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ART REVIEW

Looking Inward, and Back, at a Biennale for the History Books

Eyes are the key metaphor in the Venice Biennale's central show of 213 artists, an unprecedented percentage of whom are women.

By Jason Farago

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The intertwining of technology, art and science ripples through the sculptural works in the Venice Art Biennale. Here, “Untitled” (2022) by Hannah Levy. Credit...Vincenzo Pinto/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

Prosthetics — human inventions that make human boundaries indistinct — are a related leitmotif. I found myself engrossed here in the life of Anna Coleman Ladd (1878-1939), an American sculptor who used her classical training to craft gelatinous facial prostheses, of latex and painted metal, for maimed World War I veterans. That intertwining of flesh and technology ripples through the sculptural works in the show: whether **Hannah Levy**'s drooping silicone on spidery metal legs, Julia Phillips's bronze armature supporting a cast of an absent female body, or Tishan Hsu's resin hybrids of faces and phone screens. These are among the show's best works, though I wish Alemanni had gone all the way and included Matthew Barney: master sculptor of prosthetic-grade plastics, whose attention to permeable bodies and fluid identities prefigures almost all this show's obsessions.