

NICOLA GENOVESE

selected works 2021-2023

ARTIST STATEMENT

I am interested in exploring the relationships between materials, how they communicate, and how hierarchies develop when materials are obliged to interact. Each material carries its own story, but this story can be questioned, primarily through unexpected relationships. The shapes and the materials that I put in conversation exist bodily, even though they try to escape their biological destiny. I developed materiality that underlines the struggle between alterity and identity. Identities are socially constructed but at the same time are internalized to the extent that they become flesh. Materiality indeed cannot just be analyzed through discourse and cultural tools. There are queer camp elements in my esthetic that try to challenge the masculine body and references to medieval and baroque grotesque/carnavalesque tradition. At the same time traditional masculinity emerges as backlash. For me, decoration is not synonymous with superficiality but rather a tool to create incongruency. The hybrid sculptures that I develop claim their ambivalence, but on the other hand, they have to return to a sort of stable shape. Ambivalence doesn't have to be seen solely as an alternation of opposites but rather as the whole process of shifting the attention from one stable image to another.

24/7 decay: Hommage to Jacques Callot (2023)

Metal, fake leather, polyurethane foam

130 x 92 x 20 cm

Gastrosopia (2023)

Textile, fake leather, metal, plastic

26 x 30 x 90 cm

Snack (2023)

Salt dough, metal balls

31 x 26 x 4 cm

This precarious construct leads to Nicola Genovese's idea of the „grotesque body.“ A shattered identity forms into a protestmasculine figure, deliberately deviating from conventional aesthetic standards. With rough, rugged hardness and beer bellies - a conscious contrast to a controlled and cultivated body image - these figures refer to a pre-industrial era. Although this may seem judgmental at first glance, a closer look reveals that Genovese's works are rooted more in vulnerability and contradiction. Razor-sharp, steel teeth at the end of the arm-shaped work Gastrosopia, 2023 cut into the soft faux leather. The conflict between the materials speaks of an imprisoned pain, with the forms reminiscent of swollen hemorrhoids. A moment that is continued in the work 24/7 Decay: Hommage a Jacques Callot, 2023. Here, the faux leather resists its decorated, but mostly iron cage. In this struggle, two body shapes become recognizable. The lance of the left figure works its way out of the surface and awakens the notion of wanting to penetrate the butt of the figure on the right side of the diptych. If one interprets the staff as an erect penis, the gesture testifies to the last bit of controllability that cannot be achieved in the male body. Genovese's works offer an intimate look into this despair. In an era where the relationship between body and commodity has shifted so far that consumer goods now influence the body, it will take great effort to break these chains. Looking at the artist's hometown, we encounter a long tradition of concealing, changing, or reinventing identities. With masks and costumes, the Venetian Carnival forms a heterotopia, a place of rulebreaking where fluidity in gender identity and the performative aspect of gender roles are taken to the absurd. If we agree that the anatomy of the body fundamentally does not presuppose gender and vice versa, one might fundamentally ask, what can a body say about masculinity at all?

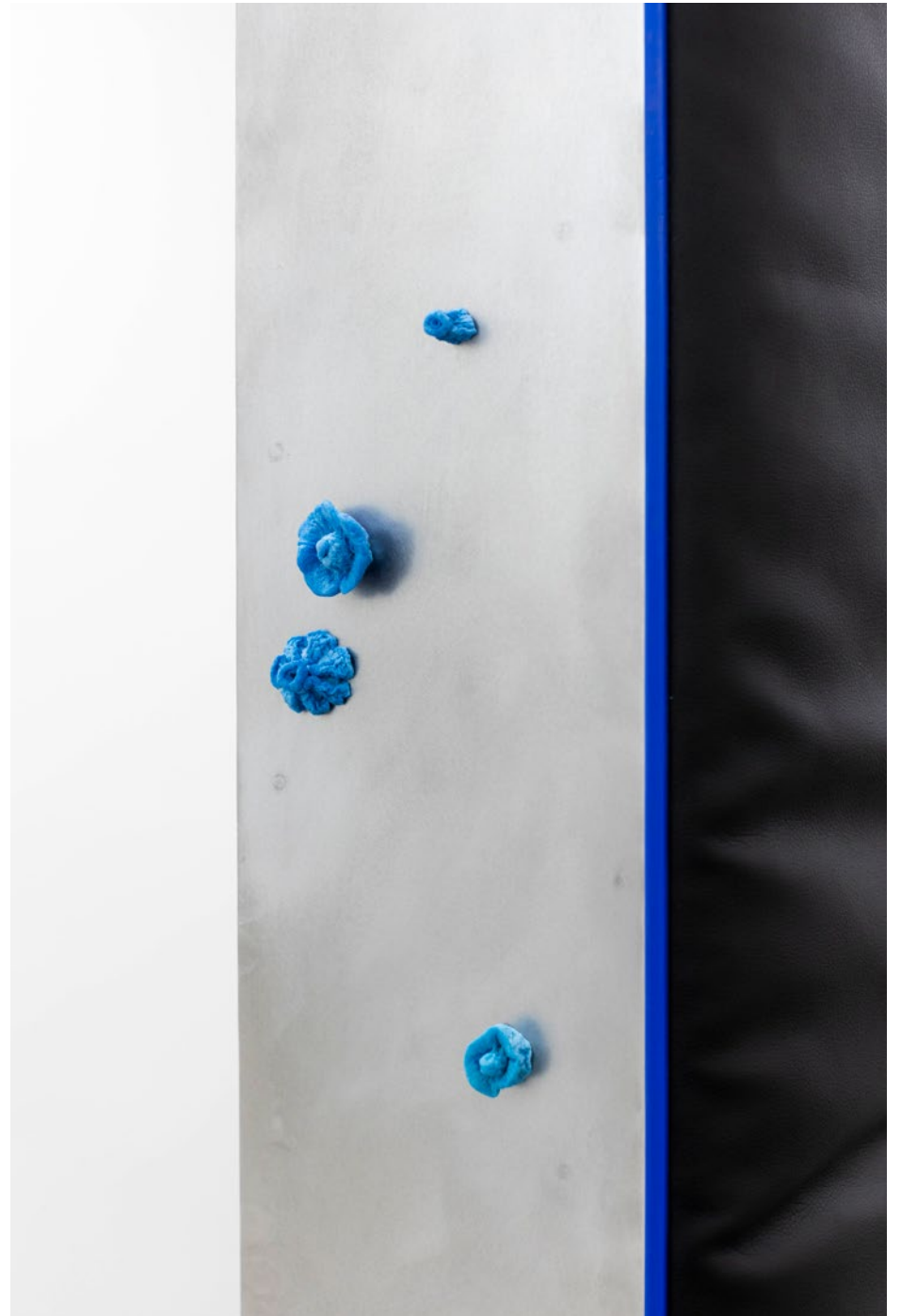
Excerpt from Matteo Kramer's exhibition text

Photo documentation by Kim da Motta of the solo show Snacks at Kali Gallery, Lucerne.













