



IVANA BAŠIĆ

The work of New York-based Serbian artist Ivana Bašić was included in "Dreamlands: Immersive Cinema and Art, 1905–2016" at the Whitney Museum of American Art this past fall and "Without a Body" at Andrea Rosen Gallery in January. In 2016 she had shows at Annka Kultys Gallery in London, Nina Johnson in Miami, and Nogueras Blanchard in Barcelona. Bašić has upcoming solo exhibitions at New York's Marlborough Contemporary and Signal in Brooklyn.



1. Stained rug. Photo: Dan Keech. 2. Deer captured by motion-activated trail camera, Chelsea, MI, September 7, 2010. Photo: Rick Taylor. 3. Cracked marble. Photo: Horia Varlan/Flickr. 4. Giambologna, *Rape of the Sabines* (detail), 1579–83, marble, approx. 13' 5" x 5' 5" x 5' 5".



1

STRANGLERED THOUGHTS "... a faithful creature that follows me unfailingly, which I cannot bring myself to beat, from which I retreat step by step and which nevertheless, if I do not decide otherwise, will push me into the corner between the walls, the corner that I already see, there to decompose completely, upon me and in me . . ."

—Franz Kafka, *The Blue Octavo Notebooks*, 1917–19

2

PERFECT STILLNESS Fear stiffens the body, drawing the life out to induce a perfect stillness—lifelessness. One of the earliest human impulses, the fear paralysis reflex, emerges while still in the womb and indicates that fear is present even before birth. One performs one's own absence from the body (a reduction to a stiff empty shell) as a reflex, in order to survive. The same rigid and deserted body reappears postmortem in a state known as rigor mortis, or "stiffness of death." As a continuously present force throughout prenatal development and life, fear has materialized in the flesh by the time death arrives. After a lifelong performance of stillness, fear triumphs, as the last body we have is rigid: a body made of fear.

3

BLUENESS OF DEATH AND BECOMING STONE *Pallor mortis*, *algor mortis*, *rigor mortis*, and *livor mortis* translate to *paleness* of death, *coldness* of death, *stiffness* of death, and *blueness* of death—the first four stages of a breathless body. Throughout these phases, the body turns into heavy, solid, stiff, and cold matter. During the fourth stage (*livor mortis*), the skin becomes adorned with arborescent venous patterning due to the breakdown of hemoglobin within the blood vessels. In this process, known as marbling, the body starts to resemble stone.

Considering that previous postmortem stages of transformation—paleness, coldness and stiffness—are also material properties of stone, one can say that the transition that actually occurs in death is that of the temporal body in flesh becoming the atemporal body in stone.

4

PURE DENSITY The body transforms into stone and ultimately dust, both products of extreme pressure. Acute pressure compresses the voids within matter and expels breath. Breath is life contained in the void and, therefore, loss of the void is the ultimate loss—transformation into pure density, into sheer weight.



5

DUST Dust is the absolute reduction of the world. It anonymously contains the world; the origin of each particle is unknowable. In *Cyclonopedia* (2008), Reza Negarestani writes, “Each particle of dust carries with it a unique vision of matter, movement, collectivity, interaction, affect, differentiation, composition, and infinite darkness.” In the formation of the body, dust particles insert their multiplicities under the veil of oneness—the veil of the whole—while announcing the arrival of the alien not from without but from within. The unknowable nature of the universe is contained in the unknowable composite of the body and its anonymous particles.

6

PHANTOMS “For I do not exist: There exist but the thousands of mirrors that reflect me. With every acquaintance I make, the population of phantoms resembling me increases. Somewhere they live, somewhere they multiply. I alone do not exist.”

—Vladimir Nabokov, *The Eye*, 1930

7

PAIN AND ITS DEVICES Pain reduces the scale of the world to the space underneath one’s feet and to the volume of one’s body—something Elaine Scarry has talked about. Emil Cioran writes about insomnia, which expels you from time by dooming you to a constant state of wakefulness—a state that causes the structured order of time to dissipate: Past, present, and future amalgamate into a pure dread of the never-passing moment. Pain stretches time but compresses space, embracing these conditions as its own devices and turning them against you, like a torture machine.

8

HYMNS AND DERVISHES Armenian mystic and philosopher George Gurdjieff and Ukrainian composer Thomas De Hartmann composed a series of piano pieces in the 1920s. Gurdjieff would hum tunes inspired by his travels in the Middle East, and Hartmann transcribed them and created harmonies, sometimes adding the sounds of Gurdjieff’s accordion. These beautiful pieces carry both peacefulness and a tangible sadness.

9

STAY INSIDE AND PERISH One of the most brutal implements of torture in history is known as the iron maiden, in which a person is enclosed in a spike-lined, body-shaped iron cabinet until they die. Solitary confinement is a modern, expanded version of this punishment. These techniques acknowledge that the greatest suffering is wrought by taking the world away, through limiting space or inflicting pain, so that one is doomed to the absolute solitude of the body.

10

INCOMPLETE BURNING Fear can be compared to a substance like napalm, both in its effect and in its aftermath. Negarestani writes, “As soon as Napalm ignites, it sticks to objects, blurring them, pervading them, but never allowing them to evaporate or reduce to ashes. When the substance does not burn completely, salvation or consolidation of all possible worlds is never possible. Incomplete burning blocks substance from escaping either to vapor or to ash; it prevents the substance from reaching salvation through the attainment of formlessness (matter). When burning is not complete, the substance starts to undergo a process of positive disintegration.” □



5. Image downloaded by the author from Desktopimages.org.
8. Peter Brook, *Meetings with Remarkable Men: Gurdjieff's Search for Hidden Knowledge*, 1979, 35 mm, color, sound, 108 minutes. 9. Iron maiden of Nuremberg, ca. 1500. Engraving, 1754. Photo: Roger Viollet/Getty Images. 10. Burning tree. Photo: Szahler/Flickr.

