

# CANDICE MADEY

SIOBHAN LIDDELL AND LINDA MATALON

*Fragments*

Curated by Ksenia M. Soboleva

March 17–April 16, 2022



NEW YORK – CANDICE MADEY is pleased to announce *Fragments*, presenting works by Siobhan Liddell and Linda Matalon spanning the 1990s through 2010s. The exhibition traces the ways in which the AIDS crisis resonates in the artistic practices of lesbian identified artists.

While the last decade has witnessed an increased interest in art of the AIDS crisis and queer identity, lesbian artists remain largely unnoticed participants in art historical narratives on this topic. Even when evoked as fellow activists and caregivers, their artistic production is rarely considered in the context of the epidemic, a period marked by mass death, increased homophobia, and a neglectful government that allowed for the (still ongoing) health crisis to escalate. As artistic responses that directly conveyed the political dimension of the AIDS crisis were encouraged and praised, particularly by the renowned art historian Douglas Crimp, less attention was paid to artists whose works could not legibly qualify as AIDS activism. This is especially true for those who responded and reflected through subtle registers, abstract forms, and quiet metaphors.

Siobhan Liddell and Linda Matalon are two such artists, fragments of a much larger narrative thread to which this curator has dedicated years of doctoral study. Their work shares a poetic sensibility imbued with the understanding that time is a shrinking body, capricious and cruel without exception, while endlessly seductive. Coming of age during the AIDS crisis in New York, Liddell and Matalon moved in the same circles, shared many friends, and crossed paths on several occasions, yet their work has never been paired until now. Working across different media, including sculpture, drawing,

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photography, and collage, the artists draw out a simultaneous lightness and weight from the materials at hand. Their work grapples with the body as a fragile structure, both physically and spiritually affected by the process of loss and its ramifications.

A master of subtlety, Liddell has been on an ongoing pursuit of capturing the immaterial elements of existence. Originally from the UK, the artist moved to New York City in 1987, and began a romantic relationship with the photographer Nan Goldin. Often recognized as a muse in Goldin's photographs of the period, far too few are familiar with Liddell's own creative practice, despite her inclusion in Goldin's iconic 1989 exhibition *Witnesses: Against Our Vanishing*. The refusal to disappear expressed in this title manifests itself in many of Liddell's early sculptures; executed in bronze and plaster, the artist created casts of spaces in-between bodies, giving shape to an otherwise intangible, yet palpable, absence. Drawn to the ways in which light changes as time drifts by, Liddell has been engaged in a continued exploration of its elusive patterns. This is exemplified, among others, in a series of glass rods arranged on the floor, solidifying colors into sensuous forms that insinuate a potential for bodily pleasure. Liddell was able to focus on her subject of interest as a fellow at the American Academy in Rome, where she devoted herself to studying light in the Pantheon. The oculus has since become a recurring motif in the artist's work. It first appears in a series of handprints produced during her fellowship, which juxtapose the entrance of light with the primary vehicle of touch. Attuned to an always approaching and diminishing future, Liddell's work speaks to the gradual passage of life. A heightened awareness of mortality can often trigger the tendency to rush. For Liddell, slowing down and paying attention has become an act of resistance.

Either protruding from the wall or suspended from the ceiling, Matalon's visceral sculptures explore the queer body and its traces through abstract form. Born in Brooklyn to a Jewish-Cuban family, Matalon pursued her artistic ambitions while squatting in abandoned buildings and holding various odd jobs. When friends around her started getting sick, the artist dedicated her spare time to macrobiotic cooking, and personally delivered food to homebound PWAs. Responding to the illness and death in her community, Matalon began incorporating ephemeral materials into her work, materials that radiate an eerie bodily presence, such as wax, gauze, and tar. Like slabs of skin and bone held together by wire, sometimes encaged or on the verge of bursting out, the early sculptures evoke a state of being invaded, worn down, and eaten away. These qualities are also reflected in Matalon's drawings, which seemingly echo the sculptural forms, while at the same time being unique registers of emotional struggles. Unfolding on the paper surface are compositions that conjure bodily fluids and bruises of unknown origins, equally capable of arousing desire and disgust. The conflation of these feelings, and the blurring boundaries between them, has been a popular topic of inquiry pursued by philosophers such as Georges Bataille and Julia Kristeva. Yet it took on new meaning during the AIDS crisis, when the notion that desire could lead to death caused a widespread paranoia around physical contact and the exchange of fluids. Occupying an ambiguous space between biomorphism and abstraction, Matalon's work disturbs and collapses the internal and external realms.

