

Flash Art

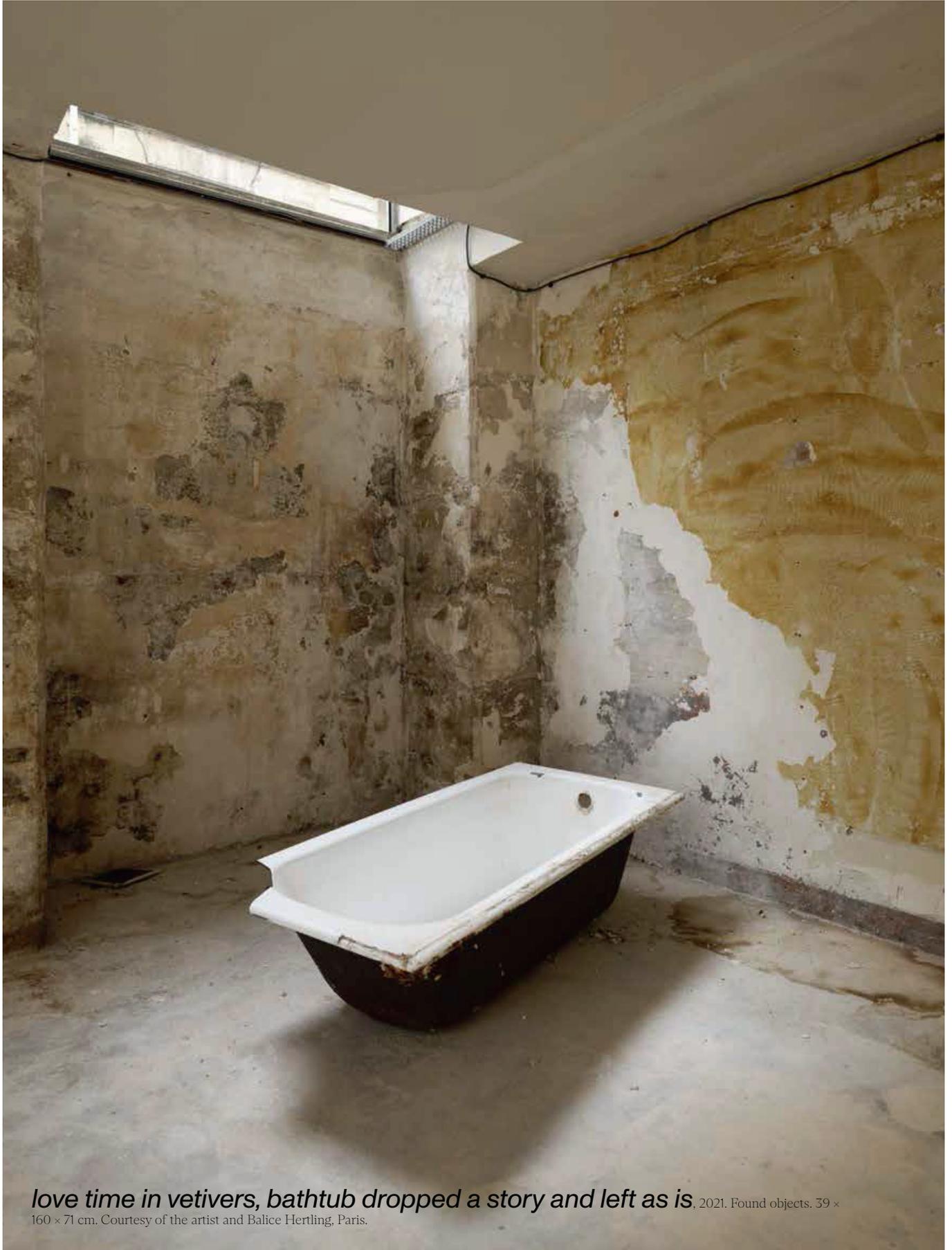
SER SERPAS
ARMATURE GLOBALE
KORAKRIT ARUNANONDCHAI
PAULINE CURNIER JARDIN
THOMAS DEMAND
SIMON DENNY
ADAM FARAH
ELI PING
AKEEM SMITH
ARC'TERYX

