



**Lukas Geronimas
Nevine Mahmoud
Vanessa McConnell**

**Los
Angeles
Municipal
Art
Gallery**



Gallery Guide

At first glance, the works of Lukas Geronimas, Nevine Mahmoud and Vanessa McConnell appear to have little in common with one another. Mahmoud's colorful peaches are a world apart from Geronimas's wooden sculptures or McConnell's effervescent abstract paintings. Yet, each of these artists demonstrates — in varying ways — a powerful compulsion to work and rework their materials, be it marble, walnut or acrylic paint, sometimes for months at a time, until they deem their work complete.

This drive speaks to an ideal of craft that has lately been cast aside, not only by a contemporary art world that relies on the outsourcing of art fabrication, but also by society at large. The neoliberalization of western economies has led to the privileging of growth and profit over quality¹. With the rise of Fordism, assembly lines and the prioritization of efficiency above all else, labor has become increasingly alienated from its product. Most modern workers have little time to lovingly hand-craft their product to perfection. The desire to do a job well for its own sake, perhaps the definition of craftsmanship, has been eroded in an era where such dedication is rarely recognised or rewarded².

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¹ This essay was written in March 2020, when the full impact of COVID-19 on the global economy was yet to be understood. It has been speculated, perhaps optimistically, that the resulting economic slowdown may force western countries to reexamine the ways in which their societies are structured.

² According to studies, the numeric models of care recently implemented in the British National Health Service, whereby doctors are limited to a few minutes per patient and induced to present confirmed diagnoses before, diminishes the quality of day to day treatment of patients.

A renewed appreciation for the handmade is a logical response to the increasing digitization of our daily life. The more time that we spend online, staring at computer and phone screens, the further dissociated we become from our bodies and the physical world around us. Our society's valorization of intellectual labor above all else underestimates the complexity of thought inherent in repetitive tasks carried out by hand. Making is a kind of thinking. The Shakers, to give just one example, brought their belief system, which centred around simplicity, utility and honesty, to bear on every cabinet, chair or peg rail that they produced. This celebration of quality and good work pointed to the presence of God, even in the little things.

The necessity of long periods of time spent hand-working activates a slower, but deeper kind of attention that is easily cast aside in a fast-paced world, one that does not value bodily, experiential and perceptual levels of understanding³. Richard Sennett suggests that we should reprioritize tacit knowledge, “gained in the hand through touch and movement,” pointing out that even the most abstract skills have their origins in bodily practices⁴.

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³ I once worked with one artist who spent four months making a single sculpture and I was continually awed by the multiplicity of ideas and associations that the work accrued throughout the time of its making.

⁴ Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman*, p. 10

The care and attention that Lukas Geronimas devotes to his dynamic body of works can be attributed to his desire for grace, and the constant pursuit to create objects that are free of any qualities recognized by the artist as a struggle. Harmony between the object and the artist's particular expressive mode is tantamount. As a result, Geronimas spends many hours engaged in the production of his sculptures, deeply attuned to his materials⁵. For the artist, the imperfections in materials call for resuscitation, be given new life and treasured for its idiosyncrasies, an approach that recalls Japanese Zen Buddhism's appreciation for the weather-beaten, aged or blemished⁶. This aesthetic philosophy values the imperfect for its associations with vicissitude and perishability, thus evoking the transience of life. Zen philosophy requires artists to relinquish their ego and let the materials dictate the design of their work⁷. Geronimas is also interested in investigating the idea of transmutation, or the power to alter the structure of matter or material. Exploring the potential of artwork to assign alternative values, he combines expression, formal reduction, context, and most importantly craft, to transform ordinary materials into something beyond their constituent parts.

