

Martin Herbert, “In Berlin, Autumn’s Art Shows Usher in an Anxious Changing of the Seasons”, Art in America, Winter 2023 issue

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Art in America

In Berlin, Autumn’s Art Shows Usher in an Anxious Changing of the Seasons

By: Martin Herbert

In her debut at Capitain Petzel, Ragen Moss projects anxiety into the immediate future in a show titled “C O N S P I R E.” Here, seven dangling steel and glass canisters hold flickering flames that collectively bump up the room temperature a fair bit; each of them accompanies one of a constellation of seven hanging polyethylene sculptures, bulbous lightweight obelisks variously decorated with patterns and figurative imagery. One image, a possible clue to the work’s latent sociopolitical intent, is a copy of a Käthe Kollwitz drawing. The show, then, feels like both an abstract campfire gathering—a conspiring, indeed, on the part of figures desiring or fearing change—and an unstable situation that might combust, for good or ill, at any moment. Its lack of specificity, and abundance of theatrical nudges, makes the viewer seeking meaning a coconspirator.



View of Ragen Moss's exhibition "CONSPIRE," 2023, at Captain Petzel, Berlin.

PHOTO GUNTER LEPKOWSKI AND TREVOR GOOD/COURTESY CAPTAIN PETZEL, BERLIN

tunnels and abysses that contrast with overlaid typographic snippets of spiraling self-talk: not yourself? what have you done to yourself?, does that make any sense?, how many layers does this onion have? At Heidi, Mimosa Echard's vertical, neo-Funk canvases embed consumer-capitalist detritus into their mottled plastic surfaces—remote controls, kids' toys, pills, kitchen bowls—while larger, gridded horizontal canvases, we're told, use anti-radiation fabric as their material; they're like fragments of a Faraday cage. The whole, titled *I Think My Cells Are Fucking Behind My Back*, points to attritional attempts to ward off a world full of invasive forces that bypass rationality or control.

The show that offers the most relief from all this has, perhaps inevitably, the fewest humans in it: a retrospective for Lin May Saeed at the Georg Kolbe Museum. The German-Iraqi artist, who died at 50 just a couple weeks before the show opened, engaged with interspecies communication and empathy for animals long before it became a contemporary-art staple; she also did so not by lecturing but via a seesawing mix of fairytale charm, humor, mythological learning, and underlying grit. That's clear from this generous presentation of her signature sculptures of autonomous animals and Arab-script-dotted reliefs in carved polystyrene, a pointedly problematic, nonbiodegradable material that is both fragile and built to last. Saeed had an empath's eye for nonhuman facial expressions. Witness the fierce, comical determination of her forward-leaning pangolins, panthers, anteaters, and goats, individual sculptures lined up here as if at the outset of a race. Or see the calm solicitousness of her conversant lionesses in the paradisial painted relief *Mureen / Lion School* (2016).

Where humans appear, things could go either way. In *St. Jerome and the Lion* (2016), one of Saeed's series of welded metal gates depicting figurative scenes, there's a take on the art historical subject of the saint considerately plucking a thorn from a lion's paw; but in *Toreador Gate* (2019), the gored, innocent-eyed bull is crushing a cylinder-headed, near-abstract bullfighter. If you reach this point after having traversed all the shows mentioned above, humankind going down feels like something of a win.

Jan Garden Castro, "Spatial Language: A Conversation with Ragen Moss", *Sculpture Magazine*, January/February 2020, 16-25.

sculpture



■ ragen moss

Ragen Moss's breakout success at the 2019 Whitney Biennial and her current solo show at Bridget Donahue in New York (on view through January 26, 2020) point to new directions in sculpture. Spatial and temporal foci, interiority, and embedded paradoxes and ironies push her investigations into the workings of relational, mental, and physical inner spaces. Her multi-layered sculptures draw on and intermix philosophy, poetry, politics, painting, art history, and contemporary culture. Instead of offering a statement, her works form puzzles and conundrums that hide inside seductive surfaces.

Jan Garden Castro: You've said that you want to "reinvigorate the history of sculpture away from surface and toward spatiality, mass, volume, and density." That's a huge objective. How did you come up with that, and how does your work put it into practice?

Ragen Moss: Some latent operations within sculpture's discourse, such as space, haven't been fully mined yet. I start from the idea of space. Much contemporary work has been interested in sculpture's ability to narrate a story, offer a joke or pun, or challenge the differential between a non-art object versus an art object. I am interested instead in sculpture as the medium that can teach us what space is and why space is important. I come at this because I see each of us as being an awkward, bumbling biological body that is also inscribed by language. This friction between being a physical spatial being and also a thinking, relational spatial being is what generates my work. This, of course, is a political concept as well.

One thing I like to talk about that helps people understand my work is the idea that I can visualize your heart beating contemporaneously with but at a different tempo than my heart. More is going on between us than sculpture has traditionally and recently approached. My work tries to get people to consider that which is inward at a conceptual level, and also literally to look inward. In the works, sculptures and texts are embedded inside each other—there are layers. Each sculpture is transparent but operates in the round; each work is also inscribed by language and carries with it a demand that viewership be through-looking toward interior parts and ideas, and not just surface-looking.

“ I believe in art and its ability to lessen our sense of disjunction in the world, but being responsible for another human's flourishing is the most important thing.”

JGC: Could you discuss one of your favorites pieces?

