

## GAGOSIAN

### BROOKLYN RAIL

#### RACHEL FEINSTEIN with Phong Bui

*“it’s time to put shame, guilt, remorse, etc. to rest. This show feels like a new beginning for me as an artist.”*

Phong Bui



*Portrait of Rachel Feinstein, pencil on paper by Phong Bui.*

The unpredictable and elusive nature of Rachel Feinstein’s oeuvre has made it, for the most part, difficult to interpret one way or another, even for those who have followed her career as an artist as long as I have since her first one-person exhibit at Marianne Boesky in 2001. As Feinstein continues to follow her ambitious vision of life and work as one personal synthesis, the work from the last few years has gradually begun to reveal a desire to reconnect with aspects of strength and vulnerability of selfhood from her early years. Everything else in between seems to be caught perpetually in the issues of identity and the countenance of everyday life.

On the occasion of her first survey *Maiden, Mother, Crone* at the Jewish Museum, which will feature three decades of Feinstein’s work in sculpture, installation, painting, drawing, and video, as well as a newly commissioned wall-relief, a panoramic wallpaper, and the artist’s sculptural maquettes, I first paid a visit to Rachel’s studio in Chinatown to experience the preparation process, then in the following week, she came to the Rail HQ for a lengthy conversation. The following is the edited version for your reading pleasure.

**Phong Bui (Rail):** Before we discuss the selections of works included in this retrospective, first, I thought in addition to Kelly Taxter’s observant essay in the exhibition catalogue for your show

at the Jewish Museum, the five chapters in the form of interviews on the subject of your interest, including: *Mother, Witches, Nature vs. Art ...*

**Rachel Feinstein:** *Fairy Tales vs. God*, and the last chapter *Then vs. Now*, which is about *Europe vs. America*.



*Rachel Feinstein, Adam and Eve, 2007. Wood, stain, and hardware. © Rachel Feinstein. Photo: Marcus Leith.*

**Rail:** They were so complex, honest, and compelling. I'm so sympathetic to your struggle, both in reaching the maximal potential and unabbreviated self as an artist and being a responsible mother, and I should add also a productive, good human being.

**Feinstein:** It all began because I had no brothers and like a few of my women friends, we would go through life without thinking about gender roles. So, my dad named me RJF because it's his name. The story goes my parents were hoping to have a boy so when I first came out, my dad's a doctor so he was in the room helping deliver me and he said, "Where's the penis?" and my mom thought that I was a boy born with no penis. [Laughter] And she started to freak out, partly due to her poor vision, and she said "What's wrong with the penis?" I think this a good example of understanding women who are raised to think they can do everything and anything and there's no glass ceiling. I remember playing on the boys' sports teams but I never identified as girl or boy, I just did what I wanted to do and didn't think about it. And then I married John (Currin) who has two sisters and one brother, and the boy would do physical work like lawn-mowing and chop firewood, and the girls would cook and clean and so on. That was never part of my vernacular and when I went to college at Columbia University, I had no gender awareness. I took a welding class with Judy Pfaff and then I met Kiki Smith at Skowhegan, and Ursula von Rydingsvard, who I met through Judy—they all became my mentors. They're very strong and willful artists. Kiki's aesthetic of the bold, and transgressive references to the physical nature of being a woman and the nastiness of bodies made sense to how I think of the human body. My dad being a doctor, I saw the nastiness of bodies through seeing medical procedures at home. For example, my cat came in one day with a giant, swollen neck and my dad and my sister and I held the cat down in the garage and he slit open this big growth full of pus in the cat's neck with all of us just watching in the garage. He just took it out, sewed the cat up, and we all went on our way as usual. Also, that same cat ate an iguana and threw up the head, which was the size of my hand.