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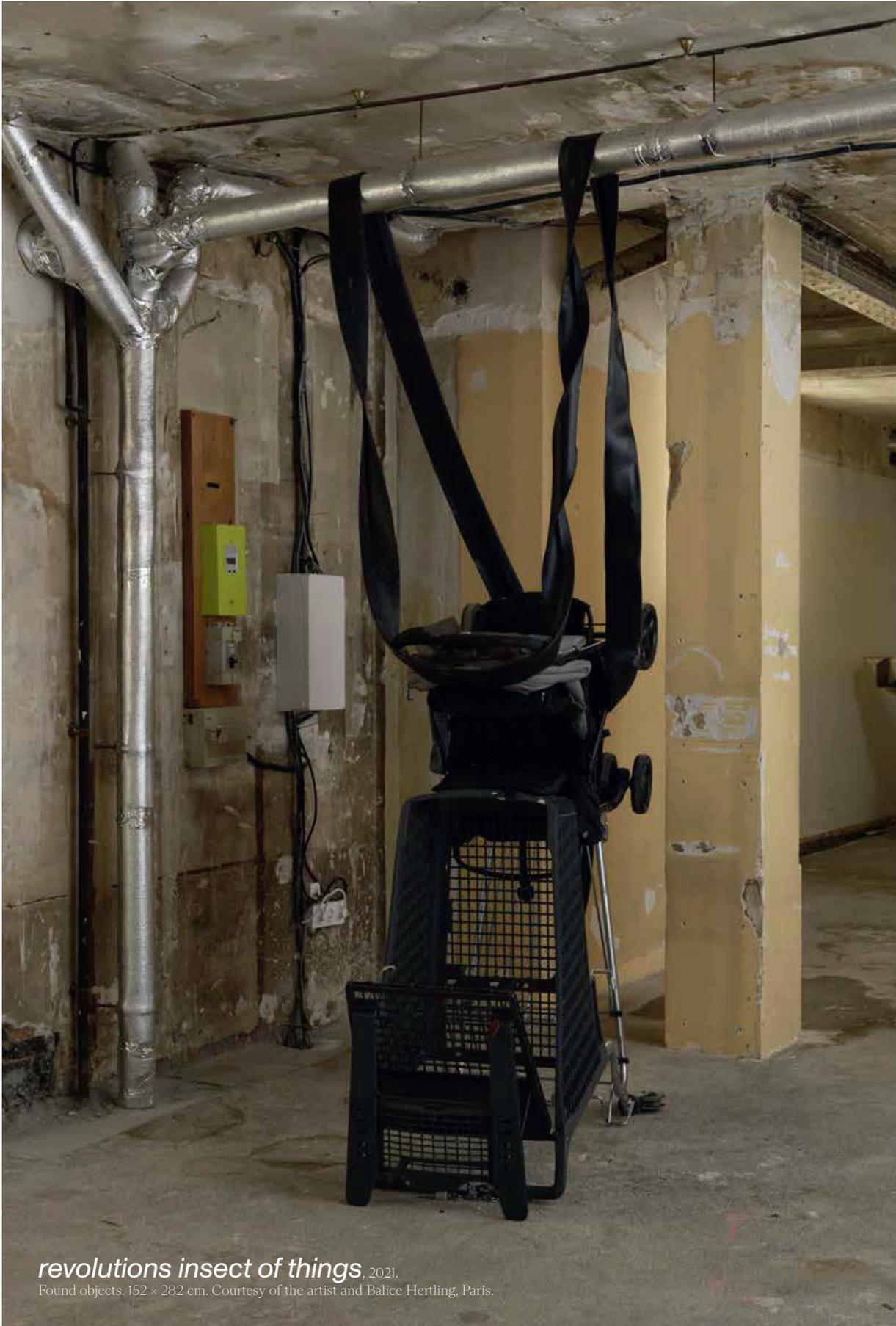
love time in vetivers, bathtub dropped a story and left as is, 2021. Found objects. 39 × 160 × 71 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Balice Hertling, Paris.