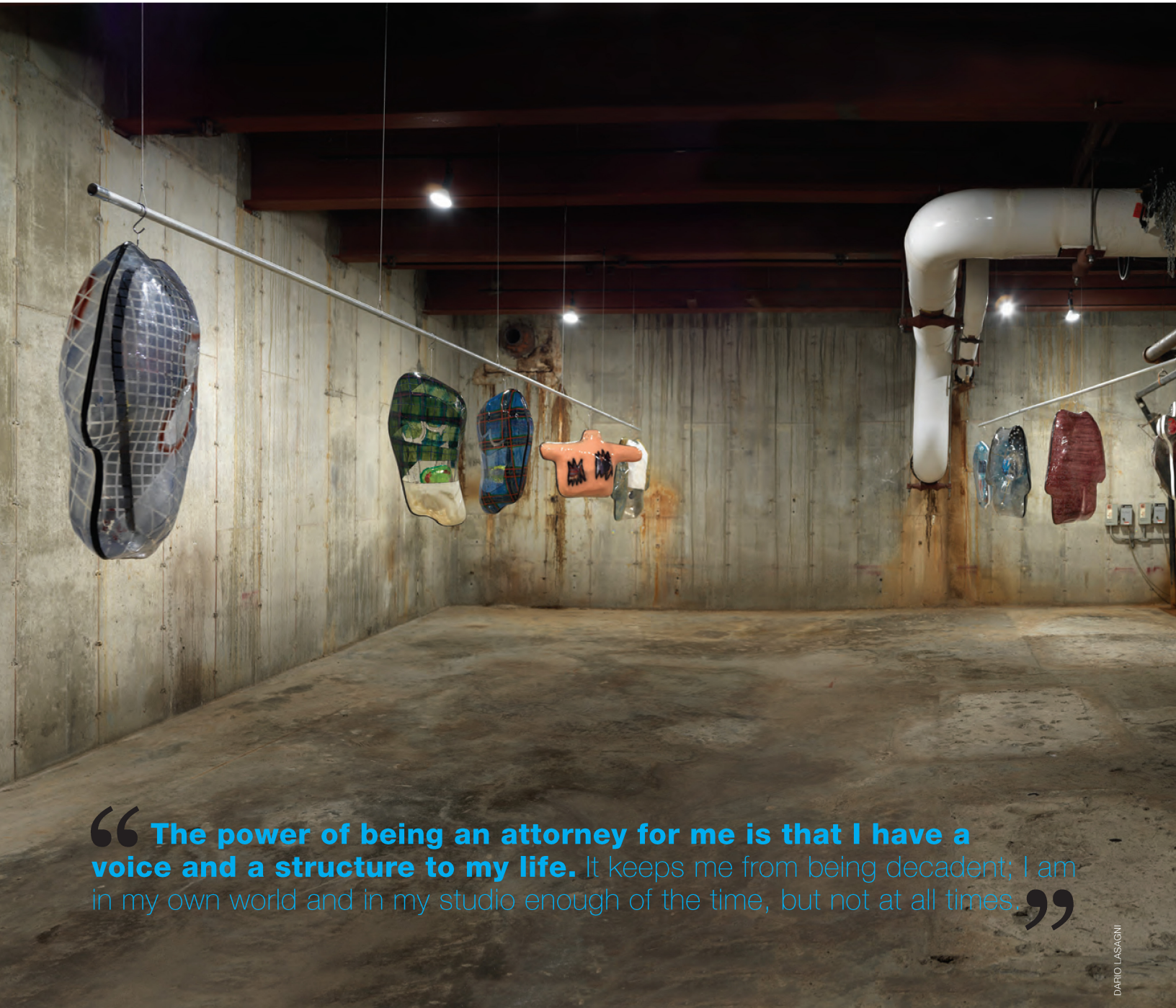
RM: Maybe I can talk about two pieces in relationship to one another. In addition to using sculpture as a medium that can think about and best address space, I am also interested in posing myself hard questions that help motivate me to make work. For the Whitney Biennial, I asked myself a temporal question: Can sculpture, even though it is, seemingly, oppositional to time, also speak about time? Two works in particular are generated from this challenge—even if this isn't the most obvious thing about them: *Romanettes (with double Hearts)* and *Driver (with Passenger (with Heart))*, November.

Romanettes consists of two torso sculptures that each have a smaller, heart-shaped sculpture embedded inside them to make a total of four separate sculptures in one work. *Romanettes* deals with time in a Circadian way. The text on the outside front of each torso says, "Tonight..."; the back says, "Tomorrow..." This basic linguistic device of "Tonight...Tomorrow, Tonight...Tomorrow" comes from a poem, and it became a structuring tool for me to build the sculpture. What we do in the time-space between each "Tonight..." and each "Tomorrow..." ends up forming our lives, our humanity. What do you do between that sunrise and that sunset each day?

The inner heart-shaped sculptures of *Romanettes* also have text, so reading the full work across and inside says: "Tonight...Legislative Looting, Tomorrow...Porchside Bourbon," and, "Tonight...Accounting Acrobatics, Tomorrow...Hotcakes!" The questions are basic but hard: How do you do a sour thing, go to sleep, and wake up the next day and simply have breakfast? How do you do a wrong thing, go home, and have a drink on your porch and relax?

OPPOSITE:
Bureaucrat, drunk (with Bottles),
2017.
Polyethylene, acrylic,
and steel hardware,
installation view.





“ The power of being an attorney for me is that I have a voice and a structure to my life. It keeps me from being decadent; I am in my own world and in my studio enough of the time, but not at all times. ”

DARIO LASAGNI

ragen moss ■



Installation view of "Wolfish Contour" at Ramiken Crucible, New York, 2017.

Driver (with Passenger (with Heart)), November also had a time-based question to it, but not a Circadian-based concern as with *Romanettes*. This time, I challenged myself to use sculpture—which is, again, not usually thought of as a temporal medium—to address a predictive concept of time. In *Driver*, the middle sculpture has text on it that says, "Predictive economic model: market crash, Summer 2019." The work makes a real-world prediction about our economic lives. The date I closed this sculpture was November 2018, and the biennial ran through September 2019, so I couldn't mess with or change the work's prediction—it operated the way that market operators operate—predictively. I liked the idea that during the course of the biennial, the work would either be miraculously right, or wrong like so many predictions. I didn't mind which way it turned out.

JGC: In today's world, space is literally threatened. Does your work respond to that threat?

RM: I'm a subtle worker. The work comes off as alluring, but if you spend time with it, something should unfold. I spend my time researching before I start making anything. I enjoy reading about sociological, geographical, and philosophical views of space. I've spent a long time thinking about, speaking about, and writing about what space means. Obviously, dialogues about globalization raise a definite spatial question, but I don't think my work lies there.

