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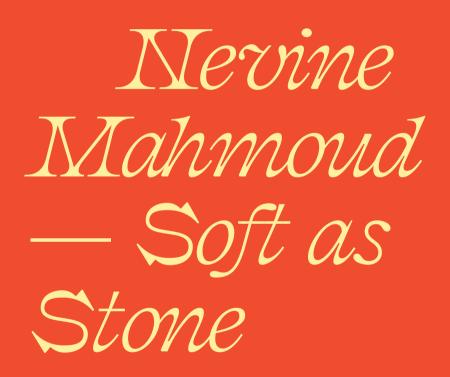




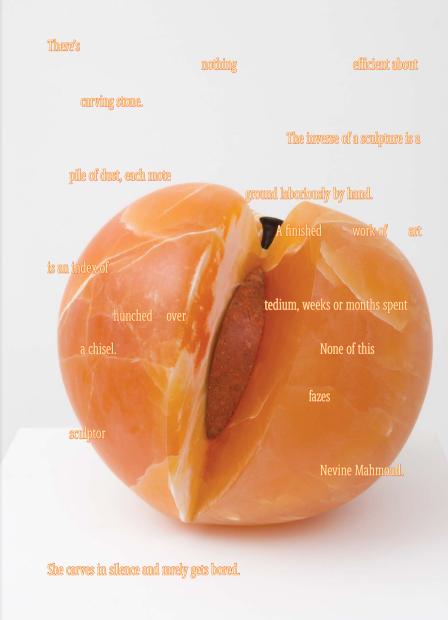
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STORY—JAMIE LAUREN KEILES PHOTOGRAPHY—JACIYN CAMPANARO



SCULPTOR NEVINE MAHMOUD LETS MARBLE BE HER GUIDE





ven if you've been doing the same thing for two hours, you'll learn something new," she told me. Mahmoud. 30. was born in London and started making sculptures as an undergraduate at Goldsmiths. She switched to carving stone full-time after her MFA at the University of Southern California. I met her at her studio in Alhambra, California, east of Los Angeles, in a garage in the shadow of a 7-Up factory. Mahmoud herself is tall with dark hair and the arms of a person who does not work at a computer. Her studio floor was littered with sculptures: an alabaster flower with a subtle human nipple, a pink marble tongue caught mid-lick. Mahmoud's sculptures are funny-almost too funny for stone, the stately material of graveyards and churches. Such is the immediate joy of her work: crass common shapes exposed for their grace by methods in use since before the birth of Christ.

There are faster and more reliable ways to make objects, but coming to terms with the pitfalls of a rock is as much Mahmoud's occupation as the finished shape itself. Though carving could, in theory, be learned through online research, its skills are hard to express in easy search terms. Each sculpture presents a unique challenge of finding the best way to hack off a chunk of stone. As in Hellenistic Greece, or Renaissance Florence, the craft is still best conveyed through demonstration. Mahmoud walked me through the tools at her disposal. A metal hand chisel moves across the material slowly, liberating tiny baby teeth of stone. A pneumatic hammer cuts the rock more quickly, but efficiency comes at the cost of precision.

Mahmoud learned to hone these techniques from Joanne Duby, one of the few female carvers at Art City Stone Yard in Ventura. When Mahmoud is stumped by a difficult shape, she calls upon Duby's 43 years of experience. Duby was instrumental in Mahmoud's most well-known work, a 50 lb, peach with a missing slice. rendered in calcite with a travertine pit. Getting crisp cuts inside the sphere proved a challenge, and Duby came through with a custom drill bit. When Peach with Erotic Inside debuted at the 2017 Armory Show in New York, the sphere of its skin was so improbably smooth, and the orange of its flesh was so unflinchingly rich, that many viewers assumed it must have been plastic.

"I'm attracted to those stones that will always speak to being a rock," she said. "But that also have this part of them that's like, oh my God, it's so brightly colored—or so very consistent in color—that it's almost questionable that it's stone."

Art City Stone Yard is a kind of Flintstonian answer to Ikea. When Mahmoud goes shopping, she looks for rocks in solid colors, with very few veins. She's drawn to orange calcite and pink Turkish marble, but finding the right rock can be more luck than skill. When Mahmoud takes a chisel to a hunk of raw stone, she's the first to see its inside. If she finds the guts don't live up to expectations, her options are to change her plans or scrap the draft. She's done both before. When I suggested a half-carved sculpture was a toilsome mistake, she seemed unfazed.

"It can be frustrating, I guess," she said. "But in a way, that's why I work the way I do."



Breast Shade, 2017 Alabaster, Resin

10

Soft as Stone









Bitte, 2017 Alabaster, Resin

50

