

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS

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"The shape left by the body"

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It seemed appropriate that I visited "The shape left by the body"—a group exhibition rich with the weight of succumbing bodies; bodies on the brink of collapse; and waxy, mutating, or mummified bodies—while partially delirious, suffering from a fever occasioned by the unrelenting London heatwave. The vertiginous staging of the show across two floors provided the option to view work from above and below, and in the case of Alice Channer's *Mechanoreceptor, Icicles (red, red) (double spring, single strip)*, 2018, even venture under the cage-like elevated structure. Alina Szapocznikow's black-and-white "Photosculptures" series, 1971/2007, portrays surreal forms made from wads of masticated chewing gum often agglutinated or stretched to look as if they were melting, the teeth marks implying both tenderness and repulsion.

The macabre push-pull of attraction is similarly charged in Gillian Lowndes's elongated, grotesque *Untitled (Tongue)*, 2008, hung from a nail in the wall like a hunk of aging meat, the sand-encrusted latex bristling with long black spiky horsehair. A singed aluminum materiality featured in that work melds with Piotr Łakomy's *Untitled*, 2018, sarcophagi pieces that hang on the wall or loom above the doorway. Their porous honeycomb surfaces—tightly bound like hard, scabrous skin—might arouse trypophobia, appearing paradoxically organic and inorganic, postapocalyptic and biodegradable. The notions of fleshy corporeality and the bionic, posthuman form manifest in both Channer's and Alisa Baremboym's works. Baremboym's flushed synthetic surfaces, with their attached viscous gel sachets, appear as if they were large erogenous silicone implants (*Substitute Impression* and *Mutable System*, both 2016), while Channer creates a sinister factory line of disembodied fingers dipped in red PVC, with cords curling on the floor like disused probes. As with Szapocznikow's chewed series, repetition becomes fetishism. Squeamish, strange, seductive.

— Philomena Epps