Instead, my interest is inward-looking. For important reasons, we need to remember that we're not just the surfaces that we present to the world. There are spatial relations. I am a fan of Henri Lefebvre's writing on the production of space; Doreen Massey is another resource. From them, I've learned to think about space differently—not just as a literal physical space, which is obviously a concern in my work, but also as mental and relational space, what it means to have a relationship that forms space.

I think of space as built—and that's part of why the works have windowing in them. I want the works to suck in the room, suck in people, and push you back out, like a set of lungs. Space is built because it is in flux, relational, contingent, changing. And my work should have this quality about it. In part, this means that the works are best dealt with in "noisy" spaces—spaces that have a lot going on in them—not in a

■ ragen moss



THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE: GREGORY CARIDEO

pristine white cube. I like my work in my messy studio and when it's lived with in people's homes, whatever they may look like. The works are meant to be generous in that they will suck in and exhale what's around them. I think that's our experience of the world as well.

JGC: Unlike many artists, you have your studio at home and you fabricate everything yourself. How does that work?

RM: I have more ideas than I can build, which is always exciting. I love making this work. Each piece is an opportunity to make the next one. They're all attached. I have a studio and a workshop at home in Los Angeles. I can make more work that way, and it doesn't feel compartmentalized from my life. I can set up technical processes that my work requires, wash up, come inside, take care of something else, go back. I don't have to put walls around my practice. I am almost constantly working.

JGC: You're also a lawyer. Do you still practice?

RM: I do. I'm a transactional lawyer, and I keep up with that because I like solving problems, which is what a transactional lawyer does. The power of being an attorney for me is that I have a voice and a structure to my life. It keeps me from being decadent; I am in my own world and in my studio enough of the time, but not at all times. I have to reckon with the needs of other people. It's healthy for me, keeps me balanced, and allows me to be economically independent. This lets me take risks with my work in a way that I want.

I make all of my work myself probably out of the same ethic. I like handling my work, and I always learn when I'm making—and that's the biggest thing. I know my mind, and my mind needs to be involved in this, not just my hands. It's a thinking thing. While I'm working, I'm thinking about the next work; I'm thinking about the problems—this didn't work, that didn't work—and it's invigorating to solve those problems. My work always surprises me, which is also joyful, and I would lose that if I shopped it out. I like using tools, I like sawing, I like all the different phases of my process—the intellectual phase when I'm heavily researching and reading, the construction-athletic phase when I am carving (and am a mess and physically tired), and the thoughtful-visual phase.



FROM OPPOSITE:

Figure (with Arm),
2018.

Acrylic, polyethylene,
copper, and steel hardware,
51 x 38 x 12 in.

**Theoloogian [sic] (with
Torso),**
2018.

Acrylic, polyethylene,
aluminum, and steel
hardware, 43 x 22 x 15 in.

JGC: You've said that your materials aren't as important as the process.

RM: Right. I tend not to want to talk about the name of the thing I'm making things out of. I'm not a materialist. Some excellent makers are very invested in the symbolism of a material or its properties—its texture, its provenance, its entry or exit from the stream of commerce, or its relationship to industrialized production. Materials are not signifiers for me in that way. Working in a transparent medium is what I'm after.

JGC: How does being a mother add to your practice?

RM: To be more precise with language, I'll speak of

“ I am interested in sculpture as the medium that can teach us what space is and why space is important. ”

myself as a parent more than as a mother. I'm a parent with a very strong co-parent, and this makes everything not just possible, but also energizing. Being a parent reminds me on more than a daily basis about what's important. I believe in art and in its ability to lessen our sense of disjunction in the world, but being responsible for another human's flourishing is the most important thing.

JGC: You were born in New York and are now in Los Angeles. Has the move influenced your work and life?

RM: I have the pace, gait, and speech of a New Yorker. I am fast, voracious, and direct like a New Yorker, but it is good to live in a place with larger studios, and sunshine is very good for me. I am a swimmer; there is nothing like submerging myself in an outdoor body of water—I make work (mentally) while I'm swimming.

JGC: I'm unsure whether or not you identify with Paul Thek, but the Whitney Biennial catalogue essay thinks you do. What about some of the West Coast artists?

RM: I think I could get lumped in with some Light and Space artists, but my inputs are so wide ranging that it'd be hard to find a clear thread. Being mentioned in the same sentence as Paul Thek is great. I think decomposition is weird and good, but I don't think my work looks decomposed. And although there is a meat-hanging reference, I hang my work more because I care about motion and time being involved in sculpture. When hung, the works have a slight reactivity to people's currents as they pass by. Also, I have yet to figure out a way to address the concept of a pedestal. I'm working on it, though; I think the pedestal is a good challenge. Hanging work off the floor is a concise way to get a nice shadow, a nice set of movements, to imbue a work with time, and for now to avoid the Modernist question of a pedestal.

In terms of people I identify with, it would not be for resemblance or visual impact alone; when I think

of influences, I think of what operations are relevant to me. Along these lines, there are playful painting references. Lee Bontecou is a good reference. I studied (at UCLA) with Mary Kelly, and what I have from Mary, if you look, is text and editing. I would put El Lissitzky in the room with me. His *Prouns* have early meaning for me. Tomas Tranströmer is maybe the poet that I go back to—he's basically a sculptor creating space through language. Glenn Ligon is a reference; I can learn from his ways of using text. I like all of these makers' works, but I don't make their work—I don't make work that looks like their work—I make my work.

JGC: How does the work in “8 Animals,” your Bridget Donahue show, speak to your pieces in the Whitney Biennial?

