

METEMPSYCHOSIS

IVANA BAŠIĆ

MO.CO. PANACÉE

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The works of Ivana Bašić, born in 1986 in Yugoslavia, are deeply influenced by the experience of war, violence, and brutality that shaped her childhood. Bašić's hybrid bodies present metamorphosis as a substitute for escape, whether on an individual or collective scale—a transformation that might be the only solution when there is nowhere left to hide.

Almost human in scale, each of Bašić's sculptures is composed of diverse materials—wax, glass, bronze, stainless steel, and alabaster—that together construct the artist's symbolic and material language. Her forms evoke uterine fluids and insect-like bodies. The figures are both violent and tender, suggesting primordial forces that are both subterranean and invisible.

The installation *Passion of Pneumatics* spans seven meters in length. Using the force of compressed air, the repetitive movements of the hammers are synchronized with the rhythm of the artist's breathing, evoking the idea of *Pneuma*, meaning “breath” and “spirit” in Greek. In spiritual teachings, the Pneumatics represented beings sustained by the spirit, by the “breath of life” that transcends mere materiality.

“Humanity in its present telluric stage is too much a captive of gravity and the senses. In order to inhabit the entire universe, we must evolve beyond our present, earthbound state.

The further we evolve, the smaller our bodies should become, and that as we approach divinity we will also approach a vanishing point of spaceless invisibility.

BOOKLET

ART AND SCIENCE SEASON

After a season dedicated to contemporary figurative painting in France (Spring 2023), followed by an exploration of the links between art and literature (Spring 2024), MO.CO. Montpellier Contemporain presents this spring three exhibitions across its two art centers, delving into the relationship between art and science.

This theme resonates with the history of Montpellier, a city that has played a major role in the transmission of knowledge since the 12th century. In 1220, it saw the establishment of official university statutes with the founding of the Faculty of Medicine, the first to formally develop medical and life sciences, paving the way for scientific research as we know it today.

During the Renaissance, the University distinguished itself through its specialized fields, particularly anatomy, botany, and pharmacy. With the creation of the Jardin des Plantes in 1593, the study of medicinal plants expanded, cementing Montpellier's status as the capital of botany until the 19th century. Today, the University of Montpellier stands out for its dynamic research community and the richness of its heritage.

Like scientists, artists observe, analyze, interpret, and experiment—often venturing into the unknown without any guarantee of results, embracing failure and practicing doubt. But it is above all their shared approach that deserves attention. Both connect ideas, challenge hierarchies, and blur our perceptual frameworks. They seek beyond and beside, exploring the unseen and manipulating matter to bring forth the unexpected.

This season allows us to establish a strong partnership with the University of Montpellier, to whom we extend our gratitude for its generous loans as well as for the exceptional support provided to MO.CO. through the creation of a Scientific Committee.

As part of the Art and Science season, MO.CO. Panacée hosts two monographic exhibitions, one dedicated to Ivana Bašić and the other to Pierre Unal-Brunet—two artists whose work generates speculative narratives rooted in scientific data.

Ivana Bašić's *Metempsychosis* takes the form of a rite of passage, a spatial journey at the material and metaphysical boundaries of humanity.

With *Prodrome*, Pierre Unal-Brunet develops a bio-fiction exploring the evolution of aquatic ecosystems and the ambivalence of our empathy toward living beings.

At MO.CO., *Sense Unknown* brings together over a hundred works by around thirty artists, offering an open-ended and porous journey across materials, experiments, disciplines, and eras, challenging reality—or at least what we believe we know of it.

Curators of the Art and Science season:
Pauline Faure, Anya Harrison, Alexis
Loisel-Montambaux, Deniz Yoruc
Under the artistic direction of Numa Hambursin

In partnership with the University of Montpellier and the CNRS (including ENSCM, the ProPAC Professional Bachelor's Degree in Perfumes, Aromas, and Cosmetics, the Faculty of Science, and the IES Institute of Electronics and Systems).

Metempsychosis, an exhibition by Ivana Bašić, presents over 20 works—including sculptures, drawings, videos, and a robotic altarpiece—guiding visitors on a spatial journey that explores the material and metaphysical boundaries of humanity.

