



Critic's Picks, Artforum, June 2017

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ARTFORUM

Marguerite Humeau

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Dystopian daydreams and arcane myth collide in Marguerite Humeau's particle accelerator of an exhibition. The French artist probes mass surveillance and modern warfare through sleek new sculptures made of synthetic media, including eight gargantuan polystyrene masks that crowd one room. Their white wrinkled faces are grotesque, pinched and puckered like those of hare-lipped chimpanzees. They grimace, snarl, and stick out their tongues. Behind each mask, a milky-pink sci-fi cylinder emits a pulse. These heartbeats merge with the surge of jet engines in the following room to create a soundscape simultaneously urgent and hypnotic. There, a single imposing sculpture titled *HARRY II (BODY)*, 2017, dominates the space. Six semitranslucent slabs containing artificial blood flank a central totem. They suggest hospital beds or sacrificial altars, conjuring unseen casualties. The conjoined heads of three carnivorous birds framed by one pair of wings are mounted above them. The mutant predator presiding over the piece feels both futuristic—the freakish result of a cloning experiment gone wrong—and fantastical. The raptors evoke not only aerial warfare but imperial heraldry and insignia, recalling the eagles of the Holy Roman Empire, the Hapsburgs, the Third Reich, and the United States. The hook-beaked birds also resemble vultures, reinforcing Humeau's ominous, ambiguous commentary on conflict and its costs. Below the birds, spiky forms sprout from the base of the sculpture like three-dimensional fractal renderings of the barbed biohazard symbol.

The show, with its chilly, clinically presented content, contrasts with Humeau's recent, more viscerally affecting exhibition at the Palais de Tokyo. Where there was pathos in Paris, one finds dispassionate restraint in Bushwick. The shift suits the subject matter, however, with Humeau's detachment effectively emulating that of the lethal drones, chemical attacks, and airstrikes suggested by her sculpture.



Marguerite Humeau, *HARRY II (BODY)*, 2017, high-density foam, fiberglass, resin, paint, spray-painted steel, glass, rubber, plastic tanks, artificial human blood, audio equipment, sound, dimensions variable.

— Zoë Lescaze