Desireless (2023)

- video installation

3 HD videos

- sculpture installation

Metal, fake leather, polyurethane foam, copper, papier-maché, textile, plastic, LED lights

- performance

110 minutes activation

In a post-capitalist and perhaps post-war Europe, the CEO of an unnamed corporation presents a new product. It is called Warp, a digital service that enables manipulation of the space-time continuum and access to a new Lebensform. It promises to dissolve nostalgia and the ambiguous passions that tinge the future into the fold of an endless present. Part speculative science-fiction and part Commedia dell'arte, Desireless takes the viewer into the depths of this temporal dimension. Through a blend of monologues, choreography, and live music, the performance by Nicola Genovese, curated by Francesco Urbano Ragazzi, exposes the masks, codes, and feelings of a semi-privileged humanity, torn between the remnants of a late-imperial world, the bondage of a technocratic hell, and the fantasy of a biomedical Nirvana. The work itself is conceived as a machine of doubt and indistinction. In creating Desireless, Nicola Genovese has collaborated with artists Dustin Kenel, Patricia Meier, Dauen Park, Maria Sabato, Thembeke Sincuba, the goth rock band They Die, and various artificial intelligence apps. The stage/exhibition space thus coincides with the action field of a partially non-human collective mind that extends beyond the individual identity of the artist.

Francesco Urbano Ragazzi

Photo documentation by Sebastian Lendenman of the show/performance at Toxi Space, Zurich.





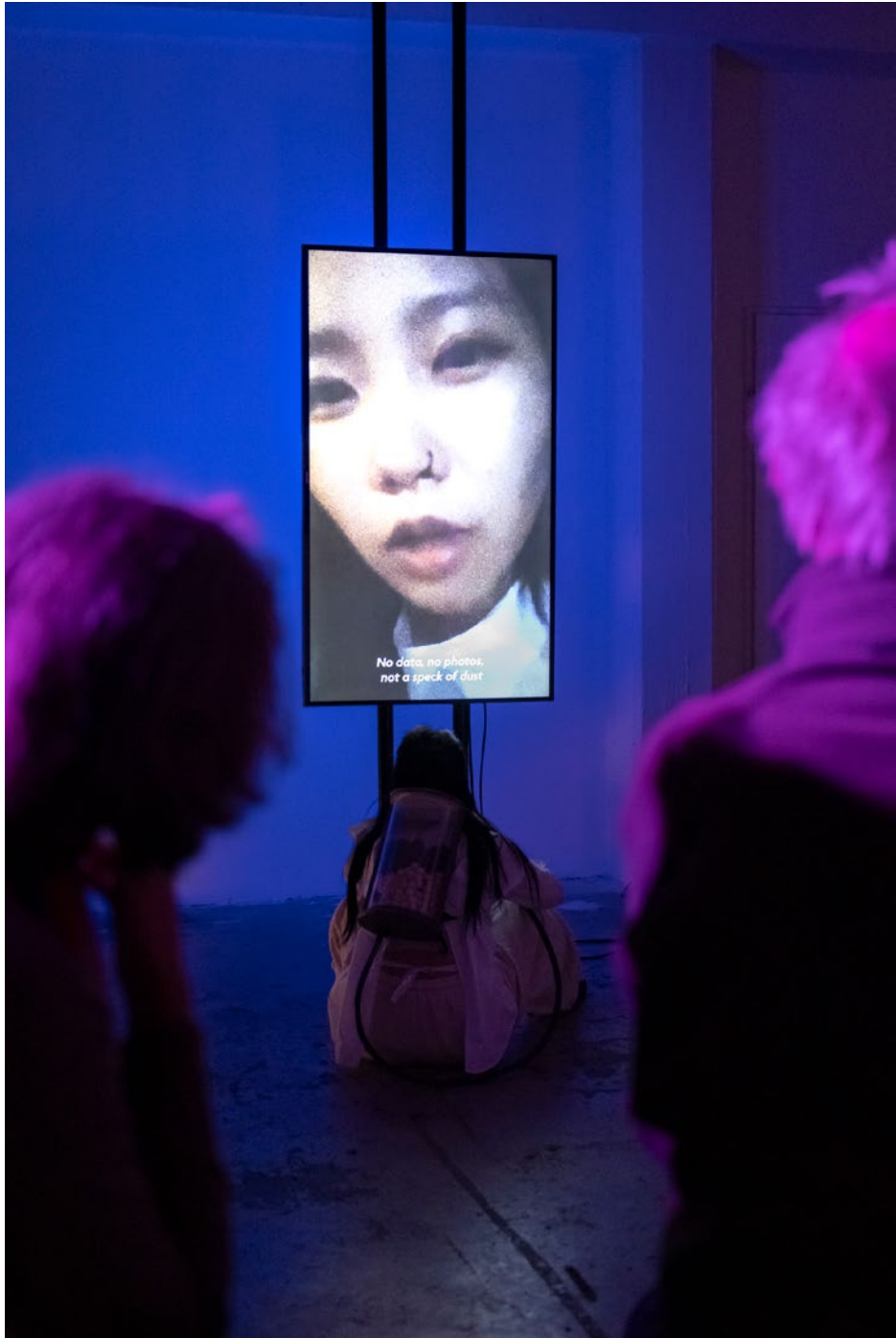


















Cramps (2023)

Metal, resin, fake leather, copper
variable dimensions

Sad Boy (2023)

Quilted textile
240 x 120 cm each

In my prime (2023)

Salt dough, watercolour, metal, bronze, textile, resin
340 x 180 x 35 cm

The day I got stuck in your garden (2023)

HD video loop
5 minutes.

Genovese is garnering a reputation for an artistic vocabulary which presents a set of innovative conceptual and material propositions in response to a key question of our age, which might be only partly ironically formulated as: Who do men think they are? The Italian/Swiss artist's body of work for this academic exhibition comprises sculptural works, 'sculptural activations' and performance, including an animated video piece, to 'engender and embody new perspectives on the male body and performed masculinities'. In his own exhibition statement Genovese makes it clear that his aesthetic approach is designed to invoke 'ambivalence, parody and the aesthetic category of the grotesque'. The concept of the grotesque has come to be synonymous in English with the monstrous or the experience of horror. The original Italian etymology identifies the word to refer to something 'out of the cave', which survives in English as a different word, the 'grotto'. Genovese plays with the notion of the monstrous and that which emerges from the depths in this exhibition, but also performs a series of gently but insistently playful performance and material strategies to recontextualise the idea of the male body in our time. In this way his conception of the grotesqueries of the male body become also carnivalesque, that ancient understanding of the movement between rationality and playful magic, between the physical and the spiritual, or perhaps also the monstrous, realms. Genovese's approach as a whole redefines the 'monstrosity' of the straight white male by reframing, in performative, theatrical and object narratives in video and sculpture, the history of the grotesque. More than this it offers a reframing of the question of who men think they are.

James Sey

Photo documentation by Jurgen Meekel of the solo show Sad Boy at Wits Art Museum, Johannesburg.















