

ARTFORUM



Sara Gernsbacher, *7 Stories*, 2018, pigmented silicone, acrylic paint, 84 x 25".

Sara Gernsbacher

PARRASCH HEIJNEN GALLERY

Last spring, Sara Gernsbacher showed hanging sculptures of silicone, acrylic, and canvas at the Franklin Parrasch Gallery in New York. In her home base of Los Angeles, she offered a new group of the slippery-looking cutouts, which appear to

be remnants imbued with purpose through lavish care. This set was colored with pigments and spray paint and set into interlocking plaited or abutted configurations. The represented shapes—including cavities (plugged with black silicone or open to the supporting wall); petals; and spindly, rodlike sticks—felt elemental, ever malleable, even as they were fixed in spatial relationships. They were evocative of figures: The fleshy bits of *Shape is Your Touch*, *Magic Child*, and *Up Arms Center in 3* (all works 2018), among others, had been trimmed into slender appendages recalling legs and arms—or, more accurately, the skin that would cover them. The substance was floppy, hanging limply from the grommets where it was attached to the wall, minutely but perceptibly stirred on occasion by ambient motion. The surfaces were pockmarked, with cracks that resembled veins, and sullied with a dusting of the paint flecks and fine-grained stuff that settled in her studio, where they spent time before being drafted into use.

The installation at Parrasch Heijnen Gallery smartly exaggerated the oblique, portrait-like qualities of would-be abstraction—those indexical registrations of sensible and somatic manipulation that transpire in the studio—by juxtaposing Gernsbacher’s seven sculptures in the main gallery with two of Bruce Nauman’s in the front gallery. This arrangement framed Nauman’s *Untitled*, 1965 (a test cast of a sand mold made as a demonstration for patrons of the arts at the University of California, Davis), and *Untitled*, 1966 (a cardboard geometry fitted into a corner high enough off the ground to read not as the matte-black painted box that it is but rather as a hovering iron or steel construction), as portals to Gernsbacher’s work. Both artists deal with architecture and the residual traces of work spaces, as in the flaunted seams of her studio’s concrete floor, which become a visually continuous register within the varied amalgamations. Both allegorize making and thematize process. And so on.

We might also think of Eva Hesse, to whom Gernsbacher seemed to appeal in the modular repetition of *7 Stories*, a vertical daisy chain of dirty peachy-tan flowers whose central pistils (termed the “female” part of the plant) are represented as black holes, and in the playful parallax of the even more obviously bodily *Flower Brick Body—Black Center Yellow Out*, which comprises a bright two-by-two grid of what looked to be either botany or nipples. The press release explained that Gernsbacher’s symbolism is intensely personal, with representational codes cued to sensations: “Holes represent energy flowing through the works, triggering the space and the violence that is felt when something is abruptly taken away from pure forms; legs, indicative of two imperfect parts meeting as one, encompass an emotional space; flowers challenge conventional ideas of femininity where the grime and evidence of the studio floor leaves marks upon their innocent petals, relieving them of their bolstered ego.” To be sure, there were many points of connection; the Nauman works set off an associative and historical chain in

parrasch heijnen gallery

1326 s. boyle avenue
los angeles, ca, 90023
www.parraschheijnen.com
3 2 3 . 9 4 3 . 9 3 7 3

which Gernsbacher's recasting, as it were, of post-Minimalist tropes—with all their material sensuality—gained significance. Yet to her credit, the comparison also felt superfluous, or at least compensatory: The meaning behind her work was right there, even if still out of reach.

— Suzanne Hudson