So, the idea of the body being both disgusting and really magical at the same time really spoke to me in Kiki's work. To some extent, I relate similarly to the works of Jeff Koons and Duane Hanson, this idea of making a body look real yet creepy. I grew up with a grandma who was a painter so she would take me to art lessons and I went to RISD summer school when I was 15. I always knew I wanted to be an artist. At the same time, when I was about 14, I met Bruce Weber at the shoot of a Calvin Klein Obsession ad, and he later photographed me for Italian Vogue on South Beach in 1985, during which time I met all of these incredible, creative people from New York. I just knew I needed to get out of Miami, so I set my sights on Columbia University. I had a supportive family and I went there in '89. I went to Skowhegan right after college in '93, and then ended up in a group show at Sonnabend in '94. I included a big sculpture called *Hot House* that was made with this huge hoop skirt that I welded with little flower plants inside. It was suspended right below a skylight. It was a symbol of being a woman, both beautiful and grotesque, containing birth and decay at the same time. But then the whole thing fell down like an hour before the opening.

**Rail:** Whaaat! [*Laughs*]

**Feinstein:** I never put anchors in the ceiling and I was out of my mind, but I quickly fixed it. It was then that I realized sculpture and installation has the fourth dimension, which is time existing in real spaces as you feel your body decaying or confronting your own mortality. Peter Schjeldahl's review of Richard Serra's shows in *The New Yorker* was so powerful because it brought up these similar issues.

**Rail:** I agree. In the same way, this body of work of Richard's reminds me of [Alberto] Giacometti even though Richard's form is monumental and densely volumetric, and an abstraction as opposed to Giacometti's thin, fragile, vertical form of a human image, yet they both share a profound existential sensitivity to the surrounding space. It's as though the form is slowly eroding in front of your eyes and your psyche while your body is trembling, trying to hold your mind and body together.



*Rachel Feinstein, Satyrs, 2008. Resin, nylon, and polyester. © Rachel Feinstein. Courtesy the artist.*

**Feinstein:** I couldn't agree more. And that's what's so strange about Koons, how he denies it.

**Rail:** Koons preserves and prolongs the adolescence of the everyday suburban with unspoken things lurking beneath the utopian surface.

**Feinstein:** Yes, like the original story about Sleeping Beauty, which I'm obsessed with: how her father, the king, tries to preserve her in a sleeping state because he doesn't want her to become a full woman, a full human being who has sex and produces children. It's that in-between stage where girls become women and they're just about to get their periods, and so he encases her in this glass coffin to gaze upon her as if time is being suspended. Of course, her father ends up dying, and the whole kingdom dies, and then she's discovered years later in an entombed ruin. And then there came a traveling king from another kingdom, who finds her and rapes her while she still remains in her coma. And he keeps going back and raping her, and eventually she gets pregnant, and then is only awoken by the suckling of her two children that are birthed from her comatose body. My dad being a doctor, I was able to find, through his help, medical information of women in comas giving birth to children and never waking up. It's actually on the record, cases of comatose women who are being raped by hospital custodians, and they were already very obese so no one noticed they were pregnant. But when the nurses walked in they found a baby with umbilical cord suckling from the comatose mothers' breasts.

**Rail:** Spooky and intense indeed, which was part of your senior thesis on the real Sleeping Beauty for the history of sexuality course, as I read in one interview.

**Feinstein:** That's right, partly because I couldn't major in studio art since Columbia had just gotten rid of the MFA program.

**Rail:** I remember. That's when Archie Rand left and later Gregory Amenoff took over as the new chair, and together with Jon Kessler, they began to rebuild the MFA.

**Feinstein:** Exactly. The great thing during this interval was I had a 1,500 square foot studio in Prentis Hall at 125th Street and I had these great teachers who were the graduate teachers teaching undergraduates like Judy (Pfaff), Kiki (Smith), among others. Anyway, getting back to how the catalogue of the show came about, it begins with the period of hibernation of in-between working and being with the kids and with John. I still managed to have shows, doing great things with my art but I also had to have moments where in order to keep my mind active and stimulated I always had productive conversations with my women friends about different things, at different times, essentially about our lives and what we care about the most, especially when we have children like...