Cover Story **Collecting Time Through Space**

64—79

Ingrid Luquet-Gad
in Conversation with Ser Serpas

Ser Serpas assembles situations through poetry and sculpture, painting and performance. In the 1995 Los Angeles-born artist's ever-mutating practice, everything is about remaining in transit, alert, and afloat. Having studied at Columbia University in New York and encountered her elective scene there — artists, activists, and internet weirdos alike — the artist later moved to Zurich and Geneva, before recently relocating to Tbilisi in Georgia. Whether writing in trains or drawing in public spaces, collecting gifted or found debris of late-capitalist society, or learning how to paint the fragmented bodies of maybe-lovers, Serpas reclaims agency from inside the late-capitalist matrix through a seemingly improvised execution carried out during trance-like, private moments. What we, the viewer, experience is transient moments of fleeting grace that command our rarefied attentional currency to attune itself to the artists' quasi-musical scores in space. If only for the duration of a show, the curse to continuously self-update and self-represent is lifted. A shared intimacy slowly resurfaces for those willing to follow the wake of the artist's both eruptive and fragmentary path. Recently, the artist has had solo shows at Luma Westbau in Zurich (2018), "Models" and "Two Take Red Series" at Karma International, Zurich (both 2020), at LC Queisser in Tbilisi, and at Galerie Balice Hertling in Paris (both 2021). She was included in the 2020 Made in LA Biennial at the Hammer Museum as well as the opening show of Bourse de Commerce – Pinault Collection in Paris (2021). Her first poetry book, *Carman: Based on the Opera*, was published in 2019, and the second one, *Guesthouse*, a few months ago.



revolutions insect of things 2021.
Found objects, 152 x 282 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Balice Hertling, Paris.



spilled out of my head head was spinning 2021.
Found objects. 131 × 129.5 × 106 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Balice Herling, Paris.

nights of the soul thorough body, 2021.

Found objects. 185 × 263 × 95 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Balice Hertling, Paris.



conjoining fabricated excesses literal end to a mean, 2021.

Found objects. 117 × 185 × 96 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Balice Hertling, Paris.

69 Ingrid Luquet-Gad: I got to know your work through your poem collection *Carman: Based on the Opera* (2019) that a friend gave me, so I first wanted to speak with you about your writing and what role it plays inside your practice.

Ser Serpas: Do you remember the performance art duo called DarkMatter? It was formed by Janani Balasubramanian and Alok Vaid-Menon, and all my friends were into them as they were those social-justice geeks doing poetry. I was an organizer in high school myself and I already knew writing, stand-up, and millennial poetry. So, we went to see a reading at New York University, in 2013, and on the train back to campus that night I wrote two drunk poems. I was doing Urban Studies at Columbia University, and by the end of freshman year I had a lot of writing in my iPhone notes that I would sometimes look back at.

ILG Were you already thinking to make something out of it?

SS No. It wasn't until two years later that artist and poet Manuel Arturo Abreu, who had invited me to poetry readings online, thought that I should compile some of my writings. Every year, I was writing around ten poems; I would just take a train or a cab to go somewhere and then write. I always write in transportation, and usually very caffeinated. I see the poems as time-sculptures – like most of my practice – and I collect them in four-year cycles. In Tbilisi for the show "Guesthouse" (2021) I was able to publish a new book, *Guesthouse*, which was conceptually the exhibition that I filled with works about writings, language, translations, inks melting and dripping.



ILG Your paintings and sculptures retain a similar quality of remaining in transit and not getting attached to anything for too long. How did you make the move to make works in space?

SS I was also drawing, usually in between the writings. Both started as something I would do during classes, and when I'd get distracted I would mostly draw. It was about being in public and being watched, in the sense that some people can only write in cafés. At that point I was just filling notebooks that I usually shoplifted, while also having jobs in fashion PR or styling and making friends that were either in performance art or internet weirdoes. When I decided to take a sculpture class after urban studies, my professor, Sanford Biggers, made us take metal and wood workshops. For one assignment, I didn't make it to the wood shop on time, but I had all the clothing I had gathered from assisting stylists. I made four sculptures out of that, which was the first time that I worked with fabric. They were garments with hangers, composed from clothes, my odd stuff – dresses, old bras, cleaning supplies.

ILG We are meeting in Paris as you are installing your show at Galerie Balice Hertling, a sculpture show with materials found around the city. How did the collecting process evolve?

SS My friend Donna Huanca invited me to her studio because I was in a performance with Women's History Museum [Mattie Barringer/Amanda McGowan] in New York and she was painting the shoes on us. Initially, she was going to ask me to perform in one of her performances, but then she saw on my Instagram that I was making the fabric sculptures.