RM: I view each show as a gift. To me, gifts are best used, so I'm using the new show to get better after everything I learned doing the Whitney Biennial. It is a continuation. I can squeeze some of the ideas tighter and get slightly better at them. I'm doing more out-painting, which I haven't done. It's like putting a brick in someone's face sooner. I tend to think of the marks that I'm putting down on these sculptures like bricks. I'm building a building versus just applying color as one would on a canvas, because I'm actually giving the sculpture form by giving it color. Some of the chords in the Whitney Biennial that I used to make the work feel that it has depth and contrast, different ways of dealing with time, different marks—some of those chords are swapped out and new. Such as: I have been thinking about coupling, about interior couples versus lateral couples, which is what we're used to seeing in diptychs and with people on the street. There are smaller works, which I like making. For the Whitney Biennial, I scaled up. It was an awesome challenge to go bigger. The new show features smaller, concentrated works. I like the idea that sculpture doesn't have to be big to have power. ■■■

OPPOSITE:
Camo (with Heart),
2018.
Polyethylene, acrylic,
copper, and steel
hardware,
24.5 x 15 x 8.5 in.



rager moss ■

Peter Brock, "Ragen Moss: '8 animals'", *The Brooklyn Rail*, December, 2019. <https://brooklynrail.org/2019/12/artseen/Ragen-Moss-8-animals>



ArtSeen

Ragen Moss: *8 animals*

By [Peter Brock](#)

ON VIEW

Bridget Donahue Gallery

November 10, 2019 – January 26, 2020

New York



Installation view: *Ragen Moss: 8 Animals*, Bridget Donahue Gallery, New York. Courtesy Bridget Donahue, New York.

The works in Ragen Moss's exhibition, *8 Animals*, invite us to explore the vexed relationship between written language and the material poetics of sculpture. The pieces contain elements of hand-written text that, despite being embedded within the work, never settle into a definitive relationship with their sculptural containers. These hollow forms, made from molded polyethylene plastic embellished with acrylic paint, hang

from the gallery ceiling on braided steel cables. Evocative couplets punctuate these torso-like works, appearing in black script on red heart-shaped vessels suspended on delicate wire within the larger shell: “DAMP SHADOW,” “COMFORT REGIMENS,” “SILENCING DISTANCE,” “MEZZANINE LENDER,” “OLD HANDSHAKE,” to name a few examples. Two pieces have longer passages scrawled across their sides with opaque references to salt content and the firmness of a body. Are these bits of speech, codenames, or glimpses of interior states?

Just to the right of the gallery entrance, five sculptures made from the same mold hang in a neat row that anchors the installation. Each of these works have the word “Again...” scrawled unceremoniously on what seems like the neck. And on the opposite side we find “And, Again...” written in the same script. The urge to unpack the significance of the writing interrupts the act of gazing into the alluring contours and glossy haze of such luminescent shells. Something changes when we find ourselves looking at language. The text alters our relationship to the sculpture, but it does so in a register that does not directly intersect with their form. By forcing us to oscillate between looking and reading, Moss’s work draws out the contrast between these modes of interaction.



Installation view: *Ragen Moss: 8 Animals*, Bridget Donahue Gallery, New York. Courtesy Bridget Donahue, New York.

Language does not depend on its materiality for impact, whereas for sculpture the two are inseparable. A word can be typewritten or scribbled on a napkin, yet once we decipher it, all of its specificity and resonance come flooding in. Sculpture, on the other hand, derives its potency from its physical presence. Its ability to provoke associations depends entirely on its material qualities. The decision to hand-write the bits of text and the question of where to place them are certainly aesthetic concerns, but Moss does not appear to prioritize these formal qualities. Her script is casual, and her placement is direct and frontal. The words deliver their punch despite their appearance, not because of it. Through her antagonistic overlay of language and sculptural vocabulary, Moss heightens the categorical differences in the nature of their expressive force.

Much of the colorful patterning and layering of paint in Moss's works has the same casual quickness as the artist's handwriting. These surface interventions are mostly thin and translucent—a necessary measure in order to view the text within. That the qualities of color and pattern have been relegated to pure surface further pressurizes the fragments of language: we look to the words to fill out the insides of these hollow volumes, and it is tempting to expect the text to establish concrete identities or provide firm boundaries for our visual relationship to the work. The words in this show are differently structured glimpses that do not possess the authoritative quality that we might want written language to provide. The text provokes a category of expectation to which the sculptures cannot directly respond. This condition asks us to consider the conflation of spatial and psychological notions of interiority, and what role language might play in granting access to this realm or perhaps distorting it.

Leader, reclining (2019) is notable among the group because Moss has painted the lower third of the sculpture with rich, brushy chunks of acrylic paint. On the opposite side lies a patch of luscious blue squares with zippy yellow and red lines that form a plaid-like pattern. These are the most saturated hues in the entire exhibition, and the only passage where the surface of the sculpture is completely opaque. This inscrutability leaves us to wonder what is contained within. The density of paint gives way to a black haze and then clear plastic near the top of the piece. Five arrows drawn onto the surface point downward, and the words “FLATTENING FORCE” appear alongside one of them. It is as if the presence of words has forced all the delightful bits down into the bottom of the vessel. This moment is the most explicit demonstration that language can both enliven and constrict the sensuousness of form.

Johanna Fateman, “Ragen Moss”, *The New Yorker*, December 16, 2019.

THE NEW YORKER

Ragen Moss

Donahue

DOWNTOWN The Los Angeles sculptor follows up her appearance in the recent Whitney Biennial with an intriguing new series in acrylic, polyethylene, aluminum, and steel. Suspended from the ceiling, the works initially suggest alien pods on the verge of hatching, but, when viewed up close, their torsolike forms are more mammalian than extraterrestrial. (The association is underscored by the show’s title, “8 Animals.”) They’re mostly transparent - with occluded areas of bright colors, patterning, and opaque shapes, including a riff on the Nike swoosh — but these qualities don’t outweigh the corporeal references. Moss exploits the viscous, membraneous potential of her plastic metrics to emphasize interior space; the pieces contain other sculptural elements, like bodies housing organs. The addition of hand-scrawled texts — “alarm alarm,” “making contact” — can strike angsty or saccharine notes when viewed straight-on, but, from other angles, they gain a murky dimension or sardonic edge. Moss’s curious objects invite, even demand, three-hundred-and-sixty-degree consideration. —J.F. (*through Jan. 26*)

Blake Oetting, "Ragen Moss", *Artforum*, December 6, 2019, <https://www.artforum.com/picks/ragen-moss-81532>.

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS



Ragen Moss, *Senior Borrower (with Mezzanine Borrower)*, 2019, acrylic, polyethylene, aluminum, and steel hardware, 53 x 30 x 22".