**Rail:** Like Tamara (Jenkins) and Sofia Coppola!

**Feinstein:** Exactly. I'm super aware of every moment that I just can't be asleep at the wheel. Having and caring for my children is a very profound thing. When I look at my sculptures, some of them are 25 years old. I recognize they're not my children in one way that they don't have a soul, but they are my children in another way where they each signify a specific moment in my life so profoundly. It's a very weird thing, and that's also why I think men have had more success as artists because they don't have the ability to make children so their "need to put stamps on things" is much more driven. For example, my two boys have a much clearer sense of saying what they don't like and what they don't want to do. My daughter will want to please and I always want to please, but John does not want to please. This sort of natural inclination to please is the antithesis of being an egocentric artist. The world wants you to be the aggressive,

dominating asshole if you're the male artist. On the other hand, allegedly there is a film about Alice Neel and what a bad mother she was.

**Rail:** Yes, I know it. The same could be said of Ree Morton.

**Feinstein:** Right. She decided to leave her job as a nurse, divorce her husband and share custody with her three children. This was shocking to people in the 1960s. I'm sure many people thought "You're a terrible mother. You've left your kids to do this." While Picasso, Donald Judd, you can go through the list of all the great artists that were horrible fathers and shitty husbands and it's totally fine. I think if you can add three really good people to the world that will do great things, especially when we're gone, that actually may be better than making three really good artworks. Which is why I'm pulled in so many directions all of the time. I'm feeling like I really want to finish something in the studio but my kids are going to bed right now and I haven't seen them since eight this morning. You can't do both, you know, which is what I learned. I've been reading this beautiful book *Living Beautifully* by Pema Chodron that my Aunt Ellen gave me since my dad passed away. It's about this idea of having a fixed identity. In other words, the more you get fixed on something the worse everything becomes around you. The whole expression of go with the flow, the Dude Abides, the Dao, you have to be malleable, you have to move with the tides.

**Rail:** Tony Morrison once said similarly, "If you surrender to the wind you can ride it."

**Feinstein:** That's beautiful. And I think women are much better at that than men. In our society, first of all, teachers are the most valuable entities, going back to this idea that the next generation of people need to be ready to take over because we're getting closer to the beginning of the end of our generation.

**Rail:** Hey, speak for yourself. I'm only at the beginning of my beginning. [*Laughs*]

**Feinstein:** You know what I mean? Our generation is reaping the fields of all the seeds we've been planting for the last 25, 30 years. This is it, we're now at the apex but we're starting to come to the tail end of that slow growth.

**Rail:** Can we talk about Serena Williams's exorcism of rage at the US Open Final last year, which she lost to Naomi Osaka?

**Feinstein:** Sure. How many times have we seen a male tennis star shouting with rage, and he's gotten away with it every time, but why is that when a woman does it, it's considered so wrong and so unattractive? I've learned that actually it doesn't help though, that's the really fucked up part. Me losing it and Serena losing it, it actually makes the situation much worse.

**Rail:** Which leads directly into the second chapter with Sarah [Sze] and Lisa [Yuskavage] in *Witches*, who both Lisa and Sarah thought of them as being feminist, partly because they chose not to live with men, partly because they didn't fit in and because they were smart, so therefore they were pushed to the edge of society.

**Feinstein:** Don't forget *Lolita* and Nabokov, and as Sarah put it, the so-called unreliable narrator, Humbert Humbert...that whole crazy thing.

**Rail:** And I love how Lisa spoke of Hans Baldung Grien’s empathetic portrayal of witches especially in his “Death and the Maiden” series.

**Feinstein:** Which makes total sense when you see Lisa’s own version of beautiful witches in her paintings.

**Rail:** Yeah, Lisa also went on to say that everything that is part of society is part of each of us. She cited Aleksander Solzhenitsyn—who is Matvey Levenstein’s and my favorite author, especially his book *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*—when asked about how to get rid of the evil in the Soviet Union and his response was: “If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?”



*Rachel Feinstein, Good Times, 2005. Wood, Aqua Resin, and oil enamel. © Rachel Feinstein. Courtesy the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York and Aspen.*

**Feinstein:** Exactly. And I remember the Milgram experiment from the early '60s where one person was asked by an authority figure to give electric shocks to someone else, which leads one to ask why people follow orders doing shocking things even if they're conflicting with their personal conscience.