The exhibition invites the public into a surreal voyage where the dissolution of bodies and the material world is not perceived as a loss but as the emergence of radical potentiality. *Metempsychosis* marks Ivana Bašić's first monographic exhibition in France.

Born in 1986 in Yugoslavia, Ivana Bašić's works are profoundly shaped by the experience of war, violence, and brutality that defined her childhood following the collapse of her homeland. These traumatic events render certain ontological concerns urgent: the fragility of the human condition, the crisis of self and Other, the possibility of reimagining life and death, and the pursuit of immortality. Bašić's hybrid bodies propose metamorphosis as an alternative to escape, whether on an individual or collective scale. Could transformation be the only solution when there is nowhere left to hide?

Almost human in scale, each of Bašić's sculptures is composed of diverse materials—wax, glass, bronze, stainless steel, and alabaster—that together construct the artist's symbolic and material language. Glass speaks to the breath that shaped it. Wax evokes malleable, ephemeral flesh: paraffin wax originates from petroleum, a substance formed from fossils and the earth to which the body will ultimately return. Stone represents matter under pressure, while bronze alludes to armor, the organism's protective strategies. Stainless steel bears witness to the inevitable forces of violence acting upon the body.

These forms evoke uterine fluids and insect-like bodies. The figures are both violent and tender, suggesting primordial forces that are subterranean and invisible.

The exhibition's soundscape features a live audio feed from the sculptural installation *Passion of Pneumatics* (2024), synchronized with an excerpt from *Kuomé* by Éliane Radigue, taken from *Trilogie de la Mort* (1985–1993).

*Cosmism is a utopian philosophical and religious movement that emerged in Russia at the end of the 19th century. Combining spiritualism and science, Cosmism aimed to make humans immortal and is believed to have influenced the space exploration project.

BIOGRAPHY

Born in 1986 in Belgrade (Serbia)

Lives and works in New York.

Ivana Bašić's sculptures explore how subjectivity can transform through otherness: from the human to the non-human, from the organic to the inorganic, from matter to pure idealism. Her sculptures are metamorphic, showing different states of transformation in their bodily and metaphysical identities.

Ivana Bašić has recently participated in exhibitions at Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin (2024 and 2023), Lafayette Anticipations (2023), National Gallery, Prague (2021), Museum of Art+Design, Miami (2020), Het HEM, Amsterdam (2020), Contemporary Art Museum Estonia, Tallinn (2019), NRW Forum, Düsseldorf (2019), Athens Biennale (2018), Belgrade Biennale (2018), Künstlerhaus Graz (2018), MO.CO. Panacée (2018), Hessel Museum of Art, New York (2017), Kunstverein Freiburg, Freiburg (2017), and the Whitney Museum of American Art (2016).

The exhibition *Metempsychosis* follows a first presentation at Schinkel Pavillon in Berlin in the summer of 2024, complemented by works created for this new reconfiguration in Montpellier.

WORK DESCRIPTIONS

ROOM 1

Passion of Pneumatics (2024) Installation
Metabole (2020-2024)
Blossoming Being #1 and #2 (2024)

The installation *Passion of Pneumatics* spans seven meters in length. It is inspired by images from the Italian Renaissance and the Immaculate Heart of the Virgin Mary. Here, the sun rays of the Immaculate Heart are replaced by pneumatic hammers that gradually strike a stone, attempting to reduce the heart of the sculpture to dust. Using compressed air, the repetitive movements of the hammers are synchronized with the rhythm of the artist's breath, evoking the Gnostic concept of *Pneuma*, meaning "breath" or "spirit" in Greek. In spiritual teachings, Pneumatics represented the highest order of beings—those sustained by the spirit, by the "breath of life"—transcending the purely materialistic realm. The heart of the sculpture is surrounded by four panels of pink blown glass, symbolizing the breath that formed it, in both the material and symbolic language of Bašić. The body of the altarpiece is constructed from exhaust pipes. By combining exhaust pipes, blown glass, and compressed air devices, the installation reflects both industrial and spiritual dimensions. All objects are symbolically linked to breath. *Passion of Pneumatics* resembles a respiratory machine that gradually breaks down the stone at its center, transforming it into dust. On each side of the altarpiece, biomechanical figures titled *Blossoming Being #1 and #2* emerge from the ends of stainless steel stems. The flesh-toned skin folds of the sculptures are surrounded by shining armor plates, which seem to protect the soft bodies as they emerge from their shells. These figures address themes such as the fragility of the human condition, the delicate balance between concealment and revelation, and the necessity of transformation when escape is impossible.