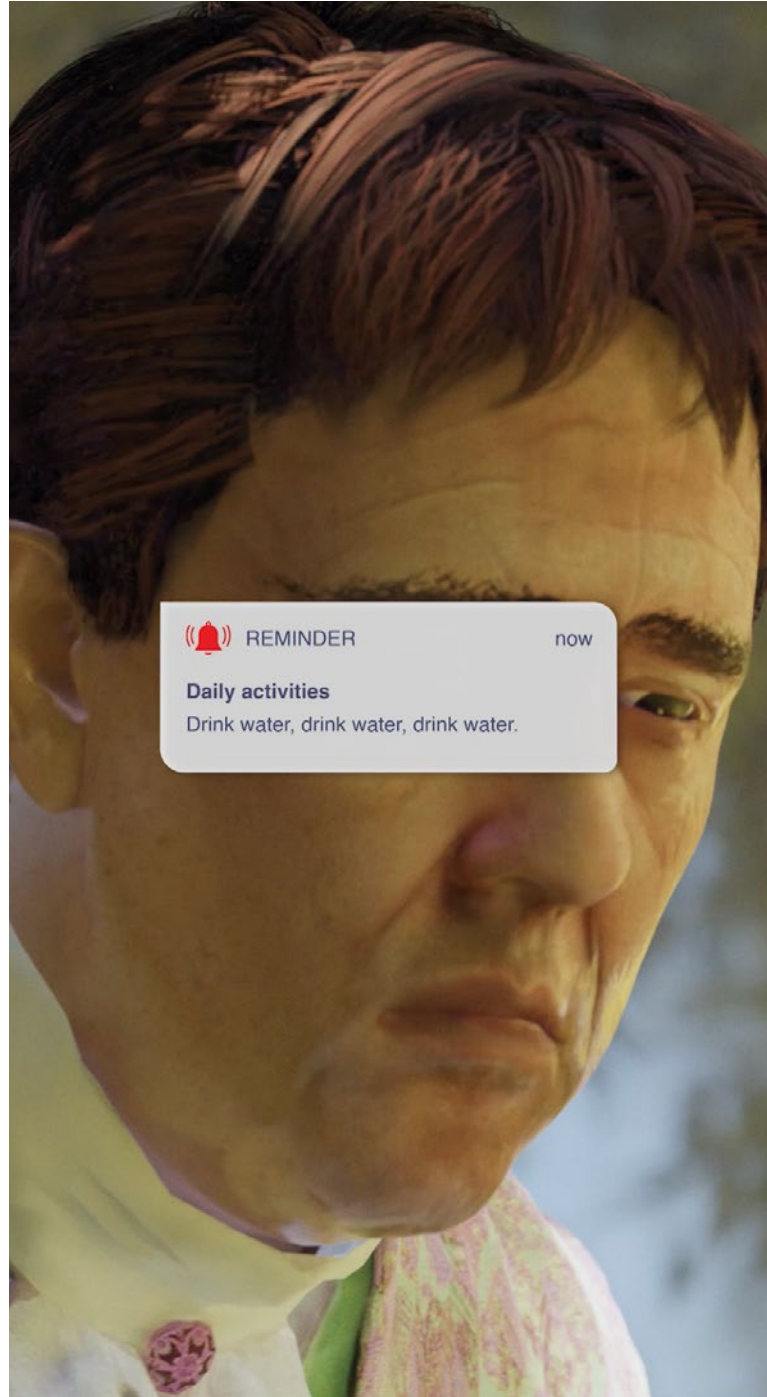










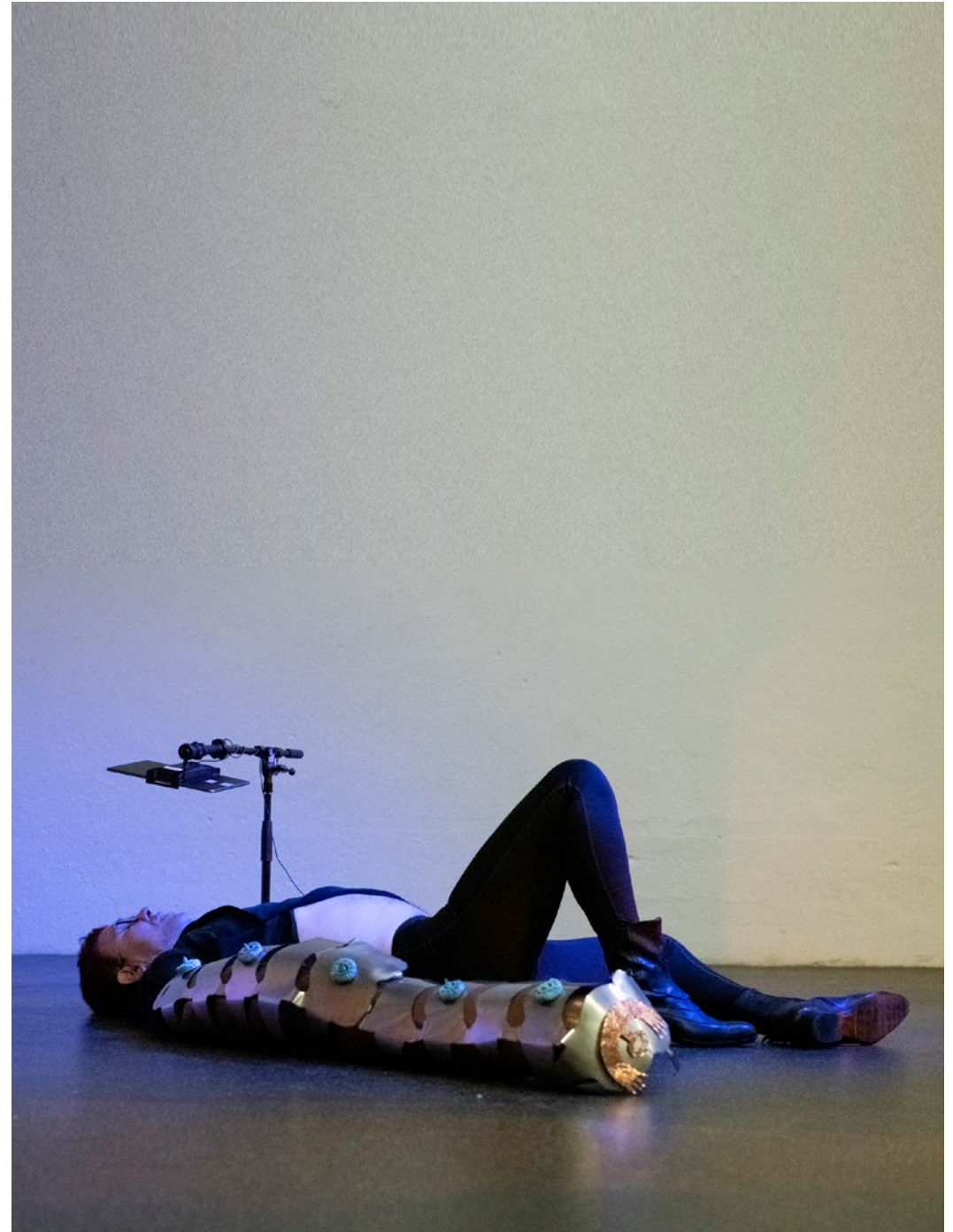


[VIDEO LINK](#)

Backlash*3, the storm of roses (2023)

45 min. performance

In my last performance, I explored the question of social class and its impact on marginalization. Drawing from my personal experience as a low-level technician in a gas company in Padua, Italy, where I worked for ten years, I delved into the complex relationship between economic power and white male privilege. Using a metal extension as a metaphor for power and impotence, I tried to illustrate the nuances of these themes tangibly. Furthermore, I incorporated a steel fig leaf to represent the taboo of male sexuality and to challenge the notion of male superiority by bringing attention to the fragility of the male body. Overall, my performance was a biographical reflection on the complexities of social class and privilege.