NEW YORK

Ragen Moss

BRIDGET DONAHUE

99 Bowery 2nd Floor

November 10, 2019–January 26, 2020

There is something peculiar about the beginning of a party, the conspicuous amounts of empty space fostering an ambient anticipation of what will come, who will arrive, and how I, you, or we will respond. It's this sort of social anxiety that one encounters here, where Ragen Moss's bulbous, anthropomorphic sculptures are currently on view.

Constructed with polyethylene, aluminum, steel hardware—and adorned with acrylic paint—Moss's forms, which hang from the gallery's ceiling, are both bionic and voluptuous. Indeed, the works' bodily contours are exaggerated precisely through the rigidity of the materials employed (however, a number of their indentations suggest a certain malleability as well). À la Umberto Boccioni, her characters seem transitory, both full of air and not, inhaling and exhaling. Although they encourage a certain fasciation with surface tension, Moss's sculptures are spatially dynamic. *Senior Borrower (with Mezzanine Borrower)*, all works 2019, for example, features a range of felicitous decoration—including stars, a Lamborghini logo, and written text—that partially obscures a world behind its translucent plastic skin. "Interiority" becomes hypostasized, no longer a metaphysical inwardness but rather the spatial sediment of Moss's sculpting.

Not all the sculptures should be considered individually, however. Some, like *Puritan (with hellcat Heart)* and *Hellcat (with puritan Heart)*, are physically linked, their swapped hearts suggesting an amorous entanglement as well. *Unteachables I (with double Hearts)* and *Unteachables II (with double Hearts)* serve as the show's more established couples, each pair gently swaying next to each other. The gallery becomes the arena in which these relationships play out, Moss's sculptures carving out space both social and physical, beyond and within their evocative forms, charting this party's beguiling cartography.

—Blake Oetting

Kristin Tauer, "An Inside Look With Artist Ragen Moss", *WWD*, November 12, 2019, 17.

NOVEMBER 12, 2019

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WWD

An Inside Look With Artist Ragen Moss

The L.A.-based artist's new series, "8 Animals," is at Bridget Donahue Gallery in downtown New York. BY KRISTIN TAUER PHOTOGRAPHS BY LEXIE MORELAND

Ragen Moss wants you to take a really good look at her sculptures; like most art, there are many layers to consider.

But she particularly wants you to consider the literal inner layers. "One of the arguments that I would like to be presenting about sculpture's capacity is that it can make specific arguments, it doesn't have to always be about gestalt," she says. The petite artist, who is based in Los Angeles, was in New York to install her newest work since several of her pieces were exhibited in the Whitney Biennial earlier this year. "Sculpture's gift is to teach us about the space we are not, and to learn about what it means to be a human being through all of that."

That argument is on display at Bridget Donahue Gallery in Manhattan's Lower East Side, where her exhibition of new hanging works, "8 Animals," is hard to sum up without the use of physical presence. Installed so that viewers can circumvent the sculptures and observe them at different angles, the works morph depending on where you are observing them, and what level of opacity is in view.

At one angle, you may be able to be inside a sculpture where text or imagery or another sculpture altogether may await. Taken in at another angle, you may be able to see through the other side of a piece, or your view might be restricted to just the texture and color and decoration of an exterior shell, more in line with traditional sculpture.

"It's completely contour-driven, and yet it becomes completely not about the contour," says Moss of her work. "By overloading the contour, there's almost a collapse of it. It's so overloaded it crumbles or disintegrates."

The sculptures are all modeled loosely on the idea of a human torso, the core – and a core implies an interior. Her addition of an interior sculpture, often in the shape of a heart, also cues the viewer into the human quality of the work.

The sculptures resemble partially deflated helium balloons, and her labor-intensive process of creating them is proprietary. But Moss maintains that she's



Unteachables I (with double Hearts), two sculptures each 24 x 15 x 8 in and Unteachables II (with double Hearts), two sculptures each 24 x 15 x 8 in.



Ragen Moss at Bridget Donahue Gallery.

not a process artist, and the work isn't about her use of material; there are no symbolic meanings to untangle from her choice of acrylic, polyethylene, aluminum and steel. "It's about space and it's about creating these characters," she says.

Her characters are unexpected – a girl sprinting, a leader reclining, a senior borrower and senior lender, puritan and hellcat – and often paired to highlight polarity. Moss collects words and phrases which make their way into her work, including legal text which she encounters in her career as a lawyer (like her sculptures, there's a polarity to her own life.)

While the idea of space is explored within each sculpture and their physical relation with the viewer, Moss also sees a dialogue created between the sculptures, and installed the works with a focus on the interplay between their proximity in the room. To be sure, a different configuration would have highlighted different ideas proposed by each of the works; Moss sees her current layout as an outline of the present cultural landscape, inclusive of economics, religious and moral based judgment issues, and politics.

Space has influenced Moss' artistic



Installation view of "8 Animals."

career, too, with the scale of her work increasing as her personal environment has expanded. "When I lived in New York, I lived in a 350-square-foot place and I made these tiny weird things," she says. "And then I moved to Los Angeles and I had more physical freedom."

Her work speaks to big ideas, which

viewers may or may not take away from peering inside the sculptures.

"I'm more interested in really thinking a lot about an idea or a set of ideas and then putting them there, and then my job is kind of done and what people do with it, they do with it," she says. "On some level, a viewer gets to see what they want to see."

