

MARIAN GOODMAN GALLERY

ANNETTE MESSEGER AVEC ET SANS RAISONS

19 APRIL – 27 MAY 2017
OPENING RECEPTION:
TUESDAY 18 APRIL, 2017, 6–8PM

Marian Goodman Gallery is pleased to present Annette Messager's first solo exhibition at Marian Goodman Gallery in London. This is Messager's first exhibition in London since her 2009 Hayward Gallery exhibition, *The Messengers*.

Avec et sans raisons, brings together works that display a diversity of forms: small assemblages of objects, acrylic washes, textile works in the form of installations, and wallpaper. As is common in Messager's practice, she cultivates an environment of lexical literalness, reversal and ambiguity.

Messager's chosen title for this exhibition encapsulates her fondness for word-play and double entendre. On one level, *Avec et sans raisons* may be understood as "having reason, or cause, for doing something, or not"; but one could go further and take it to mean "being deprived, or in possession of, the faculty of reason." Messager offers an experience full of contrasts. While some works have a clear underlying rationality, the absurd character of others soon comes to undermine this rationality. The collection as a whole reveals an indomitable freedom of spirit.

Alluding to Pascal who, in *Les Pensées* from 1670, drew a distinction between the "geometric mind" which analyzes reality through the lens of reason, and the "intuitive mind," which, above all, "sees the matter at once, at a glance, and not by a process of reasoning," Messager invites viewers to put their "geometric mind" to the test and make use of their "intuitive mind" in order to better succumb to the lightness of what seems to have no *raison d'être*. There thus are three works that will take the viewer by surprise: *Gants croix*, *Gants triangle*, and *Gants croix oblique*, 2017. The minimalism of these three pieces, made of simple lengths of taut string with end-points in the form of gloves studded with colored pencils, stands out. Their mathematical rectitude, however, gives way to an unruly tangle of references, presenting us with utmost whimsy—as in *En trottinette* (*On my Scooter*), 2017, *3 Escargots-seins* (*3 Snails-breast*), 2017, *Le Bras chaussure* (*The Arm Shoe*), 2015, or *En équilibre* (*In Balance*), 2015. These sculptures intensify unusual associations between objects, including breasts shaped like snail shells, an infant's arm emerging from a child's shoe, a carbonized Barbie doll precariously balanced with both legs in the air. The resulting bizarre forms, as much uncanny as burlesque, defy any rational reading.



ANNETTE MESSEGER
Uterus doigt d'honneur, 2017
Fabric, paper maché, paint, rope
31 7/16 x 31 7/16 x 5 1/16 in. (80 x 80 x 13 cm)

In the work *Mémoire Robots*, 2015, where the words "memory" written with metal wire covered with a thick black net and "robots" written with soft coloured letters, Messager asks another metaphysical question that already preoccupied 17th and 18th century philosophers: does human nature contain a machine component? This question holds even greater relevance today, since one can now identify man in machines due to the development of artificial intelligence. Indeed, robots have come to replace man in a number of professional fields, they are a part of our daily lives and have in some ways become extensions of ourselves, safeguarding our memories and managing our social lives.

It is said that reason gives humans the faculty of judgment, the ability to distinguish truth from falsehood. Yet Annette Messager, also known for adopting multiple identities, continuously blurs the boundaries between fiction and reality. By disseminating the motif of the mask, namely in the installation *Les 7 balais* (*The 7 Brooms*), 2011, and the assemblages *La Chaussure à double visage* (*The Two-faced Shoe*), 2016, the artist cultivates subterfuge.

Some works, in turn, alter our perception of reality by presenting spectacular variations in scale. The monumental installation *Daily*, 2016, composed of everyday objects hung from the ceiling, as if sewn to giants, generates a Lilliputian experience. Walking among enormous trinkets, the visitor experiences a strange inversion of proportions: the objects we routinely handle and which fit in the palm of the hand, are now out of reach. We feel as if we were in the shoes of Alice in Wonderland who had just swallowed a shrinking potion.

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While reason is one path in our quest for truth, Messenger never forgets that it is also the normative one. In response, the installation *Les Interdictions*, 2014, suggests a mutinous relationship with the norm, as well as a critique of our deceptively emancipated times. Messenger collected, and then re-drew, sixty-eight pictograms from around the world designating various interdictions. The sixty-ninth frame takes up the saying "It's forbidden to forbid" coined by the actor Jean Yanne during the strikes of May 1968, and which then became the emblematic slogan for that moment in French history.

The desire for freedom and emancipation manifests itself with power and jubilation in Messenger's latest drawings. Painted using acrylic wash, some represent Femen in action, insolently baring their chests which serve as the canvas for such incisive catchphrases as *I Am My Own Prophet*, 2017, or *Fuck Your Morals*, 2016. Some drawings depict efflorescent or vengeful uteruses, as in *To My Desire*, 2017, where a brash uterus twists one of its tubes to give the finger. Other drawings represent isolated breasts, either in pairs or in a multitude, as in *La Mer de Seins*, 2016. As always in Messenger's work, humor is just below the surface, and the uteruses seem swept by a wave of frivolity as they pirouette as innocently as little colored flowers the artist used as a motif in her wallpaper. Exhibited here for the first time, is the new work *Tututérus*, 2017, which perhaps best embodies this playful spirit. It is a sculpture in the shape of a pink uterus attached to a puffy black leotard, suspended in mid-air and dancing in the wind generated by electric fans placed on the ground.

Finally, the spindly rag dolls Annette Messenger installed above *Interdictions*, or the small wooden puppet tangled in his own viscera which the artist entitled *Pinocchio dans ses entrailles (Pinocchio in his Entrails)*, 2008, or again the word *Icone* which she enveloped in black netting and which seems to be tumbling down like an overturned symbol, once again bring to mind Pascal pointing out the misery of the human condition and mocking human vanity. While Annette Messenger may observe others with an irony which is somewhat dark, she never forgets that they are also full of desires and dreams. Thus the word *Désir* is spelled out on the wall, large as life, and draped in black netting.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Annette Messenger was born in Berk-sur-Mer in 1943. She lives and works in Malakoff, outside of Paris. Messenger is the winner of the 2016 *Praemium Imperiale* award for sculpture in recognition of her lifetime achievement in art and is also recipient of the Golden Lion for Best National Participation at the 51st Venice Biennale in 2005. Her works are found in the permanent collections of such major museums as the MoMA and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York; the Musée national d'art moderne—Centre Pompidou and the Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris; the Tate Modern in London; LACMA in Los Angeles; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; K21 in Düsseldorf; and The National Gallery in Canberra.

Her work is currently on view at the Villa Medici and was recently presented at the Librairie Marian Goodman in Paris. Messenger's art was also recently exhibited at the Musée des Beaux-Arts and at the Cité de la Dentelle et de la Mode in Calais. In 2014, she had two major exhibitions at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) in Sydney and at K12 in Düsseldorf. In 2011, the artist's work was also showcased at the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Monterrey (MARCO) in Mexico. Messenger has had solo exhibitions at the Hayward Gallery in London, 2009; the Espoo Museum of Modern Art (EMMA) in Espoo, Finland; 2007-2008; the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Seoul, 2008; and at the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo, 2008. In 2007, the Centre Pompidou organized a large retrospective on the artist's work. A new solo exhibition is scheduled in 2018 at the IVAM in Valencia (Spain).

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