For this exhibition, Geronimas has deliberately chosen forms that borrow from ritualistic objects or spaces wherein rituals take place. *Mayfair Column Remainder* is a reliquary, or tomb, for the first piece of wood the artist intended to use in the production of his first column piece. *Puzzlemaster* combines elements from an array of devotional figures with shapes based on the underlying volumes of foam that were used to carve out the bulk of the figure. Some of the iconic elements incorporated into this work include: the nemes headcloth and ceremonial beard of ancient Egyptian pharaohs, the seated "pose of royal ease" of Dharmic idol, the multiple arms included in depictions of hindu deities, and the heroic proportion and musculature portrayed in renderings of Greek and Roman gods. *Barnsdall Column* is built in nine segments: four wooden pieces in the shape of a cross (modeled after the gallery's unique column design), and five ten-sided prisms made of a custom resurfaced plexiglass. *Custom Hung Valance* is a series of wooden racks that support pointed Gothic-style frames made of polished aluminum, stretched muslin, and tinted plywood. The placement of these works along the gallery walls mimic a clerestory, a reference to the gallery's church-like floor plan.

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⁵ This investment of artist's or craftperson's time could be said to imbue the object with some trace of their maker. We can speculate on the ingenuity and wit of those anonymous medieval builders who left humorous carved capitals behind in the Gothic churches of the 11th century.

⁶ Saito points out, too, that the appreciation of imperfection is enabled by social privilege and cultural sophistication. Yuriko Saito, "The Japanese Aesthetics of Imperfection and Insufficiency," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*. P.378 <https://unmhonorsart.files.wordpress.com/2016/01/saitoyuriko-japaneseimperfection.pdf>

⁷ The aestheticization of the imperfect is a means of justifying or reconciling oneself to the unpalatable aspects of life. *Ibid.*, p. 383

The wood used for each set of racks is unique, and the frames are tinted in either dull yellow, green and red in reference to the three colors of the Lithuanian flag, Geronimas' ancestral home. In recent times, as western society grows increasingly secular, it seems that the art gallery has come to replace the cathedral as a sacred site. We tiptoe reverently through galleries to view one of a kind, authenticized objects, taking care not to sully them with our touch. Ultimately, Geronimas' works invite us to consider what is involved in our own process of establishing and manipulating value, with objects we own, hold dear, and consider sacred.

In his 1936 essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", Walter Benjamin famously theorised that the rise of reproduction through mechanical media removed the art object's 'aura', its unique existence in a specific time and place, that contributes to its value. Much of the contemporary artwork's value stems from the Renaissance exaltation of the gifted individual, those artists such as Michelangelo or da Vinci who it was believed possessed some superlative sensibility. Their aesthetic validity was couched in terms of theological truth,

conveyed by God to the artist. During the Romantic period, this gave rise to the notion of the artist as a misunderstood genius, who was set apart from society somehow - a visionary ahead of their time who garnered unique insights into our world. This was coterminous with the rise of scepticism toward religious orthodoxies in the wake of the Enlightenment, in which art became society's means of accessing higher truths. This was expanded upon further by Andy Warhol whose industrial scale of production disrupted centuries of thinking about the artist's role as a skilled maker of original handmade work. Warhol's model has proved enduring for today's contemporary artists, many of the highest prices commanded by artists that most engage teams of assistants and fabricators to produce their work⁸.

Nevine Mahmoud's decision to study stone carving, after studying for a Master of Fine Arts at USC, sets her work apart from that of most other emerging artists. After coming across an outdoor artists' studio in Ventura, Mahmoud became fascinated by the craft, spending a year photographing and observing the artists at work. After enrolling in classes,

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⁸ William Deresiewicz discusses the institutionalization and commodification of art which has brought about a reduction in traditional artistic skills as artists are driven to depth rather than breadth in an effort to stay afloat financially. Deresiewicz, "The Death of the Artist—and the Birth of the Creative Entrepreneur", The Atlantic, Jan/ Feb 2015

