Los Angeles Times

The hairbrush made of fingers and other scenes from the mind of Genesis Belanger

Big Sleep" by Genesis Belanger, 2019. Stoneware and porcelain, ash, cotton ticking, foam, 45 inches by 60 inches by 23 inches. (Ian Byers-Gamber / From Genesis Belanger and Francois Ghebaly)

Genesis Belanger's entire show at the gallery François Ghebaly could consist of the sculpture "One for Me and One for My Friend," and it would suffice as an enthralling experience. But there's more, much more, in this first L.A. solo presentation, and all of it is just as beguiling.

The round, skirted table of "One for Me" holds about 20 objects made in porcelain and stoneware, all of them straddling the line that divides ordinary from strange, real from surreal. Appetizers might be expected on such a table, but not the little gray fish splayed across a saltine that Belanger has set down, nor the Ritz-like crackers topped with vaguely scatological pinkish dollops plugged by pimento-stuffed olives.

"One for Me and One for My Friend" by Genesis Belanger, 2019. Porcelain, stoneware, wood, powder-coated steel, cotton blend, 48 inches by 43 inches by 43 inches. (Pauline Shapiro / From Genesis Belanger and Francois Ghelaby)

There are also oversized burnt matches, their blackened ends curling abjectly, plus a pair of prescription bottles and several other larger vessels. The tip of a finger pokes out of one. A hot dog curves, suggestively, out of another. Little-Shop-of-Horrors-style blossoms sprout from a few others.

According to the press release, "One for Me" is part of an ensemble meant to evoke a wake. The neighboring sculptures in the room have a rich noirish feel (a woman's fingers peeking out from a curtain) and recall the dark symbolism common to fairy tales (a huge hairbrush with fingers as bristles, resting on a stack of bare mattresses).

As tableau, a more persuasive, affecting example is found in the next room. There, Belanger has set a reception desk and two couch-table combo pieces to conjure a waiting room. The furniture is covered in felt and supports clay sculptures that extrapolate on the mundane accoutrements of such a space. A tape dispenser unfurls a rippling pink tongue, a trio of uncapped pens droop flaccidly in their mug, and bitten chocolates expose centers soft and rosy.

"Reception" (detail) by Genesis Belanger, 2019. Stoneware, porcelain, wood, wool felt, 36 inches by 72 inches by 28 inches. (Ian Byers-Gamber / From Genesis Belanger and Francois Ghelaby)

If the uncanny were a language, it would be the Brooklyn-based Belanger's native tongue. She deftly defamiliarizes the familiar through scale, surface and context to render it disorienting — not threatening or unsettling to a Freudian degree, but highly curious.

She animates the inanimate and imbues the generic and functional with the electric current of the sexual. The surfaces of her objects are smooth, generalized, erased of particularity. They occupy a narrow spectrum of flat browns, blues and greens common to public settings, falling under the palette category of washed-out institutional. Such understatement only serves to accentuate the sculptures' delicious peculiarity.

A bowl of overripe and partially eaten fruit in the waiting room nods to still-life painting's traditional invocations of mortality and sensuality, as well as its use as a vehicle for displays of exquisite technical skill. The disembodied female hand, with long slender fingers and polished nails, appears frequently in the work as surrogate for the entire body, bringing to mind the charged paintings of Chicago Imagist Christina Ramberg. Belanger's objects resonate like fetishes, and her spaces like stage sets in the theater of the unconscious.

"God's Bounty" (detail) by Genesis Belanger, 2019. Porcelain, stoneware (Pauline Shapiro / From Genesis Belanger and Francois Ghelaby)

"Waiting-Room" (detail) by Genesis Belanger, 2019 (Ian Byers-Gamber / From Genesis Belanger and Francois Ghelaby)

Ollman, Leah, "The Hairbrush Made of Fingers and Other Scenes from the Mind of Genesis Belanger" LA Times, June, 08, 2019.
https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-cm-genesis-belanger-francois-ghebaly-20190608-story.html