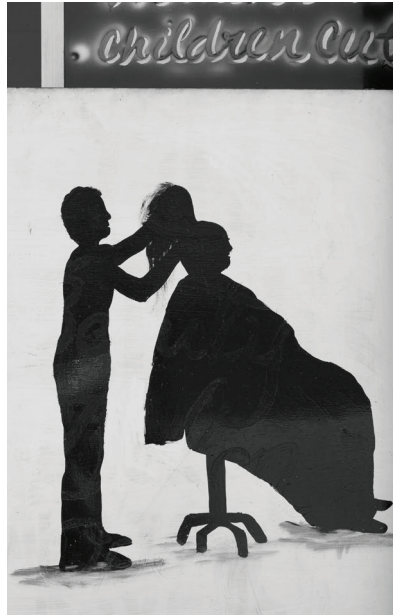
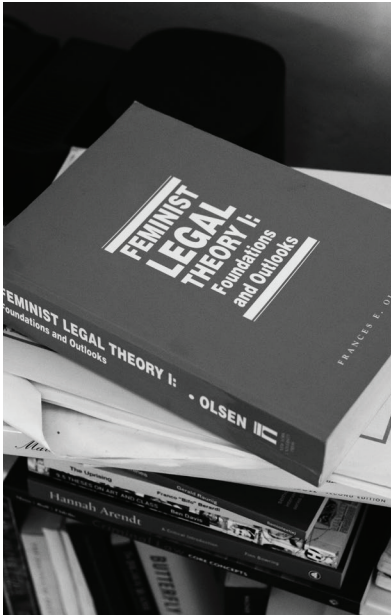
Lindsay Preston Zappas, "Working Artist", *Carla Issue 17*, Fall 2019, 32-35.

carla

Working Artist

Featuring Ragen Moss,
Justen LeRoy, and Bari Zipperstein

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Lindsay Preston Zappas
Photos by Jeff McLane

When I tell people that I am a writer and artist in addition to the publisher and editor of this magazine, I often get confused looks or concerned questions. “Doesn’t the magazine pull you away from the studio?” people ask in horror. Of course it does, I tell them.

An artist’s life can take on many forms, and artists often blend modes of working, making, and thinking into hybrid careers that span communities and genres. The myth that an artist must commit wholly to the solitary practice of producing their own artwork day in and day out in order to be successful still persists, but is slowly shattering. Refreshingly, the genres that creative producers work within are becoming less stringent and more playful.

Across the next two issues of *Carla*, we will feature portraits and words by L.A.-based artists who are also highly invested in endeavors outside of the traditional art world. These artists build things, practice law, gather communities, create platforms, and push up against value, context, and utility. Their insights reveal that switching between modes of working brings rigor and variation to their creative output. As Ragen Moss puts it, “The motion of switching across disciplines is actually a fine way to get oneself to appreciate everything.”

Ragen Moss

I'm an artist, and also I'm a practicing lawyer. Being an artist and a lawyer has just made sense to me, and I experience them linked rather than compartmentalized. I'm also into both of them, at the level of genuine interest. It's rarely occurred to me internally that being both is odd although externally I'm aware that having an MFA and a JD is not the most obvious and it does make for a complex weekly rhythm—I have taken conference calls while mixing cement, which is not ideal.

Moving back-and-forth across analytic legal work and building sculptures is good mind exercise. I swim and run, and alternating across a few different areas of brain-work is not that different from physical cross-training. It's productive for me to organize the formlessness of the studio with specific, concrete thinking; and it's productive for me to upend a legal problem with the thoughtfulness inherent in making a work of art. I also really understand legal processes like a doer—like someone who hammers and saws and drills and ratchets within law—and not just someone who reads or talks or thinks about law. This makes the use of law within the artworks that I make slightly different than many artworks that have engaged with law. All to say: I less make work “about” law and more make work “with” law. That's been good for me and for the work and possibly for viewers too.

Having to answer to a client or respond to business emails is sobering and grounding. It's a clear reminder that I am not apart from or above a social-political-economic system, whether I like it or not. It also keeps me from getting too tidy or too loose in any single work pattern. I feel most alive and fresh when I am both thinking and doing, so I've been working on building a life that permits this as much as possible. Most importantly: the motion of switching across disciplines is actually a fine way to get oneself to appreciate everything. Life is (potentially) long.



"Emerging Artist Award", *Galerie Magazine*, Fall 2019, 109.



RAGEN MOSS

LOS ANGELES | SCULPTURE

Light and dark, transparent and opaque, interior and exterior—the interplay of opposites motivates sculptor Ragen Moss. Rendered in polyethylene, her multidimensional works, often shaped to resemble torsos in a nod to traditional sculpture, invite you to look within, move around, and experience them. “I make work that engages what it means to have both a beating heart and a thinking mind,” says Moss. The result is sculptures inside sculptures, each opening up to reveal another intriguing layer, achieved through hand-carving and the application of colors and patterns. Sometimes, she even includes text from the law, as she also happens to be a practicing attorney.

**“HER BIOMORPHIC
FABRICATIONS ARE
BEAUTIFUL FORMS**

Jeffrey Brown and Anne Azzi Davenport, “What this year’s Whitney Biennial says about contemporary American art”, *PBS NewsHour*, June 28, 2019. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/what-this-years-whitney-biennial-says-about-contemporary-american-art>



What this year’s Whitney Biennial says about contemporary American art

Jun 28, 2019 6:20 PM EDT

By —

Jeffrey Brown

By —

Anne Azzi Davenport

The biennial exhibit at the Whitney Museum of American Art represents a big moment for contemporary art, featuring some of its biggest names. While works tackle various major social and political issues of the moment, they tend to do so in a way that feels “hopeful and often productive” instead of cynical. But as Jeffrey Brown reports, this year’s show is accompanied by a controversy of its own.



Transcript

- **Jeffrey Brown:**

One thing they found? Even in this high-tech age, artists still like to make things by hand; 31-year-old Pat Phillips, from a small town in Louisiana, painted a giant mural addressing issues of race and incarceration that comes with its own wood fence and bench.

There are finely crafted sculptures by Diane Simpson and Daniel Lind-Ramos, whose assemblage of tools, branches, natural and salvaged materials becomes a kind of shrine to the suffering from the 2017 hurricane in his native Puerto Rico.

- **Ragen Moss:**

There's a sculptural turn in them.

- **Jeffrey Brown:**

And there's also this strange translucent torso-shaped hanging forms handmade by Ragen Moss, who wants us to walk around and peer inside them sculptures.

- **Ragen Moss:**

Sculpture, to me, categorical imperatives is that it can teach us about space like nothing else.

- **Jeffrey Brown:**

Moss is also a lawyer, no doubt unusual for a Biennial artist, but she likes the way her two disciplines make her think differently.

- **Ragen Moss:**

When you're a lawyer, you're given a set of facts. They are not in your control. And a good lawyer's job is to analyze an issue spot, address them and solve them. Art could almost be an opposite funnel, where there are no facts. I make the facts, and then I solve problems that don't exist. I set my own questions.