1000 Regrets (2023)

Textile, metal, resin

sculpture 200 x 120 x 150 cm

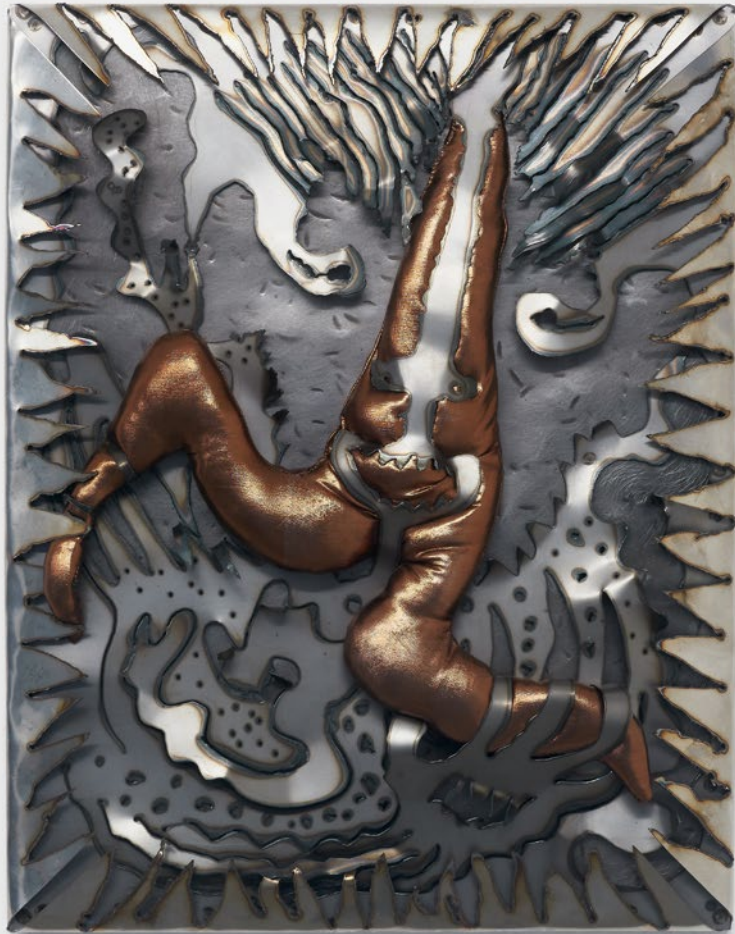
wall piece 40 x 55 x 3 cm

Excerpt of the exhibition text:

I regret not tightening the knot. I regret not wearing a hat made of jellybeans on the day of your birthday. I regret that I didn't write my grocery list in the form of a riddle. I regret not closing my eyes last Friday night. I regret not painting my car in rainbow colours and riding it like a unicorn.

I regret not dressing up as a giant dick and walking through the city streets. I regret not speaking in rhyming couplets for an entire day. I regret not creating a sculpture of my face out of mashed potatoes. I regret not fully exploring the depths of my depravity. I regret that I didn't fail enough. I regret I change my underwear after fucking with you. I regret that I didn't dare to pursue my deepest desires. I regret not acknowledging existence's absurdity and embracing life's fleeting pleasures. I regret that I didn't take that train. I regret not realizing the illusion of order and meaning. I regret that I didn't eat that cheesecake. I regret not suggesting the right thing to the right person. I regret not seeing the beauty in chaos and destruction. I regret not understanding the complexity and ambiguity of human nature. I regret I made no effort to leave you. I regret not taking the death of your favourite bird seriously. I regret not cleaning the toilet after vomiting the whole night. I regret that I didn't unlock the phone to call your ex-boyfriend. I regret not saying a word after you slapped my face. I regret not calling my mother before she got seriously sick. I regret that I didn't hug her enough. I regret I didn't love my body enough. I regret not yelling at the priest when he told me masturbation was evil. I regret not starting any physical fight. I regret that I increased the level of anxiety of many friends. I regret not enjoying my nightmares. I regret not being able to see the world from the perspective of a tree. I regret not discovering the secret of kombucha. I regret not being able to feel the sun's warmth on a cold winter's day. I regret not writing 1000 regrets.









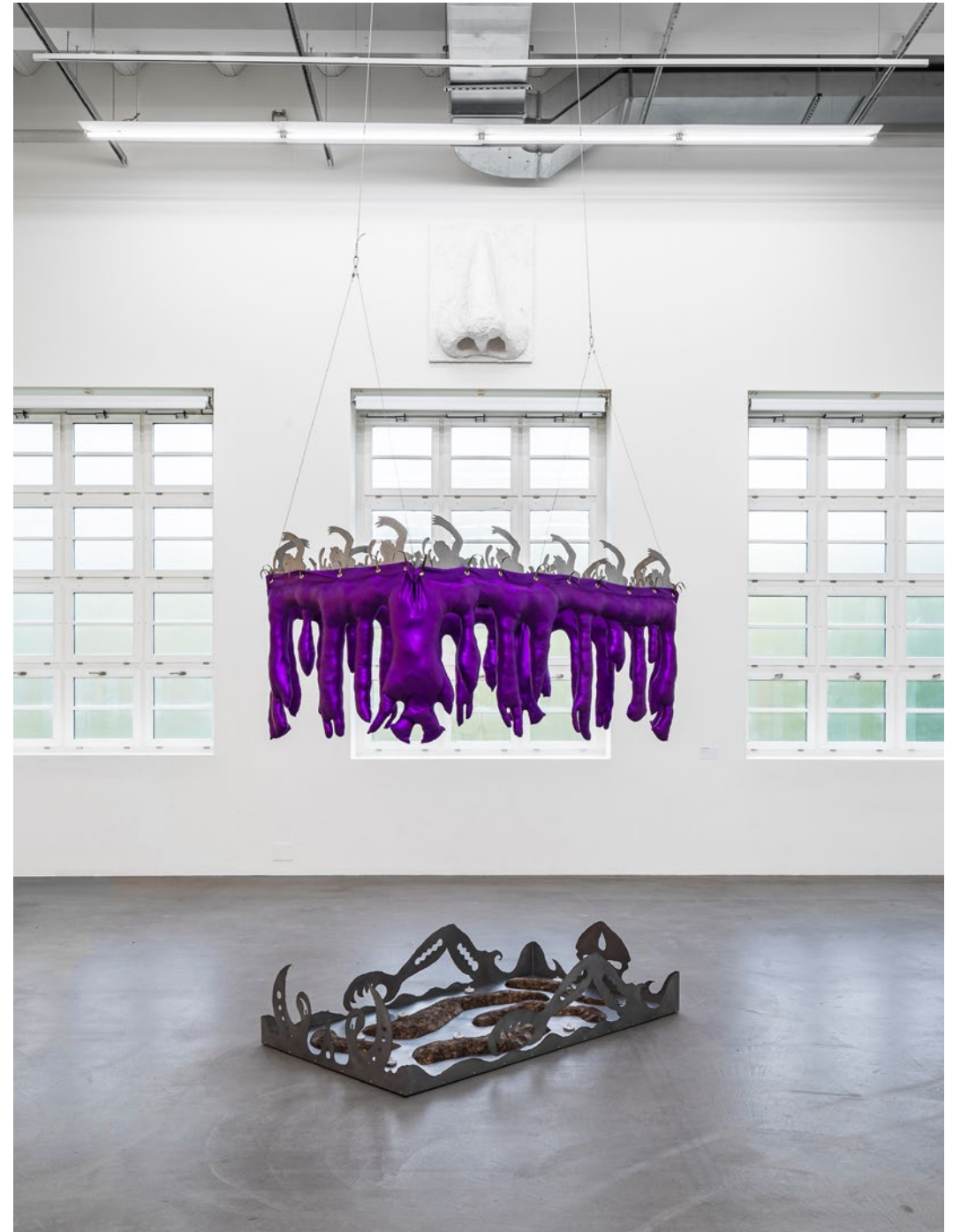
Tinnitus*1 (2022)

Textile, metal, pewter

200 x 260 x 100 cm

Tinnitus was my last sculpture produced in 2022. It was inspired by funerary art.