That's when I realized that I could also work material that my friends gifted me. I guess it had always been about space: collecting material to fill other spaces and still have an efficient life. Plus, my mum always threw out my shit, because we shared the same room and she hated clutter, as it reminded her that it was all we could afford. The show that I made here at Balice Hertling, "Ser Serpas" (2021), is probably the one I worked the longest on all in all. It is mostly the collecting part that takes time; when I'm in there, in the room, it takes a couple of hours to put together.

ILG Is it important to you that when looking at your works, the viewer knows that it's yours or your friends'?

SS If I were to really mark them with who is in the works, it would feel like too much exposure.

ILG What was the initial reaction to your sculptures? Most art institutions would probably want to insert them into a certain tradition or lineage – from Duchampian readymade to Steven Parrino-ish punk minimalism.

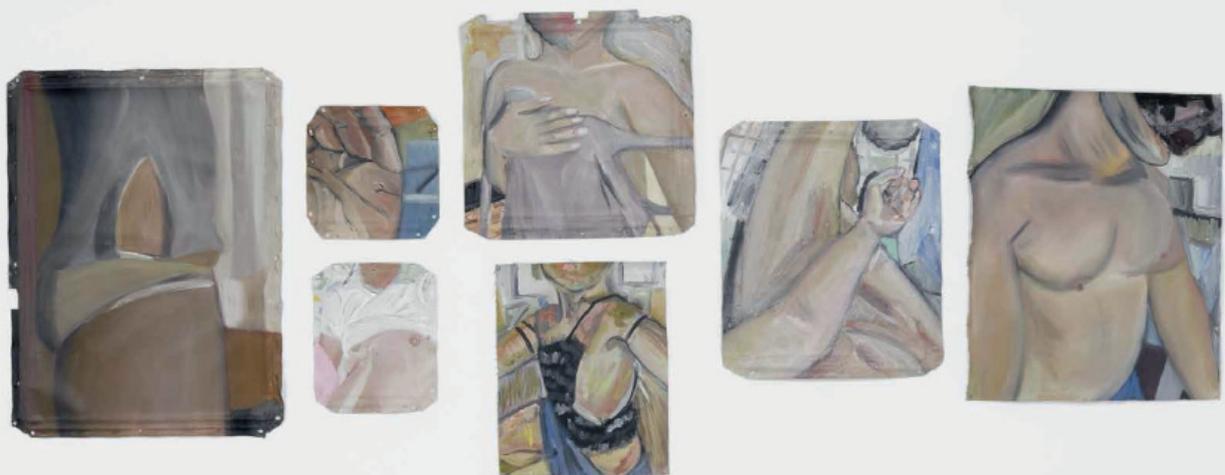
SS In a sense, anybody could do them, but even if it just feels chaotic, I have a process for everything I do. The same is true for the paintings, as I am not really a painter. At school, I was good at mixed media, collage, performance, but in painting classes I couldn't even do the color chart properly.

But then I came back to Zürich after the show I did at Luma Westbau, "You were created to be so young (self-harm and exercise)" in 2018, and I wanted to finally have a studio.



Alice (Language) Practice 20, 2021.

Ink on watercolor paper, artist's frames. 31 x 109 cm. Photography by Flavio Karrer. Courtesy of the artist and Karma International, Zurich.



"Ouverture." Exhibition view at Bourse de Commerce - Pinault Collection, Paris, 2021. Photography by Aurélien Mole. Courtesy of the artist and Bourse de Commerce - Pinault Collection, Paris.



Crumbling World Runaway, 2017. Live performance at MoMA PS1, New York, as part of VW Sunday Sessions 2016-17. Photography by Charles Roussel. Courtesy of MoMA PS1, New York.



tracing listicle generation toppling, 2021. Found objects, mixed materials. Variable dimensions. Sculptures made for Dora Budor's exhibition "Autoreduction" at Progetto, Lecce, 2021. Photography by Simon Veres. Courtesy of the artist; Progetto, Lecce; and Karma International, Zurich.