**Rail:** Which is the question that was asked, were Eichmann and his million accomplices in the Holocaust just following orders? I still vividly remember Viktor Frankl’s book *Man's Search for Meaning* (1946), which was a horrifying account of his experiences as a prisoner in Nazi concentration camps, especially with the Kapo who would torture their fellow prisoners in order for self-gain or to prolong their lives.

**Feinstein:** It’s pretty intense! No society is free from both good and evil.

**Rail:** Sad but true. One question in regards to Lucy Lippard’s notion of fragmentation being a productive and inherent motif in women’s art as opposed to men’s rationality of hard-edge

geometry, which was maintained in Kelly's essay: do you think the many mediums and materials that you've explored and worked with correspond to what you said earlier about the ability to be adaptive to things, especially to forms as images, and vice versa or when they could be flat or volumetric, and so on?

**Feinstein:** Yes, it's very true in how I work. Though on some occasions I would combine both flatness and volume together in one work.

**Rail:** Like in the piece *Model* (2000), which I think is one of your best works.

**Feinstein:** And it's the only real abstract one I've ever made. It's got many hands, all holding these strange, abstract mirrored discs. It's handmade and rough, yet it's soft and sensual. I'm very happy that it's included in the show.

**Rail:** It's your classic Lacanian version of Duchamp's 1912 *Nude Descending Staircase No. 2*. Everything about it is the antithesis of Duchamp's linear progression and his masculine/machine-like construct of analytic cubism. While the movement in his painting is moving downward so legibly, your piece is dwindling upward with the disc sizes getting smaller from bottom to top in slanting and unpredictable directions.

**Feinstein:** And each mirror is also both positive and negative because it's a negative hole that's also reflective.

**Rail:** And the mirror theory refers to the Lacanian "mirror stage" of children first seeing themselves from the age of six to eight months old, which induces a perception of turning the reflective image into an object that can be viewed from outside of themselves.

**Feinstein:** Yes, this is the first time I've used mirrors actually. And now thinking about the mirror, it also connects to the magic mirror of the Evil Queen.

**Rail:** And this idea of reflection also refers to Perseus who was able to slay Medusa.

**Feinstein:** Though her reflection appears on his shield. It's another classic of man's creation out of their own fear of women. Similar to God creating woman from man's rib. Eve is not the equal half of man: she's made from man and not made from God, so that means she's never Adam's equal opposite, she's never the light to Adam's dark. This piece means so much to me on so many levels. First of all, the fact that it's truly the only abstract piece I have ever made. And also, I've been thinking about shame a lot, especially as it relates to my being Jewish and having a show at the Jewish Museum—as opposed to having it at an entirely "contemporary" art institution like the Whitney or MoMA. When I mention that I'm having a show at the Jewish Museum to people who aren't in the art world, the first question they ask is, "are you Jewish?" "Do you have to be Jewish to show there?" These kinds of questions, that are so related to my career and my identity carry a weird tenor, almost a sense of shame, that somehow being Jewish and that having the last name Feinstein carries shame, in a similar way that being a woman carries shame. Historically, Jews have been seen as an ethnicity that is unclean or unworthy of respect and dignity, and nearly eradicated as a result. Also, the aspect of being a woman, where you can't control your own body due to menstruation and pregnancy, your own bodily messiness, also works in tandem with this sense of shame. If you think about Jewish artists like Chagall, they have a very odd approach to figuration, I think because Jews weren't supposed to

make images of God. Which might also be why many great abstract artists were Jewish. But for me, abstraction since modernism is now considered elegant, very waspy and not shameful. Brice Marden is not ashamed, but Jeff Koons makes his shame a giant, shiny spectacle. There is something shameful about figuration now, it's so deeply uncool and embarrassing, just like being Jewish and the female body, vulnerable and bleeding.

**Rail:** As Marc Jacobs said in the last chapter “[I]sn’t that the coolest thing, to be deeply uncool.” He also said, “[t]here’s nothing interesting about the urinal, but Duchamp put one in a gallery and it becomes a sculptural work of art... the irony or the perversity of something becomes interesting.”

**Feinstein:** I hate that side of art, I hate it. I really do. I just feel it’s much harder to have skill than to make something as an ironic comment on your time. It’s elitist and arrogant.

