



Sargent's Daughters

Rachel Youn

No Pain No Gain

July 7 – August 13, 2022

Sargent's Daughters is pleased to present "No Pain No Gain," the debut New York solo exhibition of sculptor and installation artist Rachel Youn (b. 1994, Abington, PA). Based in St. Louis, MO, Youn uses online secondhand shopping to source materials that evoke aspiration and failure, then combines them into kinetic sculptures through an improvisational and intuitive studio practice. These motorized objects are easily anthropomorphized, as their repeated movements suggest labor, melancholia, and a sardonic sense of humor.

For several years, personal massage devices and plastic flora have been Youn's primary media. Affixed to the motorized devices, the fake plants appeared to gyrate and groove in stylized installations that comment on queer joy, eroticism, and the absurd. While Youn's new body of work retains the same core components, it introduces implements of stereotypically masculine confinement and control, including a pull up bar, a gun rack, a tire jack, and a hand strengthener, all of which constrict the movement of the motorized flowers.

"No pain, no gain," was a phrase frequently recited by Youn's father as they were growing up. Though the aphorism is commonly used to promote exercise, Youn's immigrant father was speaking more broadly about the existential toil inherent to modern American life. The phrase also echoes the emphasis on sacrifice and suffering in the Christian faith, from the crucifixion of Christ to narratives of persecution and martyrdom. Youn, who was raised Baptist, places the plants in restrictive positions so they appear to writhe in pain, questioning if suffering is necessarily a productive force.

Youn sums up the ethos of these works as a "Sisyphean dance-until-you-die-ness." The motion of the plants is unending and viscerally uncomfortable, akin to exercise or menial labor. Though the exhibition's title implies that there is gain to be had, the extended stasis of these hybrid objects only seems to result in more anguish, but perhaps there is pleasure in the pain.

Rachel Youn (b. 1994, Abington, PA) is an artist living and working in St. Louis, MO. Working across sculpture and installation, Youn sources materials with a history of aspiration and failure through online secondhand shopping. Youn rescues electric massagers from suburban limbo, fastening artificial plants to the machines to create kinetic sculptures that are clumsy, erotic, and absurd. Haunted by their immigrant father's pursuit of the American Dream, their work identifies with the replica that earnestly desires to be real, and the failed object that simulates care and intimacy.

Youn has recently exhibited at Soy Capitán (Berlin, Germany), Truman State University Art Gallery (Kirksville, MO), HAIR + NAILS (Minneapolis, MN), and Contemporary Art Museum (St. Louis, MO). Youn will have their debut New York solo show at Sargent's Daughters in July 2022.

Youn is a recipient of the Vermont Studio Center Fellowship and the 2020 Great Rivers Biennial Award. They received their BFA from the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts at Washington University in St. Louis. Youn is currently an MFA candidate at Yale School of Art in New Haven, CT.