

MARIAN GOODMAN GALLERY

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## *Liminal Life: Annette Messenger at Marian Goodman Paris*

*The Artist Speaks with Alisa Carroll about Phantoms, the Refugee Crisis,  
and Her Upcoming Exhibition at Marian Goodman Paris.*

By Alisa Carroll (May 22, 2019)



Annette Messenger. Portrait by Vincent Lemaire.  
Courtesy Annette Messenger, Marian Goodman Gallery, New York, Paris, London.

There is a French phrase, *passe-muraille*, meaning to pass through the walls. Emerging in projections and shadows, Annette Messenger's new solo exhibition at Marian Goodman Paris raises the specter of life in the in-between. An evolution of her ever-innovative material language and a haunting exploration of her themes of spiritual and bodily dislocation, the works in the exhibition range from a carbonized installation of life suspended to sleeping bags and coats empty but for the hands gesturing from them. The show also includes Messenger's first video work: silent footage of a woman projected onto the walls, it's both human and supernatural. Messenger's own name connotes a liminal state, messenger quite literally means messenger, and in this body of work she communicates between worlds.



Annette Messenger (all works depicted), *Sleeping Heart*, 2017. Duvet, Two Elements,  
Various Materials, Acrylic Paint, String 49 1/4 X 33 1/2 X 16 1/2 In. (125 X 85 X 42 Cm). No. 22413.

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In the main gallery, the show opens with *Sleeping Songs*, thirteen works constructed of sleeping bags, duvets and winter coats. Throughout her career, Messenger has transformed the materials of her everyday environment, and here she adapts into human forms household elements that evoke both shelter and displacement. From *Birth*, in which one down jacket emerges from another, to *Seule (Lonely)*, an empty coat with hands clasped, a selection of works can be seen to chronicle the life cycle from youth to old age.

The latter, however, situated at the intersection of wall and floor, could also speak to borders and isolation, and sleeping bags, of course, can't help but wrenchingly call to mind the refugee and migrant crisis. Messenger previously addressed the issue in *Dessus Dessous (Below)*, her 2015-2016 exhibition at the Museum of Fine Arts in Calais, France. Over roughly that same period, the vicinity of Calais was home to the *Jungle*, a refugee and migrant camp whose deplorable living conditions drew international attention. "I saw many people in the station, in the street, waiting, in the night, as they tried to go through," she says. On view is a work from that show, *3 Pantins PQ (3 Puppets PQ) (2015)*, three fabric figures with toilet paper extending from their bodies, beings reduced to bare necessities.



*Innocents-Help*, 2017. Nets, Metal Wire, Fabric, Resin, Acrylic Paint, Cords Approx. 149 5/8 X 127 15/16 In. (380 X 325 Cm). No. 20140.

Speaking again to children lost, *Innocents, help (2017)* is an homage to *Massacre of the Innocents*, Poussin's depiction of the New Testament story of Herod. Crafted of black and red netting, fabric, wire and resin—materials of viscosity and capture—faces, hands, and hearts are hung up within it. Nets are an ongoing medium for Messenger; in the past she has woven words into these webs—seductive words, like *Desir*, *Chance*, and *Secret*—but this new declaration is a distress call.



*Jumping*, 2018. Down Jacket, String. 44 7/8 X 31 1/2 X 6 3/4 In. (114 X 80 X 17 Cm) No. 22408.

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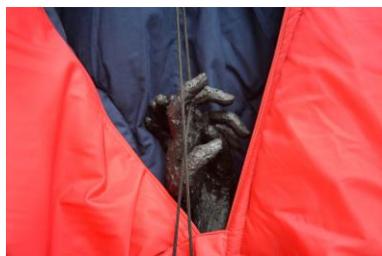
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In the lower gallery, the 17th-century vaulted stone space houses another troubled civilization, *Petite Babylone* (2019), a new installation and literal underworld in which hundreds of black-wrapped body parts, abstract shapes and stuffed animals are gathered. The work continues the exploration Messenger began with *Continents Noirs / Black Continents* (2010-2012), in which she suspended carbonized cityscapes from the ceiling, and *La chambre des légends* (2019), an installation of blackened geometric objects shown in Messenger's exhibition at the Institut Giacometti earlier this year. *Petite Babylone*, the phrase poignantly holding a small being within its words, references the 2011 tsunami in Fukushima, Japan, when, as Messenger notes, dogs and other animals were unable to escape the subsequent nuclear catastrophe, and remained, wandering the island. In the dusky room, a single light at the center of this host of animals casts shadows that move along the walls, ghosts that are both menacing and darkly comical, a recurring duality in Messenger's work.



*Perdu Dans Les Limbes (Ventre) / (Lost In Limbos (Belly))*, 2019 Video Installation, Color, Silent, Looped. 53 Sec. No. 22646.

Babylon is, of course, a mythic city of language and scattering, but one of the etymologies of its name is a Sumerian term meaning "Gate of God," connoting a womb as well as a physical place. In another subterranean space, Messenger's first-ever video work, a two-channel installation, creates this sense of a chamber: The room has been painted pitch-black, and in the void materializes the silent image of a woman, pregnant. Her body is bifurcated—one wall depicts her belly and breasts; another, her hands and mane of hair. Messenger was originally moved to create the footage after viewing an exhibition of Japanese art including images of women who had returned as ghosts to haunt their husbands; titled *Perdu dans les limbes* (Lost in limbos), this divided projection of a woman is, too, an apparition, *passe-muraille*.



*Sleeping Deep Red (Detail)*, 2017-2018. Duvet, Thirteen Elements, Various Materials, Black Acrylic Paint, String  
66 7/8 X 60 1/4 X 7 7/8 In. (170 X 153 X 20 Cm). No. 20934

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The phantoms of this exhibition are not just figments of the artist's imagination. "I think the older I am, I have a lot of phantoms around me," says Messenger, "because I am older and I have

lost a lot of people— friends, family. They are with me." A powerful exploration of life on both sides of the veil, Messenger's exhibition can perhaps also be seen, as the tragedy of the refugee and migrant crisis continues to unfold, as a reminder to allow people to pass through the walls.

*Annette Messenger is on view at Marian Goodman Paris May 24 through July 19. A series of new drawings by the artist is on view at the gallery's book store, Librairie Marian Goodman.*

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