

Ivana Bašić

Form of Flight

December 10, 2022 - January 21, 2023



François Ghebaly is proud to present *Form of Flight*, New York-based artist Ivana Bašić's first solo exhibition with the gallery. The wall-based sculptures and drawings on display offer an introduction to the formal strategies and unique material language that the artist has developed over the course of her practice—what the artist calls “a language of becoming.”

Yugoslavian-born artist Ivana Bašić has for over a decade endeavored at an artistic and philosophical workspace far beyond the conventional bounds of human or organic form. To the contrary, her figures are metamorphic, in states of shifting biological, physical, and metaphysical identity. Charged by the artist's early vantage of violence and brutality brought on by the collapse of Yugoslavia, Bašić's multidisciplinary practice levies a posthumanist lens to investigate our most pressing ontological fixations: the fragility of the human condition; the breakdown of self and other; a reimagination of life and death; and a quest for immortality.

For *Form of Flight*, these lines of inquiry converge in a body of sculptures and drawings that point toward still further possibilities of existence. The exhibition title is taken from Catherine Malabou's “The Ontology of the Accident,” wherein Malabou describes metamorphosis as a substitute for flight when there is nowhere left to retreat or hide: “The only possible way out from the impossibility of flight appears to be the formation of a *form of flight*. In other words, the formation of an identity that flees itself,” as a way to free itself.

Bašić employs specific materials throughout her work, each denoting a unique conceptual or narrative counterpart. This material codex is consistent across the artist's practice, allowing the viewer to contextualize each individual artwork within Bašić's greater theoretical cosmology, and to decode the unique forces and conflicts that undergird each of her figures. For example, wax represents flesh and organic tissues; soft and mutable, paraffin wax comprises many of her sculptures' most vulnerable and corporeal elements. Its origins in petroleum and, much older, in petrified detritus and organic material gesture toward the cyclicity of life and decay. Glass, meanwhile, represents the breath that formed it, and stainless steel the forces of life and death that act on the body. Stone is the consolidation of organic life and matter that, under pressure, is further atomized into dust. Bašić borrows the latter-most formulation in part from philosopher Reza Negarestani: “Dust is irreducible. The elemental object of creation—a formula for life without life itself.” Bašić also includes what she calls *intangible materials* in her material lists: forces and properties such as

pressure, breath, weight, and torque that in her words are contained within the matter and guide the formation of the pieces.

At opposite ends of the exhibition space are two new sculptures in copper, wax, alabaster, and stainless steel. I sense that all of this is ancient and vast. *I had touched the nothing, and nothing was living and moist. #4 and #5 (2022)* resemble both insect chrysalises with armor-like bronze protective shields, as well as otherworldly wombs caught in the process of opening, blossoming, birthing. Under the armor, wax that evokes bodily flesh unfolds to reveal alabaster stones as the nucleus of the sculptures—gently carved to look wet and intestinal. The rods surrounding the sculpture are functional safety instruments, known as “Grounding rods”—devices that are used as pathways for magnetic and electric forces to safely connect to the earth. The circular organization of the rods simultaneously evokes the gesture of pinning a butterfly, and mimics the rays of passion and transformation in mystical depictions of the *Sacred Heart*.

Installed on the right-hand wall is *I too had thousands of blinking cilia, while my belly, new and made for the ground was being reborn Position III, #2 (2020)*. In this ‘chrysalis’ form, Bašić explores mimicry as a protective strategy. When encountered frontally, a metallic facial feature appears to emerge from the figure’s pale waxen folds. Yet when viewed in profile, the piece reveals that this face is a decoy or mirage. Bašić’s use of polished bronze and metal elements denote an organism’s protective strategies during metamorphosis, like the eyespots butterflies wear on their wings to resemble a larger animal. Here, the metallic face conceals the figure’s delicate pupating underside, which faces the wall and is suspended on a steel bracket. From an opening beneath the armor, the figure’s breath—represented by black glass drops—oozes towards the floor. Bašić’s figures are nearly always represented away from walls or above floors, usually with stainless steel armatures acting as interlocutors. The resulting entities are quite literally “ungrounded” from common physical and metaphysical conditions.

Perhaps surprisingly, Bašić’s sinuous organic and biomechanical sculptures are neither virtually rendered nor computer-assisted. Instead, they are formed through intricate manual technique. Cast elements are painstakingly formed using clay blocks, their humanoid, insect, and otherwise indeterminate forms drawn out through feel and intuition as the artist sculpts by hand. Bašić says of her relationship with form, “each departure from human physiology is, for me, a point of liberation from the material realm and its constraints”—that is to say, a step away from the severity of the human condition, and motion toward something that is irreducible, eternal. *Breath seeps through her tightly closed mouth | Position II: Swelling #2 (2019)* offers an example of this flight from materiality. Evolving beyond wax, stone, and bronze components, the artwork contains only a single blown glass entity suspended on a steel armature—pure, transcendental ‘breath’ in commune with the entropic pressures of life and death.

Scattered throughout the exhibition, Bašić presents three new watercolor drawings on paper, each belonging to a numbered series titled *Ungrounding (2022)*. Though separate from the artist’s material study, the drawings show clear throughlines with Bašić’s larger formal imagination. In some regards, the virtual properties of drawing suggest in these works entities even more transient and ephemeral than Bašić’s glass or paraffin. Familiar shades of pale pink and white are bound by dark, steely curves; forms are elliptical and womb-like, evoking cyclical images of nebulae, cellular life, becoming and unbecoming—“dust to dust.” For Bašić, this sort of quantum return is an optimistic, generative space—a reacquaintance with the most basal and indivisible ingredients of existence.

Ivana Bašić (b. 1986, Belgrade, Yugoslavia) lives and works in New York. She received her bachelor’s degree from Belgrade University and her master’s degree from the Tisch School of the Arts at NYU. Recent exhibitions include: National Gallery of Prague; Museum of Art and Design at Miami Dade College; The Whitney Museum, of American Art, New York; Hessel Museum of Art, Annendale-On-Hudson; KUMU Museum, Tallinn; 6th Athens Biennial; 57th Belgrade Biennial; Center for Contemporary Art Estonia, Tallinn; La Panacee Museum of Contemporary Art, Montpellier; Künstlerhaus Halle für Kunst & Medien, Graz. Her work is in the permanent collection of The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY.