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What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week
By Will Heinrich and Martha Schwendener — December 12, 2017



LEFT: Works by Nicola L. at SculptureCenter in Queens. Credit: Kyle Knodell
RIGHT: "I Am the Last Woman Object" (1969), by Nicola L. Credit: Kyle Knodell

Nicola L.

Through Dec. 18. SculptureCenter, 44-19 Purves Street, Queens; 718-361-1750, sculpture-center.org.

In the 1960s, anthropomorphic sculpture in the style of furniture proliferated, suggesting a latent eroticism in home design. Despite the so-called "liberated" rhetoric of the era, however, most versions showed the female body in compromised positions, implying that women were as serviceable and accommodating as lamps or coffee tables. **Nicola L.**'s sculptures, surveyed in "**Works, 1968 to the Present,**" at **SculptureCenter**, offer a terrific and timely corrective.

Among the pieces here are a slick vinyl "White Foot Sofa" (1969), with slightly blobby toes, and an ironing table from 2004, cut from wood in the outline of a female body. "Little TV Woman: 'I Am the Last Woman Object'" (1969) gets right to the point: The white vinyl sculpture looks like a blowup sex toy with a blankly abstracted mouth, breasts and genitals. A television embedded in its belly has text on its screen that reads: "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."

Gender parity is suggested in the more recent "Penetrables" series. Here, you could stick your arms, legs and head into sleeves sewn into a sheet of vinyl, like donning a second skin or alternative identity. At SculptureCenter, the metallic silver "Giant Penetrable (Moon)" from 2012, and the yellow "Giant Penetrable



LEFT: An installation view of “Feel Me,” one of Kelly Akashi’s works, also being shown at SculptureCenter. Credit: Kyle Knodell/Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles

RIGHT: “Image of a Thing” (2017) by Ms. Akashi. Credit: Kyle Knodell/Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles

(Sun),” from 2012, hang limply on the wall, decommissioned from interactive use.

But you get the point. Like everything here, the “Penetrables” offer a curious, alluring, canny and uncanny approach to the human body. Yes, this physique is a beautiful aesthetic form, but for women, that has often meant being objectified or debased.

Kelly Akashi

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The basement of **SculptureCenter** proposes a challenge to artists. Divided into narrow passageways by heavy walls, the space offers a series of nooks for displaying art at unusual viewer proximity. **Kelly Akashi** occupies it with aplomb in “**Long Exposure**,” her current exhibition.

Glass, bronze and wax sculptures sit on ad hoc brick shelves or on wooden supports that resemble Ikea end tables. Some of the glass works look like spores or futuristic organisms; some of the candles do creepy things like spiral around a tree branch. A few bronze body parts crop up: human hands, fingers and such. The work might be described as restrained-psychedelic or an art-craft-science experiment from the 1960s, retooled for the present.

What makes Ms. Akashi’s presentation noticeably contemporary, in addition to its resemblance to Carol Bove’s early work, is that, as the title of the exhibition suggests, photography is used as a guiding logic — particularly, its digital form. Ms. Akashi started as a photographer, and a suite of classically black-and-white photograms is installed in a corner of the basement. Each coyly titled “Image of a Thing,” the amoeba-like photograms have a formal similarity to sculpture.

It goes further than this, though. In the era of 3-D printing, flatness and volume are closer than ever on a continuum. A picture on a screen can quickly morph into a sculpture, and vice versa. Plants are now like photographs or sculptures, too: They’re engineered by humans just as often as they “naturally” occur. Ms. Akashi’s exhibition functions as a dusky symbolic and underground laboratory for exploring some of these ideas.