

Valérie Blass

MUSÉE D'ART CONTEMPORAIN DE MONTRÉAL

185 Sainte-Catherine Ouest

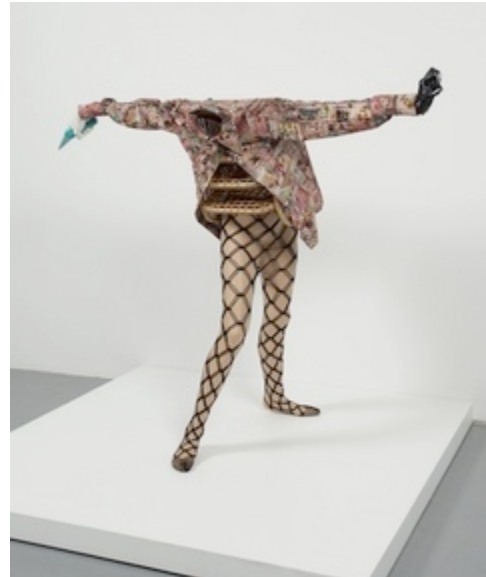
February 2–April 22

Valérie Blass's clever sculptures engage viewers in an engrossing but disconcerting guessing game, suggesting familiar forms while purposefully resisting easy recognition. Comprising almost thirty works, Blass's largest exhibition to date provides an overdue survey of the artist's recent (the earliest work dates from 2005) but prolific practice. Curator Lesley Johnstone has assembled some of Blass's strongest pieces here, including a wide array of her arresting, life-size human-animal hybrids that combine traditional sculpting materials with found objects.

Blass's works are not discordant assemblages of consumer detritus, but familiar if otherworldly creatures that seem to spring fully formed from an imaginative limbo to somewhere between figuration and abstraction. In *Femme panier* (Basket Woman), 2010, for instance, a female figure built from parts of a mannequin, a basket, and a gaudy polyester shirt is poised as if ready to leap and pirouette out of the gallery. Nearby, *L'Homme Souci* (Worry Man), 2009, presents an undulating form wrought from synthetic black hair that stands defiantly in a pair of patent leather Miu Miu booties. In both works, the trappings of luxury—the basket woman's fishnet stockings, the hairy figure's designer shoes—suggest these inanimate objects have personalities and aspirations of their own.

In the artist's smaller works, this tension between the familiar and alien becomes more acute. *Midnight Viper*, 2009, is a Michelangelo-like bust of a young man that has been rendered nearly unrecognizable through the addition of teapots, vases, and kitten-shaped creamers on the surface of his face, all clad in a slick black enamel finish. Here, mass-produced kitsch objects become the biological mutations of Blass's figures—growths and orifices that seem organic and yet disturbingly abstract.

— Gabrielle Moser



Valérie Blass, *Femme panier* (Basket Woman), 2010, fiberglass and resin mannequin, basket, fishnet stockings, polyester shirt, wood, cement, paint, 50 x 59 x 28".

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