Kristen Tauer, “Five Artists to Check Out During the Whitney Biennial”, *WWD*, May 17, 2019.
<https://wwd.com/eye/lifestyle/five-artists-whitney-museum-biennial-1203132226/>

WWD Five Artists to Check Out During the Whitney Biennial

Presented by Tiffany & Co., the museum survey of contemporary art opened May 17.

By **Kristen Tauer** on May 17, 2019

After a bit of pre-opening drama — and continued protests and calls to remove Whitney Museum board member and vice chair Warren Kanders, after it was revealed that his company Safariland produces tear gas which has been used against migrants at the U.S.-Mexico border — the museum officially opened the doors to its Biennial showcase today in New York. Presented by Tiffany & Co., the exhibition highlights work from 75 working contemporary artists. Through painting, sculpture, video, photography, performance and installation, the artists featured explore topics touching upon identity, race, religion, gender, the environment and politics.

There's plenty of time to take it all in — the show runs through Sept. 22. Here are a few emerging artists to look out for when you're there.

Ragen Moss

The L.A.-based artist's nested sculptures hang from the museum's ceiling but appear almost as if they are suspended, and there is a certain balloon-quality about the work. Torso-sized, the painted sculptures integrate illustration and text, and various levels of surface opacity. Moss explores ideas of physical space in her work — a point which may be particularly underscored if you visit the museum on a busy weekend and have to jostle your way for a better peek inside each piece.



Installation view of Ragen Moss' work at the Whitney Biennial. Kristen Tauer

Andrew Russeth, "Soft Power: The Whitney Biennial Is an Elegant But Safe Portrait of Right Now", *ARTnews*, May 13, 2019. <http://www.artnews.com/2019/05/13/whitney-biennial-review/>

ARTNEWS

REVIEWS

Soft Power: The Whitney Biennial Is an Elegant But Safe Portrait of Right Now

BY *Andrew Russeth* POSTED 05/13/19 6:14 PM



Works by Ragen Moss at the 2019 Whitney Biennial.
PHOTOS: ANDREW RUSSETH/ARTNEWS, EXCEPT WHERE NOTED

Lilting strings perform “The Star-Spangled Banner,” accompanying a tender animation of watercolors by Kota Ezawa that shows black football players, including Colin Kaepernick, kneeling to protest police brutality.

Clippings of racist media coverage of the Central Park Five, the black and Latino teenagers wrongfully convicted of raping and assaulting a white woman in 1989, hang along a wall—the work of Alexandra Bell, who has also included an ad signed by a private citizen, Donald J. Trump: “BRING BACK THE DEATH PENALTY. BRING BACK OUR POLICE!”

Voices emerge from an old tape player, sharing their fears for the Trump presidency, as recorded by Marcus Fischer just before Inauguration Day in 2017. “Fascism,” “white supremacy,” “the denial of science,” and “insanity taking over” are among the utterances.

The first Whitney Biennial assembled entirely during the Trump Administration has arrived. But despite such (mostly perfunctory) nods to the ongoing political morass, this is not a show of incendiary, radical responses. Artists are looking at how cities are being gentrified, how communities can be formed, and how power functions, in a register that is, for the most part, avowedly earnest—more melancholy than outraged.

“Who’s trying to fuck me over right now?” Martine Syms calls out in a funny, impressionistic video-photographic self-portrait of an installation, and Paul Mpagi Sepuya shoots himself in exhilarating, oblique self-portraits of his own. Strung up by wires, Ragen Moss’s nine awkward, luscious translucent polyethylene pieces vaguely recall bodies or cocoons, painted with playful references to Robert Motherwell, Charline von Heyl, and Simpson; they look tough but also a bit precarious. And I found myself strangely moved while seeing young female gymnasts tumbling through the air in Jeanette Mundt’s exquisite Giacomo Balla-like paintings, aiming to be perfect, if only for a moment.

Jillian Steinhauer, “The Whitney Biennial 75 Artists Are In, and One Dissenter Steps Out”, *New York Times*, February 25, 2019.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/25/arts/design/2019-whitney-biennial.html>

The New York Times

The Whitney Biennial: 75 Artists Are In, and One Dissenter Steps Out

By Jillian Steinhauer

Feb. 25, 2019

For most artists, inclusion in the 2019 Whitney Biennial is not only a tangible milestone but also an affirmation of their work and an encouragement to keep going. “It’s a huge deal, because it allows me to move forward in a greater way,” said [Brendan Fernandes](#), whose installations and performances combine visual art and dance. For the biennial, Mr. Fernandes, a former ballet dancer who is based in Chicago, will present a new version of a piece titled “The Master and Form,” which consists of archaic-looking wooden scaffolding and devices that allow performers to hold the five basic ballet positions for long periods of time. “For me it is a social-political space, a piece that questions the agency of the body, the agency of the dancer and our labor,” said Mr. Fernandes.

The Los Angeles-based artist [Ragen Moss](#) is also concerned with the body and how it functions within society — what she describes as the “beautiful tension that we each experience as this round, awkward, spatial, embodied being that is also inscribed by language.” Ms. Moss makes hanging, transparent sculptures that she embeds with layers and paints and that are evocative of human forms. For the Whitney Biennial, she made nine sculptures representing types, including a lawmaker, a laborer and a rule breaker, that were her answer to the question, “What are the characters or ways of being that our particularized moment are forcing us to reckon with?”



Ragen Moss is a Los Angeles-based artist chosen for the Whitney Biennial



Ragen Moss's sculpture, "Consumptive Reader, 2nd degree (with Apple)," from 2017.
The artist is making new work for the Whitney exhibition. Credit Ragen Moss; Dario Lasagni

Scott Indrisek, "7 Artists Not To Miss At the 2019 Whitney Biennial", *Garage (VICE)*, March 6, 2019.

GARAGE

VICE



ART

7 Artists Not To Miss At the 2019 Whitney Biennial

From the subtly spectacular to the oddly elegant at the 79th exhibition.

By [SCOTT INDRISEK](#) | Mar 6 2019, 11:24am

Korakrit Arunanondchai, *Together with history in a room filled with people with funny names* 4, 2017. High-definition video, color, sound; 23:28 min. Image courtesy the artist; boychild; Clearing, New York and Brussels; and Carlos/Ishikawa, London. Photograph by Alexander Addington-White

The next 79th Whitney Biennial opens on May 17, bringing together 75 artists for an exhibition that has—especially in recent years—inspired controversy. Of course, any major show meant to be a snapshot of contemporary art in America is going to ruffle feathers. But previous iterations of the biennial have dissolved into anger and polemics, as was the case in 2015, when Dana Schutz's *Open Casket*—an abstracted rendering of the body of the murdered African American teenager Emmett Till—exploded into a vicious firestorm that went well beyond the art world.

The co-curators of this year's show, Jane Panetta and Rujeko Hockley, must be hoping that their exhibition can sidestep such a fate. (That said, there are already some rumblings of discontent, with at least one artist—Michael Rakowitz—preemptively pulling out of the show due to the business dealings of Whitney vice chairman Warren B. Kanders) The upcoming Whitney Biennial is a relatively youthful affair, with Panetta and Hockley stressing that roughly 75% of the artists are under the age of 40.

While the roster includes familiar names (Nicole Eisenman, Josh Kline) and new cult favorites (the unconventional collective Forensic Architecture, nominated for the 2018 Turner Prize), it also leaves room for plenty of unexpected discoveries. Here are seven of the artists we're most excited about:

Ragen Moss



Ragen Moss, *Consumptive Reader, 2nd degree (with Apple)*, 2017. Polyethylene and acrylic paint, 31 x 16 x 9 in. (78.7 x 40.6 x 22.9 cm). Image courtesy the artist. Photograph by Dario Lasagni.

Multi-hyphenates are nothing new in the art world, but Ragen Moss is likely the only artist-lawyer participating in this year's Whitney Biennial. Her unique background leads to all sorts of heady cross-pollination: in 2018, she gave a lecture in Los Angeles entitled "The Spatial Question: What Constitutional Law Can Learn From Sculpture." Thankfully, it's possible to appreciate her work without an advanced degree. Moss landed on the curators' radar following a 2017 exhibition at Ramiken Crucible in New York, organized by Lucas Blalock (who will also appear in this year's biennial). In that show, rows of polyethylene forms hung from metal rods—an array of hollow, enigmatic husks painted with acrylic. Moss's practice might be driven by ideas and a passion for activism, but her curious objects have their own formal allure.

Andrew Russeth, “The Year in, and Beyond, New York Galleries—Plus a Top 10 from Around the World”, *ARTnews*, December, 27, 2017. <http://www.artnews.com/2017/12/27/year-beyond-new-york-galleries-plus-top-10-around-world/>

ARTNEWS

2017: THE YEAR IN REVIEW

The Year in, and Beyond, New York Galleries—Plus a Top 10 from Around the World

BY **Andrew Russeth** POSTED 12/27/17 11:47 AM

Because there are so many places to see art in New York, and so many people committed to making and showing art here, I have often thought to myself that there is really no such thing as a bad year for art in the city, only good years and great years. And 2017 was, in my humble opinion, a great one. There were superb, long-overdue museum shows, venturesome gallery exhibitions, and flashes of brilliance all over town. I am tempted to classify it as exceptional—a uniquely great year—but things are too unsettled and disturbed for that.

My top ten favorites out of everything I saw around the world follows below, but there were so many strong shows in New York City alone that I have to start with a long list from home.



Installation view of Ragen Moss's solo show at Ramiken Crucible. COURTESY THE ARTIST AND RAMIKEN CRUCIBLE

5. Ragen Moss at Ramiken Crucible, New York Housed in Ramiken's basement dungeon space, which has sadly gone quiet of late, this show—organized by the great photographer Lucas Blalock—had eleven bulbous translucent polyethylene forms hanging on two metal rods in the gallery, like hunks of meat in an abattoir or clothing in a department store. Some resembled torsos, others faces, but they always seemed to change form as you gaze at them. They were hilarious and creepy and utterly indefinable, and in very roundabout ways (they're not really paintings, nor sculptures) threw out to viewers tricky, intertwined questions about vision and bodies and how we comprehend either of those things. To put it more simply: this show marked the birth of something new.

Joanna Fiduccia, "Tops & Flops 2017", *Spike Art Magazine*, December 29, 2017.

SPIKE

TOPS & FLOPS 2017



This art year had so much to offer that losing orientation wasn't very difficult. So why not, we thought, organize it into what was best, and what was worst.

Das Kunstjahr 2017 hatte so viel zu bieten, dass man leicht die Orientierung verlieren konnte. Hier die Tops und Flops einiger unserer Autoren.

JOANNA FIDUCCIA, ART HISTORIAN

Ragen Moss**Ramiken Crucible, New York, 26.2.–26.3.2017**

Ragen Moss's transparent polyethylene encasements in the form of torsos and overstretched sweaters, partly painted with plaids and patterns, were the most original [works](#) I saw this year. Organized by the tremendous photographer and human Lucas Blalock, the works were suspended from metal rods in Ramiken's secondary basement space, the boiler room of an old office building. But the mood was less abattoir than psychic boutique for witty and uncanny statements of how bodies contain and disclose form. Moss's works offer at once a centuries-overdue reinvigoration of polychrome sculpture and the charge of something that awaits an entirely new language.

TOP

“Ragen Moss”, *The New Yorker*, March 27, 2017.

ARTGALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Through March 26.

 Ramiken Crucible
389 Grand St.
Downtown

917-434-4245

[Website](#)

Ragen Moss

Enter on the East Broadway side of the Apple Bank on Grand Street, on a weekend afternoon, and an attendant will lead you down to the basement, where eleven heartrending sculptures hang from two long poles. They are made from molded pieces of transparent plastic, which Moss partially paints and then joins to create sealed cocoons.

“Consumptive Reader, 1st Degree (with Lemon)” sports blue plaid and contains a yellow balloon; “Vigilante (with Apple, with Pear)” features an orangish cross and two jagged squares marked out in black. The objects’ shapes call to mind internal organs and suggest evidence of some mysterious trauma.

— *The New Yorker*