**Rail:** Some art historians I know thought of Duchamp’s urinal (*Fountain*) being his calculated reconfiguration of Manet’s *Olympia* (1863) in that, like the prostitute’s gaze to the viewer as a potential client. She would never turn down a client and the urinal would never refuse those that urinate on it. It’s a pretty caliginous reading.



*Rachel Feinstein, The Bleeding Shepherdess, 2014. Resin. © Rachel Feinstein. Photo: Robert McKeever. Courtesy Gagolian.*

**Feinstein:** That’s a very interesting reading. The thing I can’t get over is, first of all, Duchamp didn’t make the urinal. And Manet, regardless of the subject, made that painting, he painted it, and you see his hand and it’s beautiful. When you come up close to the painting and see the surface, how it was made, you feel that you could’ve done it yourself. That feeling invites you in. When you look at the urinal it stops you dead cold. It says “Don’t come in, you’re not smart enough for me, I don’t want you.” And that’s how the whole modern and contemporary art history of everything has unfolded for us as artists. And if you make something handmade and you love the hand you are somehow looked down upon in this shameful way, which I find really wrong. And it’s the same thing again, about being ashamed of being a woman, being a Jew, it’s all part of that way of thinking or calculation or whatever. It’s so frustrating.

**Rail:** Let’s shift the subject to *Nature vs. Art*.



**Feinstein:** Sure. Did you read Ursula's discussion in my book about her childhood? She remembers picking up these bricks from World War II and having this erotic feeling, and you could totally see it in her work.

**Rail:** Oh yeah, the erotic turns sensual. Ursula is capable of making her own Angkor Wat. To me in her work, the energy is emanating from the inside and moving outward to the surface, not the other way around.

**Feinstein:** You're right. That's why she and the work she makes is so steady.

**Rail:** Any form and shape of ambition requires courage and being willful.

**Feinstein:** And relentless optimism. Have you seen the books at bookstores in every airport, like for example, *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F\*ck*? Who buys that weird shit? I don't get it, it's all because people need to be told to do something in their lives. If you read about Thomas Edison, he had literally thousands of failed attempts, but he kept moving forward because what drove him was the drive to discover things and do things.

**Rail:** Well, America has a weird self-help culture, which is more about addiction than self-reliance.

**Feinstein:** That's the thing: just fucking do it. Whatever things that I gripe about, like being a woman, I'm still doing it, making things, and there's still shit in the way. Clear the path.

**Rail:** I'm starting a revolution, which brings up how Ursula said artists seek in their work a kind of evolution instead of truth. In science and medicine one can recognize progress being made over time, such as the discoveries of the Copernican system, gravity, electricity, you know, quantum mechanics.

**Feinstein:** Penicillin, a cure for Leukemia, DNA, yeah...

**Rail:** Exactly, but in art you can't say a Matisse cutout is more profound and more beautiful than the monumental Externstein rock relief depicting the *Descent from the Cross*, carved by anonymous artists in the side of a sandstone formation in the Tuetoburg Forest in Germany. Feinstein: I couldn't agree more. Ursula also made a good point that artists never get to the end of something they work on in the same way that scientists do. Which is true, how do you even know when you're finished with something?

**Rail:** Whatever it is, when you call it quits and let go of the work, send it out into the world, you just cross your fingers that it can live on when you die. That's why we still look at a Rembrandt self-portrait and it's alive.

**Feinstein:** His eyes tell you so much about his different emotional states. Not only are you the person thinking you painted that eye but that eye becomes yours as you're looking at it.

**Rail:** Especially the late self-portraits, when he lost everything: his son Titus died at the age of 27, his second wife Hendrickje Stoffels died, not to mention bankruptcy. Everything in his world crumbled and his only solace was in painting himself as he was an old man whose face wears the

gravity of life, which was described so beautifully in Jean Genet's amazing essay *What Remains of a Rembrandt Torn into Four Equal Pieces and Flushed Down the Toilet*.



Installation view: Rachel Feinstein: *Secrets*, Gagosian, Beverly Hills, 2018. © Rachel Feinstein. Photo: Jeff McLane. Courtesy Gagosian.

