

Martha Friedman

**BROADWAY GALLERY
NEW YORK
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The exhibition’s title is the artist’s not-so-subtle nod to Jacques Lacan’s concept of the split between what we think we know about ourselves and the things that are hidden from us yet lie deep in our unconscious. This fundamental division is not necessarily seen as a negative by Lacan, and by extension the artist Martha Friedman, but rather as an opportunity for self-invention, and an invitation to escape from the constraints of drawing too rigid an idea of our identities and mythologies. In this exhibition, the artist applies this type of psychoanalysis not to human psychology but to art history, specifically looking into the rules of modernist sculpture. To interrogate this fertile terrain, Friedman mixes materials—most notably rubber, metal, concrete, and glass—in works that plumb the collective unconscious and challenge definitions as much as expectations. A literal skewer of monumental proportions runs through several of the works, underlining her exhibition as a critique and adding a healthy dose of humor to offset the often macabre representations, which seek to (and succeed in) literally and figuratively getting under the skin, puncturing surfaces as much as expectations.

Claw Foot (all works 2024) finds four stacked glass-and-rubber crabs, delicately set above the tiptoes of a crucially balanced human shin and foot. We are at a tipping point, and the visual duet between human and crustacean is a reminder of our delicate interdependency with the natural world. Oh, and the work is literally “clawed”—crabs and foot—in a pun on a physical malady. Friedman’s tongue-in-cheek portrayal delivers frequent comic relief through word play and foible.

A pair of cast-glass geoducks caps the work *Slipper*. A concrete life-cast facsimile of a human leg (“complete” with embedded human hair and concluded with a foot) rises from the floor to rest against the wall.



*Slipper, 2024. Concrete, glass, human hair.
H 37, W 7 ½, D 17 in.*

Atop, and nestled between the foot and the wall, are matching geoducks. Paired siphons hang to serve as directionals of a sort, the tail end of these large, phallic saltwater clams (and supposed aphrodisiac). Comet-like, the implied head of each is positioned in opposition to its natural state, as the siphon of the geoduck in the wild reaches for the seawater above the burrowing clam, for food. We are topsy-turvy.

In the spirit of these representations of consistent dichotomy, there are more of these pun-ish oppositions, such as at the base of *Tail End*, a cast-concrete buttocks

from which skewered and stacked glass elements emerge—in the humorous implication that the anus is, as “found,” the perfect reciprocal of our planted metaphorical flag. Meaty and vegetal, mold-blown glass elements follow suit in enticing hues. It is, after all, glass, and little holds the attraction of its candy-like appearance—here used to entice, if only in service to repulsion. Glass is a pacifier.

Throughline sees seven duplicate red orbs penetrated by a steel skewer. It is in this work that we are most made aware the dialogue of repeated action, the practice of ritual—be it prayer, penance,

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or perversion—as exposed in repetition and process. In the cyclical one may find assurance; in custom, comfort. Beadlike, we contemplate both religiosity and, in contrast, sexual practice: absolution, pleasure, and pain. Composed of what are basically two types of elements, oversized glass beads and a steel spindle, it is the visually simplest of the works on display, with each bead threaded atop the previous in sensible and sensual procedure. The process of making is true to its components; it is logical. It entices. Its smooth and rounded surface allows both easy mental and physical passage, and rapture.

Between the oversized steel skewers piercing facsimiles of food, fauna, and body parts, the exhibition feels like a version of shish kabob Hell, made palatable only by the niceties of understood minimalism and attractive materials. Present, then, there is certainly the macabre, though tempered with a sly humor and slick, precise craftsmanship. In stacked mirth, and implied savagery, Friedman presents a mayhemic psychological snapshot of the foibles of life as exposed beneath the implied fragility of skin.

Contributing editor JOHN DRURY is a New York City-based artist, author, independent curator, and instructor.