The part placed on the floor, which resembled a tombstone, is characterised by a frame that takes the shape of a monstrous body. At the same time, the soft elements emerge from the metal, like internal organs. The upper part turns the tombstone into a baldachin. The metal decorative pattern depicts a swimmer in a sort of loop, while the purple textile elements recall body fragments and imaginary tools.





Backlash*2 (2022)

Site-specific quilting tapestry, pewter, metal, flower
each 240 x 140cm

30 minutes performance with Niccolo L'Arco

Backlash *2 has been produced for an Art festival in Cuneo IT after an artist's residence focused on a conversation with local handicraftsmen. I was paired with a tailor who developed his clothes as wearable sculptures. I was intrigued by his fashion approach, and after an inspiring exchange, I produced a quilting that I hung at the entrance of his shop in Cuneo's old town. The motif comes from a leftover of a mansion wall decoration which was located opposite the street. I have used the pre-existing wooden shop frame to frame the quilting that becomes the performance scenery. The performance started with a fictional story I told the audience about the motif that allegedly depicted one of the fantastic creatures that were secretly kept in the mansion's basement. The performance continued with a dressing ritual where the second performer placed a metal armour on my body piece by piece and then flowers. Ultimately, we sing the song *Tutta la vita* by Italian singer Gazzelle. The performance references the Tin man, one of the characters in the movie *Wizard of Oz* (1939)







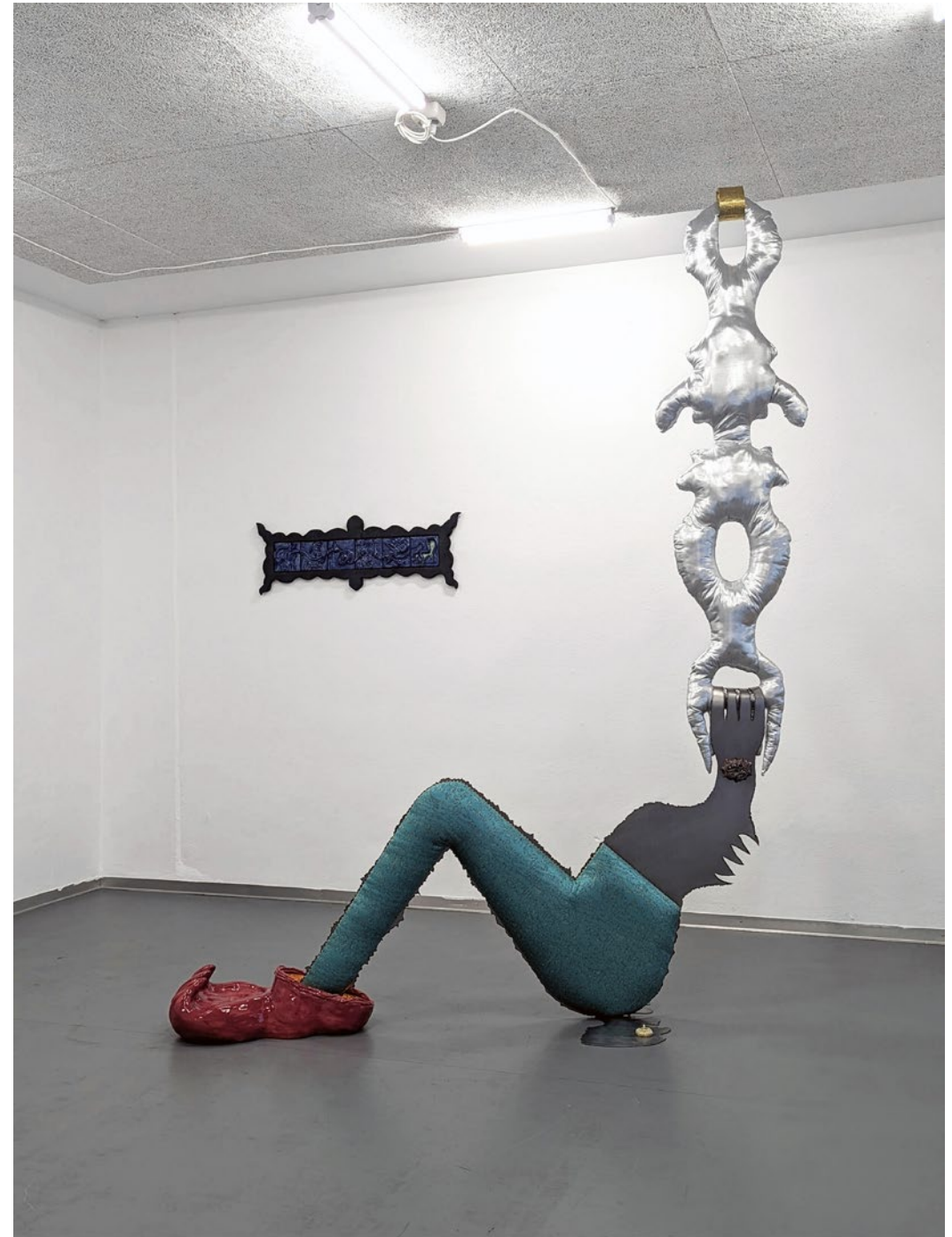
The king, the minstrel and I (2022)

Textile, metal, pewter, foam, resin, ceramic

260 x 150 x 60 cm

The following works are part of my solo show Tinnitus, which took place in 2022 at Material, an off-space in Zurich. Below is an excerpt from the text written by Swiss curator Camille Regli for the occasion.

The underworld and the realm of the dead are close to the terminology of the grotesque and the semantics of the monstrous. In medieval arts and literature, the 'deviants', queer or marginal characters, were often portrayed as fantastical or nightmarish beasts to emphasise their oddity and alienation from normative values. Often forced to live in the outskirts of society – in forests, oceans, caves – monsters were feared for their multiple selves, for their hybrid and transformative bodies, as well as for their antagonistic minds, which defied the hegemony. It's these multiple selves that Nicola Genovese's new series of works brings to the forefront. Researching on the topics of queerness, masculinity and gender roles is not new to Genovese. But rather than focusing on the othering, he explores the notions of juxtaposition and fragments, not only in regard to pieces and bodies but also to narratives. His fragments are set in scena to perform against normativity and linearity, with an attempt to go beyond 'queerness'. Genovese uses craft techniques such as ceramics, textiles, and decorative patterns as opposed to minimal, conceptual, male-dominated art forms. He also challenges – or purposely reinforces – gender stereotypes in blending dichotomies such as soft and hard; textiles and sharp metals; penetrating versus penetrated materials; coupling, rejecting, and encapsulating. Investigating the limits of the biological body in favour of fragmented selves, Genovese dives into the underworld to find an essentially alternative visual language and mythologisation.



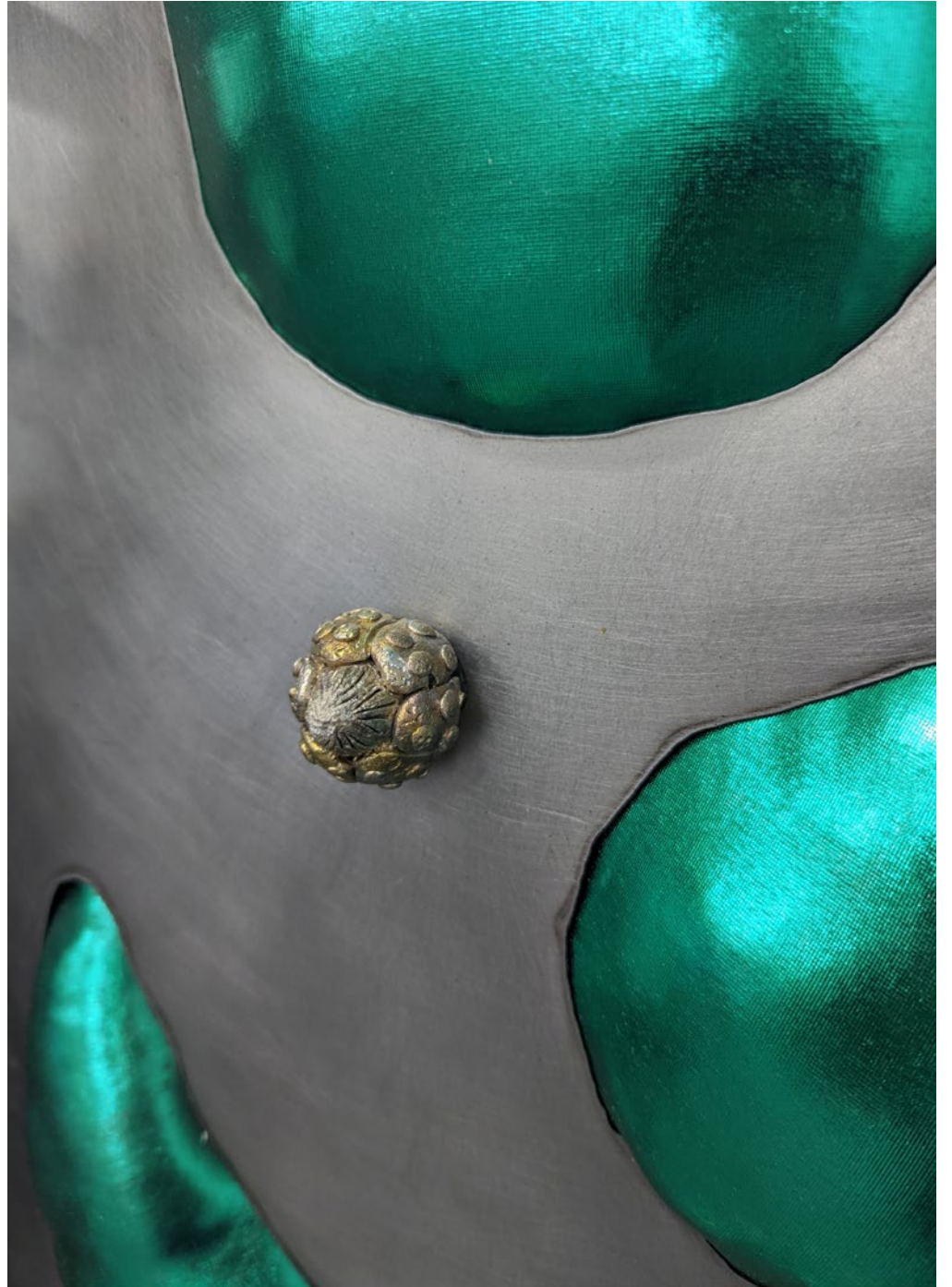


Tinnitus *2 (2022)

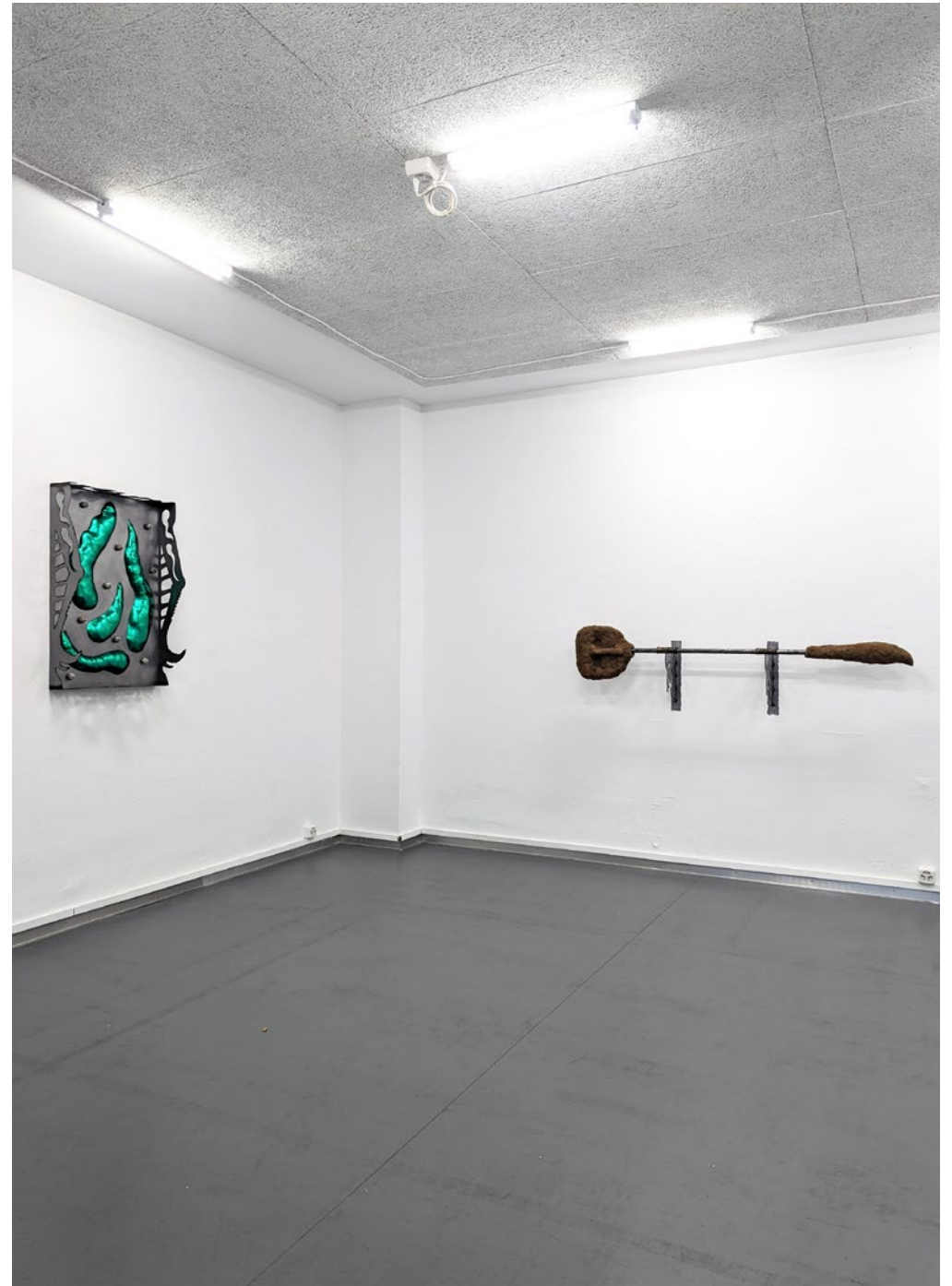
Textile, metal, pewter

100 x 80 x 25 cm





Backlash (2022)
Seeballs, leather, metal
120 x 32 x 37 cm





Maciste (2022)

Textile, metal, pewter

110 x 90 x 30 cm

The wall sculpture „Maciste“ is a representation of my personal confrontation with the western culture’s social construct of the virile man. Maciste is a fictional character from an Italian film, *Cabiria* (1914), known for his extravagant and grotesque appearance, which was later adapted into a series of Hollywood movies in the 1960s. This commercialization of the strong man archetype became a dominant reference for masculinity, defined by muscularity and an unwillingness to show vulnerability. Genovese argues that despite Maciste’s fictional nature, the character’s distorted representation of masculinity has been passed down through generations, perpetuating harmful social norms.

The sculpture depicts Maciste’s arm hanging down, in contrast to the phallic representation of virility often found in pre-Christian artifacts and fascist iconography, where arms are typically pointed towards the sun. Genovese chose to create the arm with purple fabric and floppy material to contrast with the ornate metallic structure. However, the placement of the weak arm on the metallic structure draws attention to it and highlights the importance of acknowledging the multifaceted nature of masculinity.







Drowning me softly (2022)

Textile, metal, pewter

250 x 130 x 60 cm

Drowning me softly (2022)

30 minutes performance

Two dancer, one violinist and one opera singer.

For the performance, I decided to take a new direction in which the sculpture is not physically activated. The performance took place in the public area just outside of the space that faces the lake. I hired two performers, one musician and one opera singer. I directed the piece this time without performing. The two performers, Elia Meier and Dustin Kenel, wear “replicas” of the stuffed object and medallion that are part of the sculptural work inside the exhibition space. The audience experiences the sculpture in the internal space and then a second incarnation of the object in another environment. That environment, an area facing the lake, is indeed a liminal space, both an extension of the Haus am See and a public area.

The idea for the performance developed around the myth of Charon and fits within the frame of the exhibition concept. The two performers are stranded in limbo. They are waiting for the ferryman Charon on the shore of the Acheron. The stuffed object they wear is a costume and a prop, a sort of life jacket that simultaneously limits their movements. The costume becomes, in some scenes, a bodily extension that adds an animalistic element to the performers' bodies.

The sculpture exhibited in the space stays intact and untouchable in its silence. The costumes become copies of the “authentic” hung sculptural element. The performance's ritual aspects are reinforced by an alleged authentic prop being exhibited as an untouchable sculpture.









Pelvis the pelvis (2022)

Ceramic, metal, Gucci's fake leather

120 x 30 x 36 cm

Pelvis the Pelvis is part of this new body of work, where an uncanny sexuality emerges, supported by a more figurative approach. The title recalls the nickname of American singer Elvis Presley (Elvis the Pelvis), because of the singer's famous hip movements performed during his concerts. The process of hybridisation is similar to that apparent in previous sculptures. There is a visible incongruence as a result of the variety of potentially confusing references. Incongruence is one crucial element in the construction of the grotesque. Incongruence manifests through the unexpected juxtaposition of textures, materials and references. I chose a specific glaze that resembles a cheese pattern or a stained skin, to evoke fleshy materiality in decay. The claw shape made of hairy fake leather becomes a sort of Elvis Presley wig that highlights the grotesque/carnavalesque intentions. The "wig" is just propped on the ceramic. This gesture reinforces the idea of the masquerade. The open mouth between the two breasts that pops out from a sort of Texan boot might recall a gate and a medieval gargoyle. The facial expression is deformed and reveals a sort of anger mixed with pain. The female elements of the breast have been masculinized through the rigidity and the shapes that recall two testicles or two truncated legs. The mouth in that constellation becomes a vagina dentata (Latin for toothed vagina). The grotesque that permeates the sculpture triggers an acceptable degree of attraction/repulsion in the guise of playfulness. I had never before used pedestals to place my sculpture, but on this occasion the plinth was necessary to provide sufficient height to give the viewer the perspective I wanted. The modest height of the plinth still obliges the viewer to bend a little bit to observe the mouth cavity. The metal plinth itself is an active sculptural element in which the motifs that recall a burning man and carnivore plants complement the already loaded constellation of images.





I love the skin you are in (2022)

Textile, resin, metal, copper

200 x 55 x 50 cm

I Love the Skin You Are In is a site-specific sculpture that was installed in a forest near Winterthur on the occasion of a group show called Prison Break, organised by Hrtüze Gegi. The metal arms hug the tree while strangling a body-shaped stuffed object. The face that emerges from the textile is one of the Boschian characters that populate my imagery.





Cutting cuddling (2021)

*Textile, glazed ceramic, foam, metal, glass,
wood, leather, copper, concrete*
370 x 220 x 45 cm

This work is part of my sculptural production that doesn't include an activation process. Challenging the biological body through sculpture can be solely an exercise, an apology to hybridization and fluidity, and a failed attempt at transformation. „Cuddling cutting“ is mainly a soft sculpture that interacts with other materials. There is a sort of body transformation process, but simultaneously, the interstitial body is frozen in a poorly arranged mix made of human and no human body parts.

On the one hand, the hybrid sculpture claims its ambivalence, but on the other hand, it needs to return to a stable shape. The shapes and materials I put in conversation exist bodily, even though they try to escape their biological destiny. I developed materiality that underlines the struggle between alterity and identity. Identities are socially constructed but, at the same time, are internalized to the extent that they become flesh. Materiality, indeed, cannot just be analyzed through discourse and cultural tools.

There are queer camp elements in my aesthetic that try to challenge the masculine body and references to medieval and baroque grotesque/carnavalesque traditions. For me, decoration is not synonymous with superficiality but rather a tool to create incongruity.