ROOM 2

Thousand years ago 10 seconds of breath were 40 grams of dust #3 (2024) Video
The Temptation of Being #2 and #3 (2024)

The Temptation of Being, like *Exuviae* (Room 5), embodies a singular, genderless being suspended between birth and death. The sculpture features a figure in an impossible pose, driving its own amniotic-colored glass head between its lower back. From the back, the figure seems to give birth to itself. From the front, a slit in the figure's back reveals the heart of the sculpture, as if caught in a process of metamorphosis. Like a flower blooming, the flesh along the figure's spine opens, revealing an ancient, moist alabaster stone—a material under pressure. These two works transgress the boundaries of what a body could be and test the limits of plasticity.

ROOM 3

Ungrounding (2025)

A series of watercolor drawings evokes birth and the beginnings of life, with their elliptical shapes, dissolved pigments, and the deformation of the paper caused by moisture. While distinct from the material study of her sculptural work, the *Ungrounding* series shows clear connections to Bašić's broader formal imagination, suggesting entities even more ephemeral than her glass or wax sculptures. Soft pink and white hues are linked by dark curves, reminiscent of steel. The forms are elliptical, resembling a womb, and evoke cyclical images of nebulae, cellular life, and becoming. For Bašić, this kind of quantum return is an optimistic and generative space—a rebirth of the most basic and indivisible ingredients of existence.

Hypostasis (2024)

Translucent glass eggs are filled with dust and the artist's breath. These eggs, hermetically sealed and awaiting hatching, embody the brutality and potential of vital forces. The presence of the breath adds an immaterial dimension. *The breath* (pneuma) is a central symbol in many ancient traditions, representing life, spirit, and divine presence. Anonymous and irreducible, the dust symbolizes the cycle of life and the liberation from the material world.

ROOM 4

I too had thousands of blinking cilia, while my belly, new and made for the ground was being reborn

Position I (#3) (2019)

Position III (#6) (2024)

Sculptures

I sense that all of this was ancient and vast. I had touched the nothing, and nothing was living and moist #4 (2022)

The sculpture resembles insect chrysalises with protective bronze shields similar to armor, as well as wombs from another world caught in the process of opening, blossoming, and birthing. Beneath the bronze armor, wax—evoking corporeal flesh—unfolds to reveal alabaster stones that form the core of the sculpture, delicately carved to appear moist, intestinal. The rods surrounding the sculpture are grounding rods—conductive devices for magnetic and electrical forces, designed to protect from electrocution. The circular arrangement of the rods evokes both the act of pinning a butterfly and the rays of Passion in mythological representations of the Sacred Heart.

ROOM 5

I had seen the centuries, and the vast dry lands; I had reached the nothing and the nothing was living and moist (2018-2024)

This chimera-like figure, part insect and part machine, resembles a praying mantis, which in Greek and Egyptian tradition is considered an oracle and a guide to the Afterlife. Meticulously sculpted, the creature seems to recoil, head bowed. As the sculpture appears to shed its body, it reveals a soft, moist pink core that will eventually be reduced to dust, with glass bubbles—representing breath—expelled like remnants of loss. Embodied in both violence and vulnerability, the grotesque and the sensual, *I had seen the centuries...* deals with alterity, questioning the nature of form and the liberation of the material realm. Bašić's interest in insects relates to chthonic forces and primordial matter: most insect species have inhabited the Earth for over a hundred million years. *I had seen the centuries...* represents a symbiotic being thriving by blending with, by "becoming with," a different species. Reflecting on the cyclical nature of pressure-driven matter, the sculpture, like the other works presented at MO.CO. Panacée, poses the question of the body: a blessing or a trap?

Exuviae (2024)

Exuviae resembles the shell that once protected the human being, much like the exuviae of an insect safeguard its fragile organism during the metamorphosis process. Cast in bronze—a material that symbolizes protective strategies in Bašić's symbolic material language—*Exuviae* speaks to the fragility of existence and the perpetual cycle of transformation.