**Feinstein:** The late portraits speak deeper to us than the earlier ones for that same reason. Rembrandt is reaching out more because he no longer is that fixed identity, as he projected himself earlier as a young, gifted, confident painter. The late ones are about mortality and empathy.

**Rail:** What about Florence (Welch) of Florence + the Machine and her mother Evelyn Welch, a Renaissance and Early Modern scholar, talking about *Fairy Tales vs. God*?

**Feinstein:** I've known Florence for a long time now. I met her at a dinner for the new designer of Alexander McQueen, after McQueen died. We just hit off. John, Florence, and I were all together in London and I would see Florence when she'd come to NYC. We've had a lot of conversations about the idea of how difficult it is for her as a woman to be on the road, and having to get up onstage. She says it's like people tearing pieces of her that they take home after a show. And she's a very private person actually, and the opposite of who she is on stage. I sat with her in her dressing room in her last concert in Philadelphia (at the Wells Fargo Center) last year actually. Just she and I having a cup of tea, we had an intense conversation about this idea of duality and being private and then having to be public. I thought the timing of this conversation might not be good since she was about to go onstage in front of thousands of people. But as soon as the first song started, followed by the next, her aura just started getting bigger and bigger and bigger and then she just became this phoenix on fire and you could just tell, she turned into a totally different person. It was actually insane for me to witness having seen her privately at first and then at the end I went back stage again and said, "I gotta go," and she's like, "Ahhh!" Now she was open, exposed, wild, and generous. I have friends that are actors and they become the characters in the play or the movie. And once the work is done, they come back to themselves as people again.

**Rail:** It's like the famous story about Lawrence Olivier telling Dustin Hoffman during the filming of *Marathon Man* (1976), having observed how hard Hoffman, the "method" actor worked, running for long stretches to lose 15 pounds plus staying up three days in a row to be more convincing in his role, "Why don't you just try acting?" She has a great mother in Evelyn whose volume *Shopping in the Renaissance: Consumer Culture in Italy 1400–1600* (published by Yale U. Press in 2005) won the Wolfson History Prize. It seems that Evelyn had an influence on Florence.

**Feinstein:** I know. Initially I made some suggestions, but then she said "You know I think my mom would be really great," and I said, "Oh my god, that would be amazing!" It was so incredible to have all three of us talking on this subject.

**Rail:** It seems that she feels so indebted to her mother for giving her the passion, spending time in endless cathedrals, seeing art from extensive traveling, and seeing her working late nights on her books. What Evelyn said at the tail end was true, "Animism is that the word itself is filled of spirituality. Paganism is not for women; the Greek and the Roman Gods and Goddesses were rarely feminist in the way they punished each other and those in the earthly realm."

**Feinstein:** And Catholicism was more women as Protestantism was more men. I'm learning things I never really thought of before. And what I've been doing recently is to not censor myself when I get excited about something. For example, a good friend said to me about my girls in the last show at Larry's [Gagosian] in Beverly Hills, LA—

**Rail:** They're so abjectly seductive and weird.

**Feinstein:** Seductive and weird are good rather than this friend of mine who said "I don't understand these works, they upset me." And I asked why and he said "They look like they've been beat up. Why are you making women look like they were beat up? Why can't they be beautiful women like those that appear in John's paintings?" And I said, "Because John is making himself."

**Rail:** Do tell more.

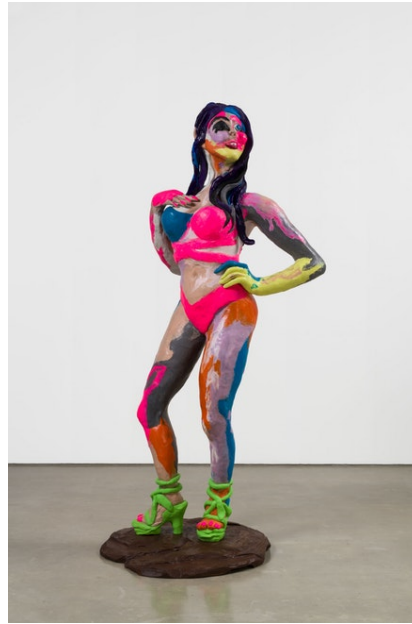
**Feinstein:** John feels he can't control lots of things in his life but in his paintings everything has an order and an ideal beauty. And he works super hard to keep it together, you know? And I'm like seeing the blood and the guts coming out of me.