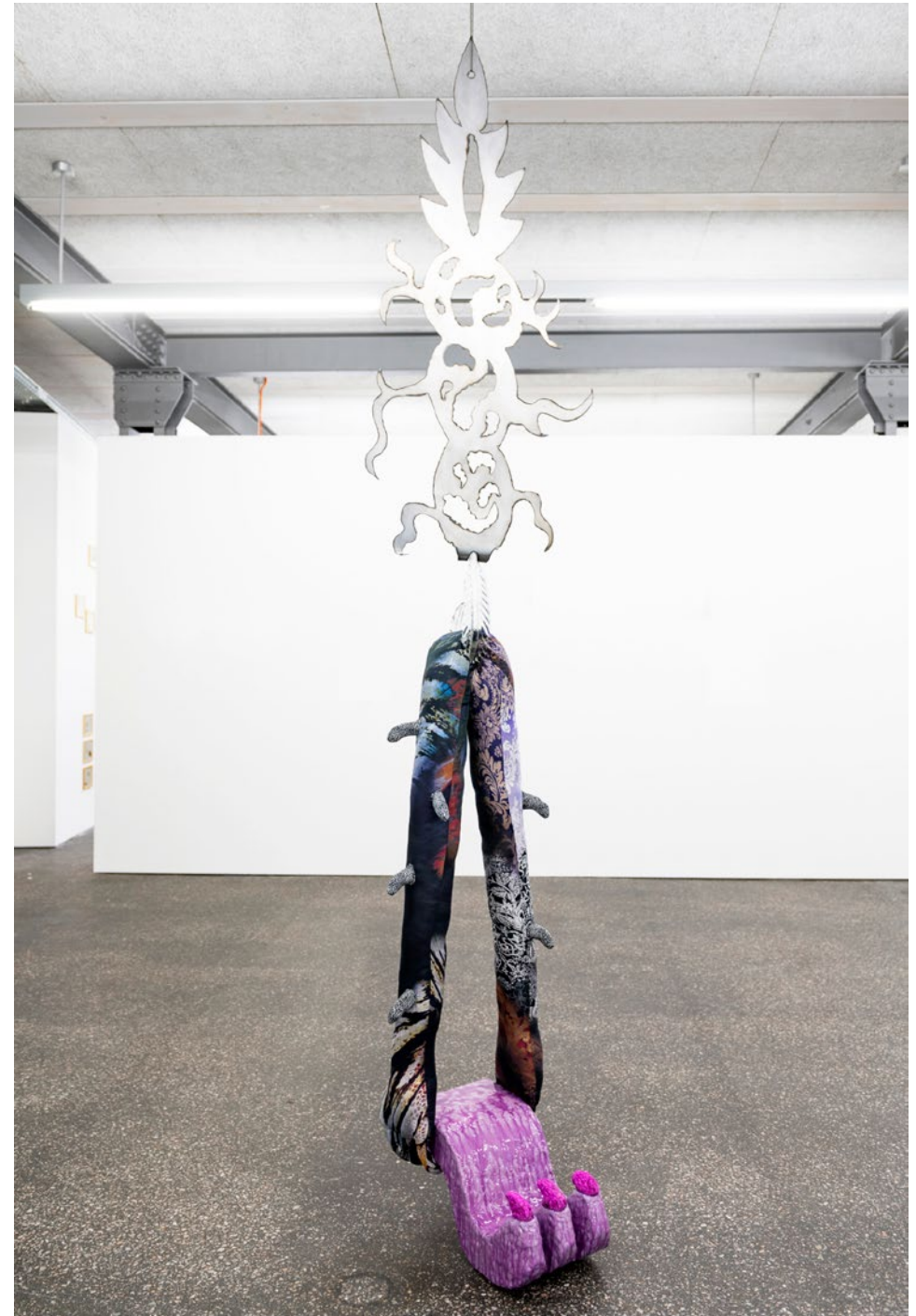
Achilles heel (2021)

Textile, resin, foam, metal, pearl clay

270 x 45 x 50 cm

Here below the text by curator Irene Grillo:

*The work of Nicola Genovese (*1971, ZH) moves between theatre, music and visual art. It includes performances and sculptures that revolve around the theme of masculinity and raise questions regarding corporeality, constructions of identities and male roles in today's society. The characteristic of Genovese's artistic practice is an unusual, almost eccentric use of materials: they are deliberately put together in a counter-intuitive way to emphasise ambivalence and awaken new associations in viewers. In the work Achilles Heel (2021), he focuses on the parodic staging of the stronger sex as a (constructed) threatening-damaging entity. Grotesque and carnivalesque stylistic devices, which were already used in antiquity to question consolidated power structures, generally characterise Genovese's work and gain additional importance here. The artist uses them to develop a post-queer aesthetic in which the strict division between normative and non-normative begins to fade.*





Nicola Genovese (1971 Venice IT)
He lives and works in Zurich.

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EDUCATION

2018/2023
Practice-based PhD - Wits University (Johannesburg)

2014/2017
Master in Fine Arts - Zurich University of the Arts (Zurich)

SOLO SHOWS

2023
Snacks - curator Matteo Kramer - Kali Gallery (Lucerne)
Desireless - curator Francesco Urbano Ragazzi - Toxi Space (Zurich)
Sad Boy - text by James Sey - Wits Art Museum (Johannesburg)
1000 regrets - Lokal-int (Biel CH)

2022
Tinnitus - text by Camille Regli - Material (Zurich)

2018
I was shaking and it was fine - curator Sara Izzo - Kunstraum Aarau (Aarau CH)

GRANTS

2022
Corona Arbeitsstipendien

2019
Werkstipendium Stadt Zürich

2016
Avina Stiftung (Zurich)

GROUP EXHIBITIONS / PERFORMANCES

2023
Raggiro - curator Lorenzo Metzler - Grieder Contemporary (Como IT)
Grosse Regionale - Kunstzeughaus (Rapperswill)
Werk und Atelier Stipendium - Helmaus (Zurich)
Observatory on Deculturalisation - curatorial collective Zaira Oram - Oxyd (Winterthur)

2022
Werkschau - Haus Konstruktiv (Zurich)
Die unterbrochene Reise - curator Lorenzo Metzler - Haus am See (Unterägeri)
Living Room - curator Andrea Lerda (Cuneo IT)

2021
Grosse Regionale - curator Irene Grillo - Alte Fabrik (Rapperswill)
A Novanta Theater Production co-produced by Fabriktheater and Südpol Luzern
Werk und Atelier Stipendium 2021 - Helmaus (Zurich)
Stitches: Scènes, corps, decors - curators Gabrielle Boder, Tadeo Kohan, Camille Regli
Le Commun (Geneve)

2020
S.H.T.F. the trilogy - curator Simon Maurer - Helmhaus (Zurich)
Gasträume/Art in public space - curator Cristoph Doswald - (Zurich)
Performance lecture - Artistic Research Africa Conference - Wits University (Johannesburg)
Artmangeddon with David Knuckney - Espace Libre (Biel)
Performance A Novanta within the exhibition Her take - Photoforum Pasquart (Biel)

2019
Première S.H.T.F. Second Chapter - Cabaret Voltaire (Zurich)
Werk und Atelier Stipendium 2019 - Helmhaus (Zurich)
S.H.T.F. the prologue (le sauvage) performance - Kulturfolger (Zurich)
Withdraw*2 - curator Katja Baumhoff / Josip Zanchi - Meštrović Pavilion (Zagreb)

2018
Withdraw - curator Katja Baumhoff/ Josip Zanchi - Shed Eisenwerk (Frauenfeld)
In the tower of plastic feelings with Nina Emge - Klara Kiss offspace (Zurich)
It's not about power it's about comfort zone - Lecture/Performance - Corner College (Zurich)

2017
ZHDK master degree show - curators Judith Welter and Ian Wooldridge
Carnage - curator Francesca Brusa - Museum Rietberg (Zurich)