

PRESSBOOK

Paola PIVI

Garage

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This Maven of Feathered Polar Bears Lives Without Fear (And So Should You)!

Artist Paola Pivi discusses her newest show in Miami, where there's a bear for every member of your (chosen) family.

As the art world dutifully swoops into an annual migration pattern straight towards the Sunshine State for Art Basel Miami Beach (which we hope you've prepared for accordingly), we check in with the artist who once took the top honors at the Venice Biennale (for installing an upside-down fighter jet in the Italian National Pavilion) on her assessment regarding human-animal relations and the possibilities of life sans fear.



Art with a view, October 13, 2018 – March 10, 2019, The Bass. Photography by Attilio Maranzano. Image courtesy the artist and The Bass.

GARAGE: The show at The Bass in Miami begins with your bear sculptures, possibly your most familiar works. They definitely have a viral quality; I first saw them in pictures online and they looked striking and fun. At the museum, I was struck by how that impression shifts in person. They felt real.

Paola Pivi: Real as bears? They're that aggressive? For me, I almost don't see them anymore because they're such an intimate part of me. There's no difference between when I touch them and when I touch my leg.

GARAGE: Would it be fair then to think of them as self-portraits?

Pivi: A person approached me once and said, "You look exactly like your bears!" But no, they're not self-portraits. They are definitely portraits of polar bears though, who are my friends. For me, inside those bears are the human beings and their relationship with the polar bears. Those animals represent a relationship between humans and the planet. I don't know if they became so much a part of my work just because they are a fun image and easily translate to audiences, or if it's because they need a voice now.



Art with a view, October 13, 2018 – March 10, 2019, The Bass. Photography by Attilio Maranzano. Image courtesy the artist and The Bass.

GARAGE: Do viewers feel empathy for them?

Pivi: The empathy for animals is there from our childhood, channeled into our teddy bear. Bears are very symbolic.

GARAGE: Yours are covered in feathers—why?

Pivi: The only thing I can tell you about that is a true story, because I've been a loyal believer in truth, not because it's such a hot topic. I originally wanted to make a sculpture of a polar bear and a grizzly bear dancing. And I was obsessed with this but I could not reconcile the idea of this sculpture with the two bodies of the two dead animals. It was going to clash with the concept of the sculpture. While obsessing about this, trying to see if I could get a naturally dead animal, I finally had an idea for a bear covered in yellow feathers.

GARAGE: And that somehow made it more plausible?

Pivi: Yeah, because I didn't have to kill any bears.



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GARAGE: Do you ever worry they might come off as comic or too playful?

Pivi: Why not? There's no such thing as too comic or playful, something playful can be annoying if it's imposed on you but if you can approach it as you wish then there is freedom.

GARAGE: So much of your work is informed by the shifting context of your life, how you lived for a time in India, and though you've recently settled in Alaska you're originally from Europe. How has this itinerancy informed your practice?

Pivi: I travel to make art. I've traveled because of my life, but my art and my life have to be intertwined, deeply. A friend recently told me, "You make cartoon images real without sparing any means, and without fear." So that is also how I live my life, without sparing any means and without fear. I am actually very afraid of many things, but when I don't have fear, that's it. I approach everything that is available to me as a human being, so the whole planet can be my home.

[Paola Pivi: Art With a View](#) runs through March 19, 2019 at The Bass Museum in Miami.