**Rail:** As you described earlier in your childhood.

**Feinstein:** Yeah and Lisa Yuskavage was in the room when I gave birth to Hollis, my second child, did you know that? Lisa saw everything, my torn vagina with my placenta on the table and I'm drinking a TaB while the doctor was stitching me up. [Laughter] How else? I mean pictures at the front of my book are showing both the picture of me as the sculptor and me as the sexy woman making the sculpture. This is both of those worlds together.

**Rail:** This is no more and no less than the way you'd described in the past of Donatello's portrayal of *Penitent Magdalene* (1453–1455) as opposed to the youthful, naked, and erotic

*David* (1440s), not to mention the right wing of Goliath's helmet caressing its way up his right leg to his groin.



*Rachel Feinstein, Feathers, 2018. Hand-applied color resin over foam with wooden base, 77 x 37 1/2 x 29 1/2 inches. © Rachel Feinstein. Courtesy Gagosian. Photography by Jeff McLane.*

**Feinstein:** But Donatello had beauty in one *David* and ugliness in the *Magdalene*. I've always wanted both in my work, especially now. I still think of the piece *The Ultimate Woman* I did at Columbia, which was a cast of my whole body with hands and knees on the floor. It's a gruesome piece partly because I inserted these hollow and bloody tubes right through my head, my breast, my anus, and my vagina. I stopped making that kind of work when I met John and I started my family. Now, the kids are growing up, I'm getting older, so I say fuck it all, I don't give a shit anymore, you know what I mean? And also, now I know how to do things, I know how to build things better than I did before, including technical things.

**Rail:** So how did these *Secret* figures get made?

**Feinstein:** I first made them as small figurines out of Sculpey, which I'd buy for my kids to play with. In fact, I made the first *Flower Girl* with my two sons, Francis and Hollis. Then eventually I wanted to make them as life-size sculptures, and I worked with a now-defunct fabricator KB Projects in Greenpoint. Konstantin showed me that I can use resin and use this squeezable pigment, and I could mix up the resin and apply it like the way the Sculpey is made on the first *Flower Girl*. So, I made the rest the same way. First, I had them scanned digitally at Digital Atelier in New Jersey, then had them made approximately to human size in gray foam as though they were three-dimensional canvas. The fun part is working with a team of assistants making the colors that would match the ones on the small Sculpey. And we managed to do it after a long trial and error process. I like to think of them as De Kooning's *Woman* paintings in 3D, in the sense of how the layers are done exactly like a painting. Some are solid and some are translucent, some have three different layers of color on them. To me, they're incredibly beautiful. There are two of them in the show. I love *Butterfly* and *Icicles* too.

**Rail:** The one blowing a kiss.

**Feinstein:** Yes, *Butterfly* is the one blowing a kiss. I don't get why some people think they're ugly.

**Rail:** Baudelaire one said, I'm paraphrasing, "If you don't know how to be ugly, you're not beautiful." I like them and yet I'm scared of them at the same time. Anyway, I'm glad that you, Florence, and Evelyn brought up Mary Douglas's classic *Purity and Danger* (1966), which we all read and admired. I love what she once said, "The pretensions to moral superiority are devastatingly destructive."

**Feinstein:** I'm totally in agreement.

**Rail:** That's the reason why art is the first-hand and invaluable document of what's happening in a specific time, way before history gets written. It's just like how quickly Mannerism fed right into the Baroque, then consequently how the Baroque fed the Rococo as a direct and immediate response to what was going on in the political and social conditions at the time, and in real time.

**Feinstein:** I just think historically it has to happen when things get stagnant.

**Rail:** Exactly. This was why when Cubism and abstraction became too powerful, Surrealism emerged with the new interest in dreams and the subconscious.

