

GAGOSIAN

ARTFORUM

Huma Bhabha

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View of “Huma Bhabha,” 2019–2020. Photo: Matteo D’Eletto.

For her first exhibition in Rome, Huma Bhabha merges past with future; archaeological remains with science-fiction utopias; and spare, light, soft materials with conceptually rich, heavy, hard forms. The show’s title, “The Company,” refers to the 1941 Jorge Luis Borges story “*La lotería en Babilonia*” (The Lottery in Babylon), in which an imaginary society is ruled by a lottery directed by the “Company,” an unknown entity that randomly doles out rewards and punishments to its constituents. Bhabha evokes the terrifying power of that consortium with a procession of totemic sculptural figures in carved cork and Styrofoam, exhibited here along with drawings on ink-jet prints in materials of all sorts (ink, collage, oil stick, acrylic, and pastel among them) and two oversize hands made of clay, wire, Styrofoam, acrylic, jute, and wood. It’s not hard to see Bhabha’s parade of bodies as representative of an evolutionary timeline: The first and smallest, *Julian*, all works 2019, sits atop a Brancusian pedestal that largely disappears from the following works, as the figures grow taller and more detailed. The last member of the autoclave, *Imagine Now for Ages*, sits atop a stack of chairs like a king, his chest flayed open and innards exposed—humanity’s final form.

One has to wonder: Are we looking at a memory of a lost civilization or an outline of one yet to come? Bhabha seems to propose both trajectories, united in a temporal short circuit that superimposes past, present, and future. The sculptures are survivors of a timeless catastrophe, and they transform their dramatic story into contemporary mementos, for, as Borges wrote, “there is nothing so tainted with fiction as the history of the Company.”