On view are not only fragments of Liddell and Matalon's respective oeuvres, but fragments of a neglected history. As the AIDS crisis constituted a time of collective queer suffering, the artistic production of lesbian-identified artists deserves deeper consideration in order to create a more multifaceted, nuanced, and comprehensive understanding of artists' responses to the epidemic, and

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thereby of queer art and culture at large. What becomes articulated through the works featured in this exhibition is also a compelling connection between conceptual and formalist fragmentation: As lesbian narratives continue to exist as fragments, the process of fragmentation presents itself as an intentional aesthetic strategy, and the fragment becomes a resonant form of mark-making for lesbian artists across time and space.

—Ksenia M. Soboleva

## **About Siobhan Liddell**

Siobhan Liddell (b.1965 Worksop, England) lives and works in New York City. She is a graduate of Central Saint Martins School of Art in London and is represented by Gordon Robichaux in New York. Liddell's work has been the subject of solo exhibitions internationally including at Gordon Robichaux, CRG Gallery, and Thread Waxing Space in New York; the UCLA Hammer Museum in Los Angeles; Galerie Eric Dupont in Paris; the Henry Moore Institute in Leeds, UK; Bob Van Orsouw in Zurich, CH; and CCA Kitakyushu in Japan. Her work has been included in numerous group exhibitions, notably *Witness: Against Our Vanishing* (curated by Nan Goldin) at Artists Space; the 1995 Whitney Biennial; the Yokohama Triennale; the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston; the New Museum, White Columns, Sikkema Jenkins Gallery, and Paula Cooper Gallery in New York; and Parker Gallery in Los Angeles. Her work in the collections of the UCLA Hammer Museum; the Whitney Museum of American Art; and the Dallas Museum of Art. Reviews of her work have appeared in The New York Times, The New Yorker, Frieze, The LA Times, Village Voice, Art on Paper, and Flash Art.

## **About Linda Matalon**

Linda Matalon (b. 1958, Brooklyn, NY) was lives and works in Brooklyn. Her works are included in museum collections such as the Centre Pompidou, Paris, the Deutsche Bank Collection, Frankfurt, the Hood Museum at Dartmouth College, Hanover, and The Brooklyn Museum. Her work has been on view in international shows including Heidelberger Kunstverein, Heidelberg (2021); DUST: Centre Pompidou, Paris (2020); Turner Contemporary Art Museum, Margate, Kent (2015); Museo de Arte Moderno de Buenos Aires (2014); the 11th Biennale de Lyon (2013); Ballroom Marfa (2010); the 7th Mercosul Biennial, Porto Alegre, Brazil (2009). Gallery exhibitions include Lucie Fontiane, New York (2017); Esther Kläs/Linda Matalon, Kadel-Willborn, Düsseldorf (2017); Embajada, San Juan (2016); Gallery Niklas Belenius, Stockholm (2013); Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York (2012); Simone Subal Gallery, New York (2012); CLEARING, Brooklyn (2012). She has been the recipient of a 2012 Artist-in-Residence, Dartmouth College, 2009/10 Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant, 1999 New York Foundation for the Arts, 1993 Art Matters, 1992/3 Provincetown Fine Arts Work Center Fellowship, Provincetown, 1991 Cintas Foundation Award.

CANDICE MADEY is open to the public Wednesday to Saturday, 11am to 6pm.

*Image details: Linda Matalon, Untitled, 1991, Graphite on tracing paper. Siobhan Liddell, Between Two Bodies, 1998, Bronze. Photo by Kunning Huang.*