79	<p>In the small space I could afford, I could make paintings. I also wanted to learn and teach myself, as my painter friends seemed to have a great time doing that.</p>	<p>ILG SS</p>	<p>How do you feel about the mediatic pressure to appear as a persona? At the end of college, the art teachers, who were professional artists in New York, liked what I was doing – the fabric works, the works on paper – but they wanted to see me doing it. They suggested that I record a video of myself in my studio, and I got so offended as I thought that they just wanted to see my body. I made a whole reactionary performance at MoMA PS1, <i>Crumbling World Runway</i> (2017), part of Sunday Sessions organized by India Salvor Menezes, where I made the audience sit on a tarp that I had left rotting out in my backyard in Brooklyn, and look at the ceiling where there was security camera footage. I was doing a DJ session on my screen and a poetry reading, really angry, and people were making sculptures in the background. Back then, I felt that I always had to protect myself from weird curators and weird people on the street.</p>
ILG SS	<p>You always have your painter friends and your other artist friends... Yeah, the way they talked about it was interesting to me. The first paintings I made were similar to my drawings, but I was not satisfied with them – I found them too flat, they looked kind of crazy. I was living and sharing a studio with Hannah Black at the time, and she suggested that I could maybe paint from some photos I had taken. I had all kinds of photos I could paint: landscapes, weird objects on the street, but I also had pictures from people I had been on a date with that didn't work out and other people. I thought that I needed to learn to paint bodies, so I started to experiment.</p>	<p>ILG SS</p>	<p>Would you be able to have a studio with assistants working with you? I don't know if that is ever going to be possible for me, if I didn't have my hands on it. I know how to push things till they are about to collapse or fall apart, and that is the only way that it is interesting to me. If you go about it the right way, you can lock the energy in, if only for the duration of a show. Maybe it can never be put back together in the same way, which means it's just going to sit in a box with me somewhere. If I'm the only person that can activate it, this seems cool to me! In a sense, the work is the aftermath of a private performance or choreography that I did – and I've never broken a nail while doing it!</p>
ILG SS	<p>You work closely with a tight network of artists, and other artists look at your work a lot as well. Did the reception of the works change when you started to get invited to bigger shows and working with institutional curators? At first, of course, because of who I was then. It became a power play. For me, it felt very personal: I was a broke college student and I was transitioning in front of a million people that I didn't know. When I did the show in Zurich, it was about how artifacts are handled: the show is set in the future with Swiss design and furniture, composed together in slapdash ways, because this is how actual objects are usually treated in museums. It started as a "fuck Europeans" show, and then I met nice people and eventually ended up moving there. This was the moment when I started questioning the pill that I took that made me see red at the slightest infraction or when someone said the wrong thing. Initially, I was a brat, but I cooled off when I left the US to move to Switzerland, and then to Georgia, where I intend to be based for some time. I needed to gain some confidence in my life.</p>	<p>ILG SS ILG SS</p>	<p>Looking back, do you feel that people are starting to want specific works from you or are you able to keep exploring new formats? Galleries want paintings and museums want sculptures, that's for sure! But I want to keep on learning. Recently, I wrote a screenplay for a horror movie and it felt really nice to write in another format. Nobody has read it yet but I'm really happy about it.</p>

Ser Serpas's solo exhibition is on view at Balice Hertling, Paris, through December 4, 2021.

Ingrid Luquet-Gad is an art critic based in Paris. Her research, developed through essays, catalogue texts, and conferences, explores how new technologies reconfigure the individual and collective structures of the networked self.

GFA

Ser Serpas walks

by Dora Budor

*Ser Serpas skims the surfaces of the streets and lots,
“attempting to rip something from the refuse piles”*

Ser Serpas (b. 1995, Los Angeles) walks a lot. “Let’s meet there in hour and forty-five or so, that’s how long it will take me to walk from Brooklyn.” While she walks, things swoop in, fixate into viewfinder, blur out of picture, accumulate, and distract. On a slow burner of permanent construction-cum-helicopter background noise, the choreography of chance encounters between the streets and the people that litter it (once romanticized as urban flaneurship) amounts to a hysterical concoction of tenses and moods. Now, condemned to a continuous socialized spatial existence either via mushrooming notification cloud, Google map routing, or too many people running away from something keeps dragging one out of the psychogeographic derive into the straight-up ADHD mess.



Zurich-Photo-May-08,-14-17-06 (photo and courtesy: the artist).



