

## REVIEWS

### Hannah Levy CLEARING

"Full fathom five thy father lies / Of his bones are coral made / Those are pearls that were his eyes / Nothing of him that doth fade / But doth suffer a sea-change / Into something rich and strange." This passage from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1610–11), describing a human body undergoing an underwater metamorphosis, has particular significance for twentieth-century art. In 1947, Jackson Pollock made *Full Fathom Five* the title of one his most materially dense drip paintings, suggesting a kind of transubstantiation. The nails, tacks, and cigarette butts embedded in the canvas had been raised up into the visual field of high modernism. Now, in the twenty-first century, we read these words differently. It jumps out to us that coral is the external skeleton of a marine invertebrate, and that pearls are sand particles coated in what is essentially oyster saliva. The scene thus speaks less to magical transformation than to science and technology's progressive breakdown of the dichotomies that have traditionally structured our conception of human life: animate and inanimate, subject and object, visceral and mechanical, inside and out.

Hannah Levy tests these disintegrating boundaries in the video that was at the center of her solo exhibition "Swamp Salad." An extended close-up of an opened oyster reveals, in exquisite squirmy detail, a quivering confusion of slippery flesh and gleaming pearl (all works *Untitled*, 2018). For the shoot, Levy obtained four so-called "cultured" oysters, where irritants have been manually insinuated into their shells, and hired a model with long, natural nails to extract the high yield of pearls embedded in their meat. Each time she wrested one free, she tossed it into a container positioned off camera—presumably a glass bowl, to judge by the sharp ping produced whenever the pearls hit its surface. Those very same pearls appeared in the gallery as part of three miniature chaise longues—scaled, it seemed, for eccentrically posh toddlers—made of silicone stretched over armatures of nickel-plated steel. The pearls lay embedded in the silicone, like incongruous eyes staring out from the furniture.

Levy's sculptural vocabulary shares much in common with that of other artists concerned with the porous edges of human life. The type of silicone she employs, commercially known as "dragon skin," can be found inside the Fuji and Evian bottles of Pamela Rosenkranz's "Firm



Hannah Levy, *Untitled*, 2018, nickel-plated steel, silicone, 71 × 30 × 30".

organized at the Museum of Modern Art in New York seven decades apart: "Machine Art" (1934) and "Design and the Elastic Mind" (2008). The titles say it all. Like Pollock's *Full Fathom Five*, "Machine Art" sought transubstantiation—to redeem manufactured goods by placing them on the pedestal of modernist aesthetics. "Design and the Elastic Mind," by contrast, attempted to stretch categories, so that design could encompass even quasi-scientific experiments such as Oron Carrs and Ionat Zurr's leather jacket grown from tissue culture. If "Machine Art" announced the hard-edged character of much twentieth-century sculpture, might "Design and the Elastic Mind" have served a similar function for the twenty-first? In Levy's work, sculpture becomes a medium that absorbs objects, information, and influences from myriad sources, mixing them into "something rich and strange."

—Colby Chamberlain

Being" series, 2009–. Her juxtapositions of flesh-tone rubber and nickel-plated steel recall Alisa Barenboym's conjunctions of unglazed clay and sheet metal. Like the work of Rochelle Goldberg, Levy's work references animal by-products associated with luxury consumption (in this case, pearls; in Goldberg's, snakeskin), and like Dora Budor's work, recalls the props and prosthetics of director David Cronenberg's gruesomely intelligent horror films (in particular the sinister gynecological tools of *Dead Ringers*).

What differentiates Levy is an abiding interest in design. The construction of her pearl-laden chaise longues is based on a sketch by French architect and designer Charlotte Perriand. Other works included in "Swamp Salad" pointed to the performative ergonomics of sports equipment. The flesh tones of the silicone she hangs over steel frames refer both to skin and to the prevalence in contemporary decor of pink, ivory, and other hues socially coded as "white." Levy's focus on design raises a larger question for recent sculpture, one that we might consider in relation to two major exhibitions