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IVANA BAŠIĆ: *Through the Hum of Black Velvet Sleep*

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Ivana Bašić presents a dire vision of the not-too-distant future in her exhibition *Through the hum of black velvet sleep* (2017). There are four pieces in her show—two pairs of nearly identical works—all of which were created this year. The reason for the doubling is withheld, but of the countless possible reasons perhaps the simplest one is that the works would be lonely on their own. These are profoundly alienated objects and figures: the hammers that destroy and the figures that wither. Bašić's matching kinetic pieces, *A thousand years ago ten seconds of breath were 40 grams of dust #1 and #2*, supply a constant interplay of tick-tocking, through which we observe the static sculptures, *I will lull and rock my ailing light in my marble arms #1 and #2* conceptually deteriorate. To watch a single limp figure with its distended head hang in space would have been gratuitously morbid; in this case misery needs company so a rhythm can be set up. The endless click of the hammer isn't annoying, but it isn't particularly comforting either—as is a heartbeat, the tick-tock is a countdown. *Through the hum of black velvet sleep* is not an autobiographical show, nor is it about an individual; it is about collective deterioration, hence the need for a mirrored pair.



Ivana Bašić, *A thousand years ago ten seconds of breath were 40 grams of dust #2* (2017) (Photo courtesy: Marlborough Contemporary Gallery)

The golden age of humanity wants to gain control of—and master—the fundamental constants of existence: transformation, expiration, and death. Bašić's elaborate installation is about loss of control in the face of this quest—the side effects of the attempt at eternal youth. Carved alabaster lumps in *A thousand years* are methodically hammered out of existence, which is simultaneously a meditation on the fragility of all substances and a direct attack on sculpture, which might be considered here as a stand in for humanity. This critique comes from opposing angles. On one hand, the classical idea of sculpture is that which makes the ephemeral eternal, though a brief stroll through any museum with its broken torsos and trunkless legs disabuses us of that idea—and is reinforced by the small mounds of dust at the base of *A thousand years*. Alternatively, we can at least rely on alabaster to *outlast* our mortal coil—figuring the idea of sculpture, on a micro scale, as static and frozen—but in Bašić's cosmology, the non-perishable material disintegrates faster than the slow wasting of the flesh.



Ivana Bašić, *I will lull and rock my ailing light in my marble arms #1* (2017) (Photo courtesy: Marlborough Contemporary Gallery)

Bašić presents the viewer with a mythology at its tail end. The shriveled wax bodies of *I will lull and rock my ailing light in my marble arms #1 and #2* are held in forbidding and cold stainless steel cradles, and those cradles themselves are held at arms length by long polished cantilevers. These tortured objects are the summation of many a darkly prophetic artist's imageries. There are resonances with the lurid, gruesome assembly line sexual imagery of Hans Rudi (H.R.) Giger's drawings and paintings, and his attendant creations in the sci-fi epic *Alien* (1979), as well as the Wachowskis's dystopian psycho-digital drama *The Matrix* (1999), which hinges on the harvesting of human energy and essences from billions of unconscious humans locked in a fetal state.

Bašić's figures seem hopeless as they hang in mid-air, one figure with its useless legs dangling, the other's drawn up like a dead animal. Their heads have been reduced to drooping bulbous transparent glass helmets; their hearts and minds reduced to a handful of dust. With the clock ticking, human vitality seems at its final low ebb. As one might do with cremated remains, sprinkling them at a particular location in order to claim it for the deceased, the artist has spread the dust from her alabaster automatons on the floor along the perimeter of the gallery. The dull white walls, the constant thud, the ubiquitous dust and the long eulogic titles make this Bašić's chamber, not someone else's gallery. Despite the hygienic steel armatures and precision hardware these works project an organic quality, a sense of life that has shriveled before it could grow.