Mahmoud found herself immersed in the labor-intensive process of cutting and polishing a single piece of marble, citing the physical aspect of the process as deeply meditative. The work is determined by the availability of materials - for instance the prevalence of orange calcite in California enabled the production of the peach sculptures. Her choice of forms and materials embodies contradictory impulses: fleshy fruits and curvaceous busts undermine our expectations of cold, hard stone or glass. Provocative sculptures made from glass, steel, resin and stones such as onyx, alabaster and marble invite our eyes to dance along the surface. The bright, succulent forms feel soft and light as if they could have tumbled out of a cornucopia into the gallery for consumption. *Slick Slice* has the appearance of a just-washed, wet surface which is heightened by the presence of *Headless*, the form of a tongue fashioned from Portuguese marble. The artist's ability to transform such unforgiving materials into forms which belie their inherent qualities is something to behold with irreverence.

As enchanting as Mahmoud's sculptures are at first glance, the realization of the cold, unforgiving nature of the materials gives way to the conceptual complexity in the work. Expectations of desire and attraction are defused by the work's clinical presentation, with their pristine polished surfaces and immaculate pedestals that frustrate one's urge to touch or handle.

Deeper consideration of the works reveal the conflation of bodies and food; disembodied busts and severed legs displayed alongside peaches and cherries - the carving up of the female body for our delectation⁹. *Miss her (peach)* is a direct example of this combination of subjects. There is, of course, a political significance to making this body of work as a female artist¹⁰. The subversion of expectations and ideals continues into the considerations of the artist as much as the work itself. Stone as a media was and is still a male-dominated craft which Mahmoud excels at. In her work, she does not shy away from the concept of objectification of bodies. The process of distorting bodies in ways that are amusing and erotic, attractive and repulsive in essence disrupts our preconceived notions of how bodies should look and feel. Even the contextualization of Mahmoud's work in relation to Surrealism falls short as the female figure in the movement was largely being carved up into pieces by male artists of the 1920's. The nature of Mahmoud's work directly confronts the drive that Western Society has to both view and possess.

The palette of Mahmoud's sculpture is reminiscent of skin, yet appears sickly. Severed from the rest of the body, Mahmoud's creations are defamiliarized from the human body to become suggestive of some otherworldly, more

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⁹ In "The Aesthetics of Dismemberment: Surrealism and the Musée du Val-de-Grâce in 1917", Amy Lyford discusses the French State's use of the visage of disfigured soldiers as propaganda for reconstruction and how the Surrealists co-opted the visual tools of dismemberment to subvert this intention.

¹⁰ As the Guerilla Girls famously disclosed, only 5% of the Modern Art collection at the Metropolitan Museum are women, but 85% of the nudes are female.

surreal entity. The cyborgian nature of the objects - particularly the cold body parts - can urge consideration of digital space. In "Glitch Feminism", Legacy Russell defines the new terms of this iteration of feminist ideals: "We want a new framework and for this framework, we want new skin. The digital world provides a potential space where this can play out. Through the digital, we make new worlds and dare to modify our own."¹¹ Of late, Mahmoud has experimented with hybridised forms, in which hollowed out anatomies are co-opted as domestic furnishings such as vessels or lamps. Playground slides, beach balls and puzzle pieces connote objects of play elemental compositions and primary colors with cold, fragile materials. The contrast between these childish things and Mahmoud's more sensual objects creates an unsettling effect, inviting us to consider the psychological origins of such bodily impulses as abjection and attraction.

Though the works they create may, on the surface, appear or feel familiar, Geronimas and Mahmoud conjure entirely new objects through their respective use of materials. In this manner, those who encounter the works tussle with the push and pull surrounding the nature of such objects, thereby opening a multiplicity of meaning and

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11 In "Glitch Feminism" by Legacy Russell, the concept of play and exploration of oneself on the internet is discussed: "The oblique romance of Internet-as-utopia, against this backdrop reality, should not be dismissed as naïve. Imbuing digital material with fantasy today is not a retro act of mythologizing; it continues as a survival mechanism. Using the Internet to play, perform, explore still has potential. Giving ourselves this space to experiment perhaps brings us closer to a projection of a "sustainable future."" pg. 14

experiences inherent to the work--both by and from the artists and visitors. Similarly, the work of Vanessa McConnell transforms the medium of paint to create a galaxy of new work that further plays with the idea of painting and sculpture.

