

CHÈRE

14 November - 13 January

Nicola L
with
Nadia Belerique
Ambera Wellmann
Chloe Wise

I am the last woman object. You can take my lips, touch my breasts, caress my stomach, my sex. But I repeat it, it is the last time.

-Nicola L

Arsenal Contemporary NY is pleased to present *Chère*, an exhibition featuring the work of eminent feminist artist Nicola L alongside new sculptures and paintings by Nadia Belerique, Ambera Wellmann, and Chloe Wise. Cross-generational in scope, the exhibition sees this latter group of artists taking as a source of inspiration and point of departure from the thematic assertions and legacy of L's work, reveling in new possibilities in the process.

Weaving through sculpture, design, video, and performance since the 1960s, **Nicola L's** practice has been marked by an impulse to conflate objecthood and the female body and to further track the cultural shifts that spur this objectification. With her "functional objects," L embraced Pop's commercialism and penchant towards engorged sizing, dressing bookcases, coffee tables, and sofas in curvy, feminized shapes. The artist's drive towards anthropomorphism entwines with an inclination to envelope the world in a communal skin; to forefront the surface quality of our shared experience of life. As Ruba Katrib, curator of L's 2017 retrospective at the Sculpture Center, writes, "It is a vehicle for entering the human body into dialogue with architecture, clothing, and furniture, to direct attention to the superficial layers that compose all structures, including bodies: the shell can be understood as both architecture and skin."

The function of performativity in L's work is twofold. First, it serves as an invitation to put her practical objects to use—to sit on, to grab onto. Second, it acts as a pledge to undermine the individual in lieu of a collective that is always-already in action. No doubt the latter penchant is clearest in her performance-cum-video work *The Red Coat Same Skin For Everyone* (1969), wherein an immense red vinyl parka fitting eleven persons enfolds a coterie of singular bodies into an active community.

In this exhibition, community, fueled by reverence, transmigrates from one generation to another. The title of the exhibition entrusts in a double meaning, a simultaneous salutation to a female addressee and as a phonetic misuse of the French word for flesh, chair. The new works created by Belerique, Wellmann, and Wise operate on both registers of this pun; they address L while ultimately being enveloped by the spontaneous community her work has continuously fostered. Furthermore, all three artists articulate at the limit where the female body moves from sensuous form towards its representation, animating this effigy in diverse performances of contemporaneity.

A series of "Beds" by artist **Nadia Belerique**, elevated steel and glass structures tracing human bodies, punctuate the exhibition. Strewn atop their glass surfaces are found objects - the kinds of miscellanea one finds in attics or lingering in a seldom-touched cabinet, imbued with a sense of past life. These sculptural installations call to mind an architecture both physical and psychological, and the stream of associations that enable objects to return to us representationally, eventually collapsing into memory.

In high-gloss application, **Ambera Wellmann's** paintings deftly enmesh flesh and non-human surfaces. Bodies collide onto bodies which ultimately fuse with their environments and the objects with which they co-populated. The result is an invocation of the world we know now replete with haptic revelations, wherein sensuality is defined by the dissolve between "us" and "it".

Chloe Wise's portraits forefront relationships between feminized bodies and consumption, probing the ways in which the commercialization of all aspects of contemporary existence ultimately settles on this roving signifier. The staged environments wherein her sitters are placed speak to a discord between the ultimately intimate relationship linking the artist and her subjects and the mediation that separates them, with a curtain of artifice both consoling and heightening this fissure.

Nicola L (b. 1932, Morocco) has been working in Paris and New York since the 1960s. She studied at the École Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Paris. In 2005 she was honored as the Guest of Honor at the Musée de Chateauroux, France. A retrospective of her work was mounted at the Sculpture Center in 2017. Notable exhibitions include *The World Goes Pop*, Tate Modern, London (2016); *A Modest Proposal*, Hauser & Wirth, New York (2016); Liverpool Biennial (2014); *artevida*, Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (2014); *re.act.feminism #2*, Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona (2012); La Bienal de la Habana (2012); *elles@centrepompidou*, Centre Pompidou, Paris (2009); *The Death of the Audience*, Vienna Secession (2009); *Aimer, travailler, exister*, MAMCO, Geneva (2004).

Nadia Belerique (b. 1982, Canada) lives and works in Toronto. Belerique studied at York University and holds an MFA in Visual Arts from the University of Guelph. She was awarded the BMW Exhibition Prize in 2014 for work presented at CONTACT Photography Festival. Her work has been exhibited at the Grazer Kuntsverein, Grazer, Austria; the Art Gallery at the Embassy of Canada, Washington DC; Oakville Galleries, Oakville; La Biennale de Montréal, Montréal; Kuntshalle Wein, Vienna and Daniel Faria Gallery, Toronto.

Ambera Wellmann (b. 1982, Canada) lives and works in Berlin. She studied at Cooper Union School of Art and Nova Scotia College of Art & Design University and holds an MFA from the University of Guelph. She was recipient of the RBC painting prize in 2017. Her work has been exhibited at the Kasmin Gallery, New York; Lulu, Mexico City; Office Baroque, Brussels; Kraupa-Tukasny Zeidler, Berlin; Regional Centre for Contemporary Art, Sète, France; the National Gallery, Ottawa, ON; Centro Cultural Casa Baltazar, Veracruz, Mexico and the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, Toronto.

Chloe Wise (b. 1990, Canada) lives and works in New York. She holds a BFA in painting from Concordia University. Her work has been exhibited at Almine Rech, Paris; Galerie Sebastian Bertrand, Geneva; Jeffrey Deitch, Miami; Atlanta Contemporary, Atlanta; Hydra School House Projects, Hydra, Greece; Division Gallery, Montreal & Toronto; The New Museum, New York.