of this is overseen by a single well-muscled women's arm triumphantly holding up a wiener. A gesture that insists that she's there to uphold the status quo in spite of the personal toll this act requires.

SC: You mentioned in another interview that you tend to omit glaze, and it follows that there seems to be a kind of tactile sense to your work that makes the viewer want to interact with it. Can you talk a little about why you decided to eschew glaze and how you choose your materials?

GB: Yes, I never use glaze. I am really attracted to the natural properties in clay. I choose each clay body for its color, texture and the way it interacts with the other clays I use. I do a lot of testing. Not all clays work together and finding ones that do is a trial and error process.

SC: There's almost a sensuality to the curves and rounded edges of your sculptures. What is the significance of the shapes you choose to use in your work?

GB: I am always striving to make my work more gestural, almost as if frozen in motion or a soft fluidity. I think something really interesting happens when you look at something that you know is hard, but it looks soft. That dissonance makes the viewer want to reach out and touch the object.

SC: Along with orphaned body parts, food recurs in many of your pieces, and many of the items also seem to point to an oral fixation. Is there something about the mouth or sense of taste that interests you or that you find significant?

GB: I hope that my objects act as mental triggers. You see something and immediately relate to it. Food makes us think about eating and all of the associations we have with our habits of consumption, from desire (I want it, I love it, I need it) to self-loathing (I am disgusting for eating that, wanting that, needing that). In this way, by adding a donut to an installation, I am including these associations in the narratives I construct. ■