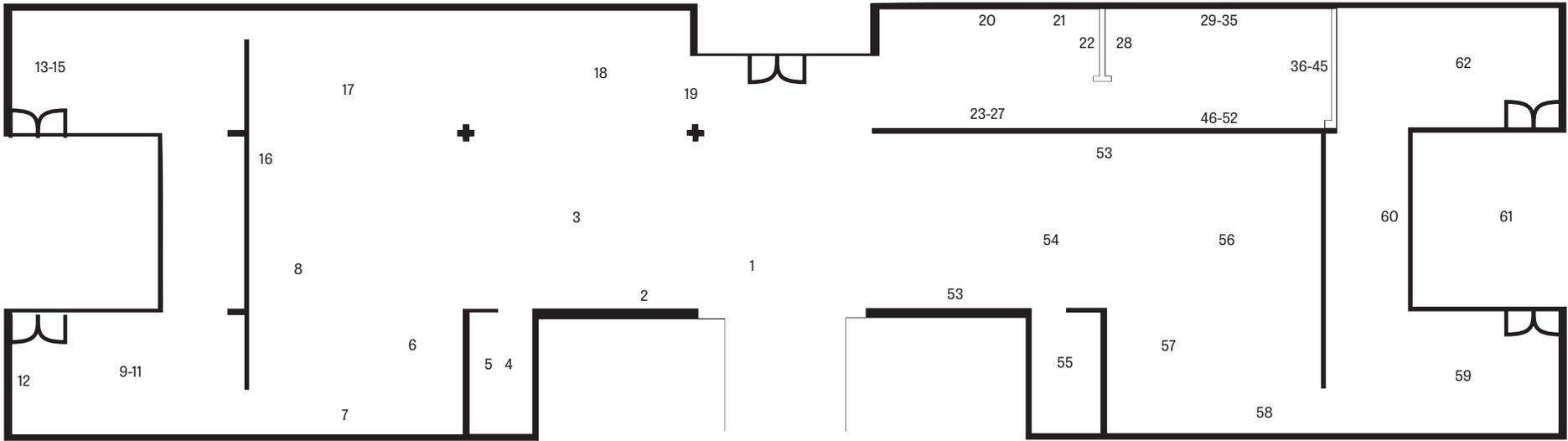
McConnell's searing paintings evince a powerful compulsion to paint, the acrylic thickly encrusted on her brushes, clothes and workstation from repeated dramatic use, rips and tears sometimes opening up in the picture plane. The artist works on several paintings at once and her practice is an intensely social one; she loves to dance and move about the studio to see what others are working on before returning to load up her brush with paint and apply another decisive mark. Music is usually accompanying the artist as she paints and the upbeat songs of The Jackson 5 are often influencing her movements in the studio.

The selection of pieces on view introduces the breadth of materials utilized by McConnell to create new worlds. Unique found objects such as wooden frames and shaped panels find their way under McConnell's paintbrushes; one painting even includes materials such as string and steel worked into the topography of its surface. The layering of paint and bold mark making impact the overall shape of the painting, and, in one case, tears a hole in the substrate, allowing a viewpoint to see the wall behind it. The artist's paint-covered apron, a stand-in

for McConnell herself, acts as a guide to the works themselves. A unique arrangement of ephemera from the artist's studio is included in the presentation of McConnell's artwork. Each object offers insight into the process, and range from vessels coated in layers of acrylic paint, brushes that have become sculptural objects themselves, and the dropcloth from her work space. A new series of works on paper presents a deeper dive into the artist's practice. While McConnell's paintings are characterized by their thick impasto surfaces and intense mark marking, these works present lighter brush strokes due to the delicacy of the paper. A singular work on heavy burlap acts as a nod to the artist's penchant for a variety of substrates.

