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Nairy Baghramian, *Hand Me Down*, Museo Tamayo, Mexico City

Museo Tamayo

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Nairy Baghramian, *Hand Me Down*, exhibition view, Museo Tamayo, Mexico City, 2015.

Photo: Diego Pérez, courtesy of the artist, kurimanzutto Mexico City and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, Paris and London



Nairy Baghramian, *Hand Me Down* Museo Tamayo, Mexico City, November 7, 2015–March 20, 2016

For many people, the expression “hand-me-down” elicits lukewarm memories of being a child wearing a sibling’s, relative’s or friend’s former clothing; slightly worn, these items suggest a previous life on the body of someone else. Unlike clothes purchased second-hand, hand-me-downs bear a degree of intimacy in that the garment can be imagined on the body of its previous owner. For artist Nairy Baghramian, the hand-me-down alludes to more than a previously owned garment; it extends to a gesture or ideology passed through artistic generations. In her solo exhibition, appropriately titled *Hand Me Down* at the Museo Tamayo in Mexico City, Baghramian addresses the “contradictory”(1) canon of sculpture following minimalism. Baghramian does so by drawing attention to the relationship between minimalist sculpture and the metaphor of the body, by deconstructing bodily structures in minimalist sculptural forms.

Acting as a surgeon, Baghramian separates her sculptures into three forms: hollow bone-like shells, stainless steel skeletons, and leather organs. Much like pulling a body apart, here Baghramian creates her own categorical divisions, leaving her viewer to make sense of the parts and put them back together. Entering the exhibition, the larger-than-life, muted-tone leather organs, entitled *Chin Up*, are hung in pairs pierced by two steel bars, with an additional organ hanging in the museum's main atrium. The amorphous objects are at first confusing as their shapes clearly allude to the interior organs of the body (liver, intestine, colon), yet the slimy and slippery organs are represented weightlessly, with visible seams holding the overlapping leather patches together. Here, if slightly heavy-handedly, Baghramian has turned vessels necessary for life into looming balloon-like figures, perhaps alluding to the daunting interiority of post-minimalist sculpture. Or perhaps questioning how vital organs or life forces can be rendered useless.

A single C-print sits propped against the wall across from the organs. The image is a cropped photograph of an unidentified man's hairy legs (he wears basketball shorts, a pair of shin-high yellow socks, and brown leather sandals). This photograph, *The Snag*, is the lone representational component of the exhibition, and the only actual depiction of clothing. Notably, the frame has only three sides, the fourth sits directly on floor, connecting the ground of the gallery to the cement ground of the photograph. Much like this photograph, exhibition visitors exist as anonymous bodies in space, perhaps in recycled clothing. In the adjacent room a series of hollow epoxy and marble plaster structures are held together with a system of metal rods, similar to how the organs are suspended. While they all share the same white exterior, each of the *Second Choices A through D*, is cross-sectioned to reveal a unique interior colour. The last grouping of sculptures are a series of intersecting polished cast steel skeletons, mostly comprised of two rods, entitled *Jupon des Corps* (translated from French as petticoat of bodies—a structural garment used for supporting a dress or skirt).

What is most compelling is how Baghramian's *body* uses the museum as its host. Opened in 1981, the Museo Tamayo would logically support elements of the post-minimalist contemporary canon of sculpture that Baghramian alleges to dismantle. On the whole, the exhibition reads as an aestheticized tongue-in-cheek rebuttal to the expectations that institutions such as museums have of contemporary sculpture. Significantly, Baghramian stages this discussion within an institution focused on twentieth century art, and within a series of gestures that independently support the canon that she aims to disrupt. Fundamental to this rebuttal is acknowledging that the individual works cannot stand alone, that they can only operate as a composite *body* within a museum (the canon) that has visitors flowing through it as its blood vessels or parasites—her critique taking place inside a host, worming its way out.

NOTE

(1) Nairy Baghramian, Press Release for Hand Me Down, Museo Tamayo, November 2015.
<http://museotamayo.org/images/uploads/boletines/Archivodeprensa-ingles-Nairy1.pdf>