

The Dallas Morning News

Human and industrial mix in Nairy Baghramian's artwork at the Nasher Sculpture Center

The exhibition features recent creations by the winner of the 2022 Nasher Prize.

by Scott Cantrell (November 14, 2022)



Artist Nairy Baghramian photographed at her show "Modèle vivant" (Living Model) with Picasso's "Head of a Woman" at the Nasher Sculpture Center on Oct. 14, 2022. (Nan Coulter)

The human body probably wouldn't be your first association in a current exhibition at the Nasher Sculpture Center. Rugged aluminum slabs, supported or suspended by poles thick and thin, look like castoffs from industrial moldings.

There's balance, though: smooth finishes as well as deliberate distortions and suggestions of damage.

Well, what can be more human than dichotomies of structure and strain, mass and lightness, smooth and worn — between what we interpret as beauty and its opposite? The human body, in varied poses and perspectives, is indeed an inspiration for Nairy Baghramian's imposing yet strangely beautiful creations at the Nasher. Winner of the 2022 Nasher Prize, selected by an international jury, the Iranian-born, Berlin-based artist is represented in works created just within the past year.

She has been busy.

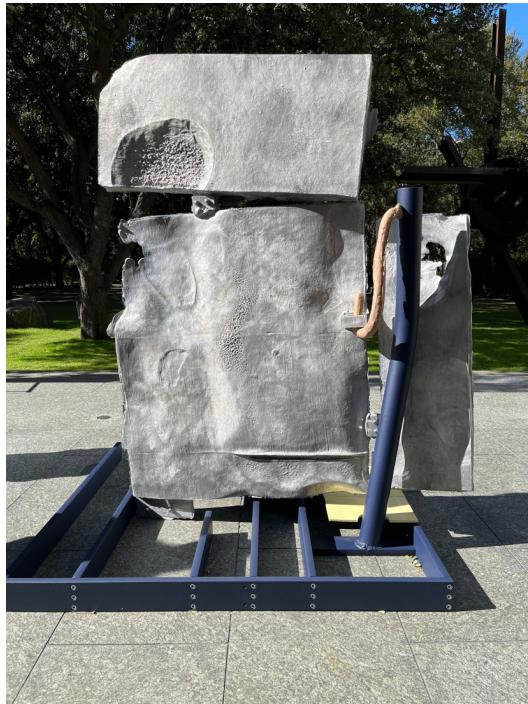
Baghramian's imagination has also been fertilized by works of other artists. In the Nasher show, she and Nasher curator Catherine Craft deftly intersperse a few works from the permanent collection.

There's little in online photos of Baghramian's past work to predict what you'll see here. But she has made a career of challenging herself with new materials and concepts.

Most of the major works here explore mass and varied surfaces of cast aluminum. Contrary to our usual expectations of the metal, these slabs are irregular in shape and density, as if the molten metal has been thrown at random to cool. What appear to be worn recesses, as if gnawed out by giant metal-eating organisms, are created by impressed molds of burnt Styrofoam.

So what, in an exhibition titled *Modèle vivant* (Living Model), is the allusion to the human body? (French titles are used throughout.)

On the Nasher's rear terrace, walk around *Se levant (jaune paille)* — Standing (straw yellow). You can *just* imagine those aluminum panels as an abstracted head and body, complete with suggestion of hair texture, supported by that blue steel spinal column and a single rib in yellow bronze.



Nairy Baghramian's "Se levant (jaune paille) / Standing (straw yellow)" in the show "Modèle vivant" at the Nasher Sculpture Center. (Scott Cantrell)

Yes, it's a stretch, but that's OK: It's abstraction, at a fair remove. *S'asseyant* (Sitting) has the geometry of a figure sitting on the floor, back against the wall, legs outstretched. *S'appuyant* (Leaning) is a single slab leaning against a wall, with another bronze squiggle supporting behind.

Another group of works, each titled *S'accrochant* (Dangling), can be read as giant, flat faces. Aluminum panels in varied and apparently arbitrary shapes are framed in finely crafted steel (sometimes with elegantly inset screw heads). You can see yourself reflected in the polished surfaces.

Each panel includes a cutout, different on each side, with a photo of animal fur with feeding flies. Again, there's that dialogue of organic and mechanical, the organized and the chaotic.



Nairy Baghramian's "S'accrochant (crépuscule) / Dangling (dusk)" with Pablo Picasso's "Head of a Woman," in the show "Modèle vivant" at the Nasher Sculpture Center.(Scott Cantrell)

These works are hung from slender stainless steel rods attached to the steel framework of the Nasher's glass ceiling. Rugged chunks of cast aluminum serve as ballast. The facial connection is reinforced in a telling dialogue with Picasso's *Head of a Woman*, fragmented on fins of painted steel.

Baghramian's bodily postures are prefigured, in a sense, by two rugged Matisse nudes; her rough textures in Medardo Rosso's *The Concierge (La Portinaia)*, in yellowish wax over plaster. Isamu Noguchi's *Gregory (Effigy)* assembles a smooth surfaced counterpoint.

Don't miss a set of Baghramian miniatures behind the life-cast George Segal *Woman with Shopping Bag* in the gallery to the left of the Nasher's entrance (where the gift shop used to be). Collectively titled *S'éloignant (Withdrawing)*, these half-boxed clumps of cast lead and wax can be read as afterthoughts — although they're strangely beautiful — or bodies seen at a departing distance. I leave it to you to make the Segal connection.

At least to me, the absence of labels in the exhibition is frustrating. But that was Baghramian's choice, so the works can be seen and pondered without intermediation. You can ask for a checklist at the front desk.



Nairy Baghramian, "S'éloignant (blanc cassé) / Withdrawing (broken white)," 2022, Cast lead, wax, walnut wood at Nairy Baghramian Modèle vivant (Living Model) at the Nasher Sculpture Center through January 8, 2023.(Nan Coulter)

Details

"Nairy Baghramian: Modèle vivant" runs through Jan. 8 at the Nasher Sculpture Center, 2001 Flora St., Dallas. Wednesday through Sunday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. \$10, \$8 for DART riders, \$7 for seniors, \$7 for educators, \$5 for students. Free for children under 12, military and first responders. 214-242-5100, nashersculpturecenter.org.