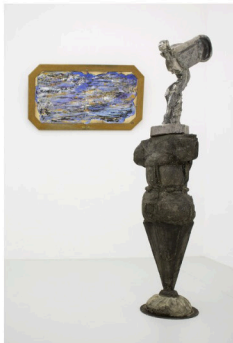


## CRITICS' PICKS

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Michèle Pagel, *Spirit of Extasy*, 2023, glazed brick, concrete, 79 1/2 x 19 5/8 x 19 5/8". Installation view.

VIENNA

## Michèle Pagel

MEYER\*KAINER

Eschenbachgasse 9

February 11–April 15, 2023

It's a well-worn truism that art can be whatever's on the pedestal. Following this cue, Michèle Pagel takes a broad approach. Her bulky cast-concrete caryatids, resembling archaeological finds, hold up tokens and symbols of world culture and civilization, allegories of the lightness of the spirit and the heft of the body. She does not distinguish the significant from the trivial, applying a clenched fist—a gesture of solidarity and resistance—as readily as a Rolls-Royce hood ornament.

For Pagel's solo show "Rats, Roaches, Pigeons, People," the contrast between the historic Boltstern Bar's elegant design and the *béton*

and *brique brut* in Galerie Meyer Kainer's en suite exhibition space couldn't be any sharper: Patisserie meets lumberyard. Pagel's mode of production shuns the application of soft materials. Instead, she delights in cutting (unfired) bricks, aligning the pieces, and gluing them together, then slicing them up with saws, painting and glazing them, and applying decorative mosaics and, when necessary, a hint of platinum.

Pagel reaches deep into the modernist inventory, coming back up with readymades and Surrealist objets trouvés. Most of them are things of small value, like the post-GDR-era tile table: bric-a-brac brought to light in dedicated dives into thrift stores. Among these heapings of life's leftovers are pieces of wrought-iron fencing, a birdcage (which inevitably brings Duchamp's *Why Not Sneeze? Rose Sélavy*, 1921, to mind), a tacky vase shaped like a police uniform, and the monogrammed heavy bronze door handles familiar from the branches of Sparkasse banks. The result is a repertoire as powerful and subversive as it is picturesque and funny: uncompromising, anarchist, cool, and, dare we say, avant-garde.

*Translated from German by Gerrit Jackson.*

—*Brigitte Huck*