All three exhibitions speak to an idea of slowing down, taking pride in your work and a kind of care in those acts that is inspiring in a fast-paced world so reliant on digital communication and constant consumption. With these exhibitions, we invite you to consider these works as artefacts that document such a process of embodied cognition. We recognize the irony that visitors will only be able to view and not touch them but there will, however, be opportunities to reenact those motions via our educational (and socially distant) offerings.

This exhibition was originated by LAMAG's former curator, Ciara Moloney.



Captions for individual works

Nevine Mahmoud

1. **HOT TOY STRADDLE**, glass, resin, alabaster, wood, 22 x 41 x 18 inches, 2021
2. **Bust (lagoon)**, blown glass, resin, and steel hardware, 14 x 12 x 15 inches, 2018
3. **Aileen & Elvis**, Atlantic black marble, playboy blue powder coated stainless steel, cherries 11 inches diameter, stem 135 inches in height, 2019. courtesy of Shio Kusaka and Jonas Wood and M+B, Los Angeles
4. **Ball Stripped Bare**, Portuguese pink marble, 18 x 18 x 18 inches, 2018
5. **Deflating Beach Ball II**, ceramic and glaze, 13 x 13 x 13 inches, 2016
6. **Beach Ball IV**, ceramic and glaze, 13 x 13 x 13 inches, 2016
7. **Abacus arm 1**, onyx, Portuguese marble, Aphrodite marble, stainless steel, rubber hardware, 71 x 148 x 20 inches, 2017
8. **Three Components**, alabaster, pedestal, glass, metal coil, 72 x 30 x 72 inches, 2021
9. **Peach Object**, carved calcite, carved steel, 11 x 11 x 11 inches, 2016. courtesy of Mr. Brandon Creed and M+B, Los Angeles

10. **Slick Slice**, calcite and glass, 5 x 9.5 x 2.5 inches, 2017. courtesy of Lynn and Greg Davis and M+B, Los Angeles
 11. **Miss her (peach)**, calcite, marble, steel, 12 x 10 x 10 inches, 2017. courtesy of Mr. Benjamin Trigano and M+B, Los Angeles
 12. **Headless**, Portuguese marble and steel rod, 8 x 1.5 x 5 inches, 2017. courtesy of Mr. Ron Handler and M+B, Los Angeles
 13. **yellow Toy**, blown glass, 32 x 8 x 11 inches, 2020
 14. **Leg (Lila)**, blown glass, 32 x 7 x 10 inches, 2020
 15. **Leg (lilac)**, blown glass, 33 x 12 x 10 inches, 2020
 16. **Babette**, hand blown glass, resin, and aluminum hardware, 7 x 7.5 x 10 inches, 2019
 17. **Castle component #1**, Portuguese pink marble, 24 x 24 x 24 inches, 2018
 18. **Sherry**, calcite, plexiglass, copper and patina, 91 x 12 x 12 inches, 2018. courtesy of Mr. Ari Mir and M+B, Los Angeles
 19. **Breast shade**, alabaster and pigmented resin with stainless steel hardware, 13 x 18.5 x 18.5 inches, 2017
- all works courtesy of the artist and M+B, Los Angeles unless otherwise noted

Vanessa McConnell

20. *Untitled*, paint on apron, 36 x 28 inches, year unknown

21. *Untitled*, acrylic, mixed media, wood panel, 25 x 20 inches, year unknown

22. *Untitled*, acrylic on found wood frame, 17 x 13.75 x 2 inches, year unknown

23. *Untitled*, acrylic on canvas, 23 x 20 inches, year unknown

24. *Untitled*, acrylic, string, steel, plastic, canvas, 24 x 18 inches, 2017

25. *Untitled*, molded acrylic, 23 x 6 x 2.5 inches, year unknown

26. *Untitled*, acrylic on canvas, 24 x 18.5 x 2.5 inches, 2018

27. *Untitled*, acrylic, mixed media on wood panel, 28 x 18.5 x 1 inches, year unknown