Miami-Photo-Dec-08,-22-49-07 (photo and courtesy: the artist).

In the halcyon days of the Situationist walks, meandering around the city used to be praised as the time spent outside of the realms of profit, where one is neither working nor buying. Now, you already know that one is always already working and buying, particularly when it doesn't look like it. This is the palette. Serpas writes poems on the trains, into her phone, lines spilling out, bare minimum of punctuation. She skims the surfaces of the streets and lots, "attempting to rip something from the refuse piles," sieving the landscape of the "satellite dishes sprinkled about mirrors." She says, "When I find the items I'm with people, and it's a bit of a performance to pick things out with the staff of the place you're picking them for and with intention. I work in this way because I can be pretty chill about it, but once the fun is ripped out, I'm done."



Ser Serpas, *Potential Indefinite Performance, This That And Now Again*, 2020. Installation view, Hammer Museum. Installation view, *Made in L.A. 2020: a version*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. Photo: Joshua White / JWPictures.com.

And it's true. Her most recent piece, which is described by the artist "not as a work or works" but a set of potentials that deferred their finite form to a, perhaps, some other point in time, was titled *Potential Indefinite Performance, This That And Now Again* (2020). Unable to work on-site due to various pandemic-related reasons, refuse for the piece was gathered remotely by her accomplice in San Marino, the neighborhood where the "exclusivity was always a plan," [1] and where part of "Made in LA 2020: a version" is located. This is The Huntington Library, bearing the name of its founder, the railroad magnate Henry Huntington, who in 1913 together with lawyer George S. Patton bred the wealthy enclave, and made sure that property

values would be protected by stringent zoning regulations ever since. Embraced by the genteel gardens, outdoor on the library's plantbed, part of Serpas' potentials lay. From skimming through array of comments below the picture of the pieces, we are informed that the sight, familiar but out of place, appears contentious, even truculent, to its local audience. While the refuse is displayed in a precise grid, the plantbed makes it seem as if the empty drawers, upside-down ironing board, duo of printer copier scanner all-in-one, and a bunch of other castaway items have been harvested and put aside by waste pickers, or that it is a part of houseless encampment. Teetering on the brink of falling into non-art, it appears unlike its sibling arrangement on the west side of LA—here, at the Hammer Museum, the arrangement of stuff sits calmly neutered behind the massive glass doors of a closed off lobby gallery. "A museum is like the lungs of a great city; the crowd floods into the museum every Sunday like blood and it leaves purified and fresh." [2] Bataille's words on the museums having a strange way of following in the footsteps of slaughterhouses, like their shadow, rising up where they once were (or, remodeling and extending), on pushing their negative pole to the edges of the city; the same that we reject and discard we adore seeing on the pedestal, as on Sundays, things *feel* different.



Ser Serpas, *Potential Indefinite Performance, This That And Now Again*, 2020. Installation view, Hammer Museum. Installation view, Made in L.A. 2020: a version, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. Photo: Joshua White / JWPictures.com.



Ser Serpas, *Potential Indefinite Performance, This That And Now Again*, 2020. Installation view, Hammer Museum. Installation view, *Made in L.A. 2020: a version*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. Photo: Joshua White / JWPictures.com.



Ser Serpas, *Made in L.A. 2020: a version*. Installation view at The Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens, San Marino. Photo: Joshua White / JWPictures.com

The statement from the artist accompanies both contributions for the LA Biennial, elaborating that incumbent reliance on “*institutional guidelines instead of the artist’s discretion*,” as well as a number of contributing factors amounted to the fact that the work or works cannot be made. However, in-between the lines (as well as in-between the locations) is where the work happens. Acknowledging that the imposed set of circumstances amounts to conjoint levels of inaccessibility and that this must be accounted for, results in the removal of agency from the work itself. It is a lesson in livelihood, in irritability (which doubles as a symptom of recognition), and in proximity between us and what we chose not to look at.