**Feinstein:** And Freud, and Carl Jung.

**Rail:** Especially Jung and his interest in alchemy, which led him to break with Freud, and this brings us back to witches, magic...

**Feinstein:** And dreams, black forests, and the fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen. It's so true, just like how you talked about Perseus and Medusa earlier. Since I was a religion major, I love stories so much and I love this idea of trying to get back in touch with telling a child what you shouldn't do, you shouldn't steal, you shouldn't hurt, through story, instead of just saying "don't do this." I think that's what always fascinated me. These violent stories in religions of someone who's about to kill his or her son, it's pretty amazing. You know I love Maya Deren. I've recently watched *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943) again. I just love the fact that one day she suddenly packed up and went to Haiti to study dance and voodoo. I'm fascinated with the idea of a rational person becoming totally irrational.

**Rail:** Especially in the film *Divine Horseman: The Living Gods of Haiti* (1985). I'm on the board of Anthology Film Archives, so let's go watch it on the screen one day.

**Feinstein:** I'd love to. Yeah, I'm also interested in the idea of myth becoming reality.

**Rail:** Like the same way you treat the front and the back of the piece *Master H.L.* as an homage to Master H.L.'s *St. George and the Dragon* (c.1530) equally in terms of surface distribution.

**Feinstein:** Except the cast of my ass sticking out in the lower half, which is one way to bring attention to the back. [*Laughter*]

**Rail:** The painter Ron Gorchov once told me he preferred the back of the Parthenon Marbles than the front—I mean the ones from the East Pediment.

**Feinstein:** That's amazing.

**Rail:** Yeah, not only because they show the roughness but the engineering parts that fit to the tympanum wall behind.

**Feinstein:** That's also the thrill of being a sculptor, figuring things like that out. I also love Arte Povera for the same reason, for example, Pino Pascali's piece *Cascade* (1984), which I saw at Barbara Gladstone Gallery in the early '90s when the gallery was on Greene Street. I feel aspects of Arte Povera have taken from the unabashed ornate beauty and drama of the Baroque and Rococo and made them look simple and pure through the use of materials. It's as though artists like (Lucio) Fontana, and again Pino Pascali, they'd take the whipped cream off. And they're just showing you the spine. As for me, I like both the whipped cream and the spine.

**Rail:** Got it. And same thing can be said of *Satyrs* (2008).

**Feinstein:** Yes. Annabelle Selldorf, the amazing architect who has worked with shows of Arte Povera and Muiccia Prada, has designed this beautiful curved wall in the middle of the space and a niche for *Satyrs*. I'm super happy with the result.

**Rail:** Are you treating this show as though you're an installation artist, which you once were earlier in your career?

**Feinstein:** That's a good question. I've done installation art, performance art, and video art, but I've never been able to fully make it work, I have to say. I think one reason is I remember John once said why he stopped being an abstract painter and he became a figurative painter: it was the idea that all the energy and the power is emanating from the face, the eyes, and the human body in each painting. I feel the same way about sculpture as singular object, capable of generating the same presence in space. In other words, as much as I love Sarah's (Sze) immersive installations, which she's able to respond to each space in brilliant site-specific ways, or Karen Kilimnik's scatter-like painting installations, ultimately, I am drawn to an object like a head or a body or something that is contained. I don't know why that is, but it seems to be that, again, it's how women scatter themselves and their energies in a million different places because they're having kids, they're running their households, they're taking care of their husbands, and so on, they haven't been able to dominate in one category because they're doing eight different things. I want to dominate using one shape. I've realized in the last few years, I need to gather up all of my energy in one piece I make each time differently. The last thing I'd like to say is again me being a Jew, a woman artist, and having a show at the Jewish Museum is about confronting the feeling of shame in order to get rid of it. In fact, the big white wall installation is called Goldstein.

**Rail:** That was Philip Guston's real last name. It was Philip Goldstein before he changed it to Philip Guston. Due to anti-Semitism during that time, it was rather common to change your last name.

**Feinstein:** That makes sense then. But now, it's time to put shame, guilt, remorse, etc. to rest. This show feels like a new beginning for me as an artist.