28. *Untitled*, acrylic on burlap, 24 x 19 inches, 2017

29. *Untitled*, acrylic on paper, 11 x 20.25 inches, 2016

30. *Untitled*, acrylic on paper, 14 x 25 inches, 2016

31. *Untitled*, acrylic on paper, 16 x 20 inches, year unknown

32. *Untitled*, acrylic on paper, 16 x 16 inches, 2018

33. *Untitled*, acrylic on paper, 12.5 x 19.5 inches, year unknown

34. *Untitled*, acrylic on paper, 17.5 x 21 inches, 2017

35. *Untitled*, acrylic on paper, 12.5 x 24 inches, 2016

36. *Untitled*, paint bucket with paint covered brushes, 16 x 10 x 9 inches, year unknown

37. *Untitled*, molded acrylic, 2.25 x 6 x 4.25 inches, year unknown

38. *Untitled*, molded acrylic, 2.5 x 8.5 x 5.5 inches, year unknown

39. *Untitled*, paint covered brushes, various dimensions, year unknown

40. *Untitled*, paint covered brushes, various dimensions, year unknown

41. *Untitled*, molded acrylic, various dimensions, year unknown

42. *Untitled*, acrylic, 2.5 x 6.5 x 6 inches, year unknown

43. *Untitled*, acrylic, 2 x 6.5 x 6.5 inches, year unknown

44. *Untitled*, acrylic, 1.25 x 10 x 7 inches, year unknown

45. *Untitled*, paint drop cloth, 50.5 x 42.5 inches, year unknown

46. *Untitled*, acrylic on paper, 18 x 20 inches, 2017

47. *Untitled*, acrylic on paper, 29.5 x 22 inches, year unknown

48. *Untitled*, acrylic on paper, 28 x 22 inches, year unknown

49. *Untitled*, acrylic on paper, 30 x 23 inches, 2017

50. *Untitled*, acrylic on paper, 13 x 10 inches, 2018

51. *Untitled*, acrylic on paper, 10.5 x 15 inches, 2018

52. *Untitled*, acrylic on paper, 14 x 16 inches, year unknown

all works courtesy of the artist and ECF Art Centers

Lukas Geronimas

53. *Custom Hung Valance*, muslin, steel, wood, aluminum, fasteners and adhesives, 72 x 60 x 18 inches (each), 2021

54. *Puzzledust*, plexiglass, wood, aluminum and plexi dust, dimensions variable, 2019-21

55. *Airy Copy Lane Chest*, plexiglass, wood, aluminum, wax, dust, found puzzle pieces, clay, fasteners and adhesives, 17 x 41 x 26 inches, 2020

56. *Puzzlemaster*, plaster, foam, ink, graphite powder, 47 x 36 x 73 inches, 2020

57. *Barnsdall Column*, plexiglass, wood, aluminum, steel, 100 x 21 x 21 inches, 2021

58. *Custom Vent*, muslin, plywood, fasteners and adhesives, 30 x 60 x 2 inches, 2021

59. *Mayfair Column Remainder*, plexiglass, aluminum, wood, steel, LED light, 31 x 57 x 33 inches, 2020

60. *Signet*, aluminum, adhesive, 6 x 6 inches, 2020

61. *Signet*, found embroidered textile, adhesive, 1 x 9 inches, 2021

62. *Custom T*, wood, aluminum, plexiglass, magnets, ink, graphite powder, 33 x 35 x 12 inches, 2020

all works courtesy of the artist and Parker Gallery

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