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The LA Sculptor Carving Erotically Charged Forms From Stone

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By Hannah Tindle

The first thing one notices when talking to artist Nevine Mahmoud is her accent: a base of well-spoken Queen's English peppered with a distinctly Californian twang. It's inevitable that the artist, who was born and raised in London, picked up such intonation – she moved to LA in 2014 to undertake an MFA at the University of Southern California. The second thing? The manner in which she speaks about her practice, with a no-nonsense clarity, a breath of fresh air amongst the many pontificators knocking around the various corners of the art world.



Now represented by M+B Gallery in West Hollywood, Mahmoud's work takes the form of sculptural stone carvings; she whittles coloured alabaster and marble into the shape of surreal yonic fruits, arousing flowers, petal-like nipples, contorted tongues protruding from walls and disembodied lips – a welcome subversion of a traditionally masculine medium. Mahmoud's work returns to her hometown this month for a new exhibition at the White Cube, Bermondsey, titled *Dreamers Awake* – an all-female show tracing the influence of Surrealism upon the work of Louise Bourgeois, Hannah Wilke and Mona Hatoum, to name but a few. To be included in such a line-up for an emerging artist is “an honour”, Mahmoud says. Here, alongside images of her erotically charged work, we speak about learning her craft at a place called Art City, and the surprising influence of Bruce Nauman.

On learning her craft...

“I've only been working with stone for around two years, since I started going to this place where I could buy it up in northern California, a couple of hours away by car from where I live. It's called Art City and I became totally obsessed with it. There are three or four women who work up there and the rest of the artists are predominantly male. Joanne DuBy, one of the women, started teaching me – she is a fucking amazing sculptor – and we did lessons for about a year. So I would go up there for two days of the week and would spend the rest of the week down in LA – and that's how it's been for a while now. My skills have obviously improved a lot and it's now less like a lesson whenever I visit, however.”

On working with stone... “I just really wanted to do something different. I was very aware that I had been labelled as a ‘young sculptor in LA’ and so I kind of went with using older and traditional materials and methods to see how the conversation would work in that context. So I worked with plaster and metal and I had been thinking about stone for a while, but just hadn't had the sort of space to do whatever I wanted. There's a lot of thinking and planning during the early stages of making the work in stone – mapping out the shape, figuring out the scale. And then there is adding the fine detailing, sanding and polishing. It takes anything from a week to a month, working every day, to complete a piece. Choosing the colours for pieces has been this really organic and intuitive process. Every piece has been made in response to a rock that I have encountered. Each sculpture is innately unique because each rock I use is different and is sourced from all over the United States.”

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On the artists who influence her... “I would cite Louise Bourgeois as one of my influences, for sure. I obviously have always looked at the work of female artists, but I have been greatly influenced by men too. Bruce Nauman and Joseph Beuys, for example, have had a huge impact on my practice. Nauman in particular – he never really worked with carving, but always fragmented and dismembered the body in his work. I always look at very figurative sculpture from the mid-century too, but I strive to hybridise this with very feminine influences.”

On being a part of Dreamers Awake... “I think a lot of processes in Surrealist art – or at least the themes – have always been something present in my work: consciousness driven forward by unconscious desire. Also, elaborate and strange visual imagery is something I think about a lot. With the fact that this show is all-female I feel incredibly excited to be a part of it. Surrealism was a movement very much defined by men. The women involved in that historical context are often side-lined, and actually don't identify as Surrealists – but they were making work in sort of that way. It's an interesting topic to bring up today.”