Potential Indefinite Performance... is related by Connie Butler [3] to the iconic pieces of 60s minimalism; Barry Le Va’s “dispersal” installations, and Robert Morris’ scatter pieces. While sharing some formal language—or better, acknowledging Serpas’ sly nod to the minimalist tactics, the genealogy of her operations strays out of the expected canon. Unlike Morris and Le Va, whose chosen industrial residues have been processed, cut, penetrated and discarded by machines—speaking of the excesses of capitalist mode of production, but never entertaining their lifecycle of use—Serpas’ chosen objects have been bought, handled, used, abused and discarded by the tenants of the areas she scavenges from. It is something that has been “through things,” and in this through-ness—voracious oscillations of desire from ownership and attachment to

divestment and abandonment—is where her interest in dichotomous nature of care and non-care lays. In her text *Becoming Trash*, Hannah Black says, “*In conditions of relentless horror and our defenses against it, carelessness is a way to show care.*” [4] Attachment to things, living and not living, has its limits when human life is treated as disposable by almost every action of the governing system existing today. When the exhibition is finished, either someone else takes care of the pieces, houses them in their home—or they slowly percolate back into the streets. Black: “*The negation is all the more stunning in its nihilism because it is ambivalent and hungry.*”



Ser Serpas, *profile marker*, 2018. Courtesy Ser Serpas and Luma Foundation. Photo by Stefan Altenburger.



Tbilisi-Photo-Feb-18,-12-36-22 (photo and courtesy: the artist).



Tbilisi-Photo-Feb-10,-12-01-58 (photo and courtesy: the artist).

A deserter of the artworld for commitment to social work, Laurie Parsons, (a reverse life-trajectory than Serpas, who turned to art after becoming disenchanted with community organizing and its respectability politics), used to collect things on walks through urban and postindustrial New Jersey areas. Bringing them back to her studio, she would live with them for a while, “*interested in the presence they had that I found as powerful as that of a piece of art.*” [5] Starting from a similar draw to material, but differing from Shaker furniture-like austerity and silence of Parsons’ pieces (such as *A Body of Work* 1987), Serpas’ assisted ready-mades often perform a deviant extroversion. In her 2018 exhibition at LUMA Westbau *You were created to be so young (self-harm and exercise)*, together with a number of other sculptural works, the pieces tended to open up in the ways their functionality wouldn’t otherwise allow them—stretching, spilling, balancing on their edges, dismembering, and piling on top of each other. Tilted on the side, hung or shoved—Serpas twists them up and above their limits. Isn’t that the same trash from the street of Zurich, now contorted to present its great trick? In challenging the fixity of value, these objects flaunt their *derrière* underneath the dress for its, now attentive, audience.



Ser Serpas, *devil tongue and other extremities*, 2018. Courtesy Ser Serpas and Luma Foundation. Photo by Stefan Altenburger.

The performativity and disrespect for convention and class is where Serpas' practice finds a common ground with an artist working more than a hundred years ago, but well ahead of her time. Elsa von Freytag Loringhoven's treatment of the rejected—from the street, fashion and domesticity—formed into found-object miniature assemblages (Loringhoven's *Limbswish*, *Earring-Object*, *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp...*), as well as rapacious and performative dressing of the body together with her “confessional” poetry (what nowadays would be called “oversharing”) could be part of the same unruly kinship of Serpas' hoarded and bound textile scrap pieces and smaller assemblages, as well as her writing practice.



Ser Serpas, *what we need is another body* at Truth and Consequences, installation view, Geneva, 2019.
Courtesy Ser Serpas. Photo Annik Wetter.

Through the last year an over-used concoction of Octavia Butler's bag [6] (I'll re-use it for that reason) as a metaphor for a novel, the fiction-carrier of the ragpickers and quote-and-scatter writers, comes on stage literally and metaphorically in the 2019 show at Geneva's Truth and Consequences. The poetry handwritten on the darkened walls, and in the space, blinded by the reflectors, small islands of shit strip bare in front of us. Gently held together by the shuffled plastic bags they unveil their discarded flora; in a black trash bag, a yellowed fleece rag enclenches a bottom piece of a beige PVC Christmas tree, in which shoved wooden sticks are adorned with a bulk of plastic price tag fasteners. Next to it, a clumped blanket holding some pale green wool, out of which a mangled XYZ mess of

carpenter's ruler, and a lengthy string of beads of temple arises in the starlight. The show is titled *what we need is another body*, and the press release spirals through Serpas' experience of post urban studies at Columbia. She describes it as a *blank* arts program, surrounded by *blanks* expecting to read and project into the work. "*I tried things as well as other things. I tried the things to make the blank more clear, but in the blank I remained determined to blank myself into oblivion.*" she writes. "*I bought 4 Loko and worked. I found the blank in me.*" The *blanks* see the work and comment on the violence present. Really, in those small, gross, and absolutely beautiful and cherished bags of shit? Not coincidentally—the violence is not them.

[1] <https://www.latimes.com/business/real-estate/hot-property/la-fi-hp-neighborhood-spotlight-san-marino-20180324-story.html>

[2] Georges Bataille, "Musée," in *Oeuvres complètes*, 12 vols. (Paris, 1970-88), 1:329.

[3] Connie Butler, Lunchtime Art Talk,
<https://hammer.ucla.edu/programs-events/2021/lunchtime-art-talk-ser-serpas>

[4] Hannah Black, *Becoming Trash*, foreword to Ser Serpas: Carman, published by Koenig Books, London, 2018

[5] Bob Nickas, Whatever Happened To: Laurie Parsons, Artforum,
<https://www.artforum.com/print/200304/whatever-happened-to-laurie-parsons-4510>,
originally published under title *Dematerial Girl*, 2003

[6] Ursula K. Le Guin: The Carrier-Bag Theory of Fiction, original 1986, republished by Ignota Books, London, 2020

Ser Serpas

Balice Hertling, Paris, France

With a broad-ranging practice that encompasses sculpture, painting, drawing and poetry, it's little wonder that Tbilisi-based artist Ser Serpas's first solo exhibition in France is not confined to one venue but spans both galleries of Balice Hertling in Paris.

Left in its dilapidated, pre-renovation state, the gallery's new space on rue des Gravilliers lends itself well to the presentation of Serpas's installations of found objects. In preparation for the exhibition, the American artist – known for her appreciation of refuse – spent several days collecting furniture and objects from the streets of Paris before assembling the items on site during an intimate performance. The installations comprise objects as disparate as a mattress, some cupboard doors and a shopping trolley. The remaining unused material leans against the walls of the old gallery on rue Saint-Martin (a slick white cube with a concrete floor) accompanied by a series of framed poems. As with many of Serpas's works, the title of the installation is not only descriptive but also indicates her relationship to it: *im not good at anything including this round the this time, 87 unused collected objects from the installation at 84 Rue des Gravilliers and 15 framed pages of notes from Georgian language classes that the artist did not follow up on after the 8th lesson* (all works 2021).

The presentation at rue des Gravilliers is characterized by two different approaches to production. On the one hand, there are the pieces that correspond closely with assemblage, such as *Mattress – conjoining fabricated excesses literal end to a mean*, an old mattress rolled up so it fits into the hole of a wooden board, creating a tension between the two materials, or *Staircase – spilled out of my head head was spinning*, a piece of a spiral staircase cut out with a grinder and installed in the corner of the space. Works like *Bathtub – love time in vetivers, bathtub dropped a story and left as is*, an old bathtub cast into the basement through a hole on the ground floor, however, are the result of very particular gestures responding to the exhibition space-in-progress. While these actions aren't particularly innovative, they contain a violence whose marks of destruction – a corner of the bathtub broke during the fall – can be read as signs of liberation and rupture.

Combined with traces of the objects' former uses, Serpas's arrangements give the sculptures a strong corporeality. Nothing in this show is welded, screwed or fixed, rather,



Ser Serpas, *Wood panels – atrophies for participation*, 2021, found objects, 1.4×1.3×1.4 m

everything is balanced, stacked, leaning against the wall or simply resting on the floor. By combining concepts of surrealism (assemblage), minimalism (reduction of materials) or even anti-form (form determined by physical forces), Serpas reflects on movements in the history of sculpture, which has been largely written by male artists.

Instead of merely echoing art history, however, Serpas creates a contrast between the sculptural and ephemeral nature of the works to open up a meditation on the deconstruction of the medium. The artist's interest

in the transformation of matter, solidity, erection and eternity is further highlighted by the fact that the objects she uses for her installations are always returned to the streets where she found them – unless they are sold. However, Serpas's works are more than a model of sustainable artistic production. At Balice Hertling, what's most astonishing is the ease with which she turns massive objects into fragile assemblages, revealing how quickly power relationships can flip.

— Oriane Durand