

David Geers, "Sascha Braunig", Frieze.com, March 2017

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Sascha Braunig **Foxy Production, New York, USA** by David Geers

If contemporary art and finance have something in common, it is that both ultimately support discourses of faith in search of a foundation – a solid ground on which to leverage risk. This may explain the body's return and outsized presence in recent art. We are embodied beings, after all, and in these uncertain times, the body is at least a constant: an art-historical terra firma. But such narratives are also misleading, since the body is also the result of social processes, their corporeal vehicle and excrescence. In Sascha Braunig's recent show, 'Free Peel', the body is presented as this ejecta: filtered, extruded, woven out of fields and networks. In Braunig's surreal theatre, the body never assumes positive presence; instead, it remains a negative form, a mesh peeling off or extending from matrices, grids or curvilinear architecture.



Sascha Braunig, 2017, installation view of 'Free Peel' at Foxy Production, New York.
Courtesy of Foxy Production, New York

As in the artist's previous work, this body disappears, melds with the background or is literally sifted through it – an allegory of all the social mechanisms that over-determine their impact on our corpus. In *Writhes* (2017), Braunig's flattened, wireframe heroine is either trapped or expelled by two undulating rollers. In *Backbone* (2016), she takes the form of a red-hot neon sign: equal parts heating coil and burlesque advertisement. If Braunig's heroine is uncanny – cut out and soldered together yet strangely animate – the artist's aesthetic is temporally unsettling, too, conjuring up retro 1980s sci-fi illustration, 3D digital modelling and surrealist landscapes. The sunset-hued *Free Peel 2* (2016), for instance, recalls the luminous, blended surfaces of Salvador Dalí's paintings. Here, Braunig's protagonist peels off as if from a roller-coaster track, forming her own path in turn. Meanwhile, in *Twist 2* (2016), the figure melds with a grid, reminding us that our individual identities are woven from our experiences of society at large – stamped or hollowed-out like Braunig's characters and, for the most part, rendered anonymous.

For some, Braunig's paintings may evoke digital associations: it is tempting to compare them to Avery Singer's SketchUp-modelled narratives. Yet, unlike many young figurative artists inspired by virtual spaces, Braunig's practice is decidedly analogue; she makes sculptural models of her set-ups and then paints them from observation. It is a surprisingly traditional approach for a practice so suggestive of data-driven transformation, but one that lends these works their unusual placelessness as well as their manifest vulnerability.



Sascha Brauning, *Cuirasse*, 2016, Cast Bronze with brick red patina, 33x28x10 cm.
Courtesy of Foxy Production, New York

Indeed, the modest scale and delicate surfaces of these paintings demand close viewing, as does this show, which generously exposes Braunig's process, displaying preliminary oil studies as well as the bronze wall sculpture *Cuirasse* (2016). But, while these works serve as compelling windows into Braunig's artistic breadth, I found myself mesmerized by *Free Peel* (2016), perhaps the most compositionally ambiguous painting in the exhibition. Rendered in sumptuous orange and grey, and depicting a figure peeling off a puckered surface, the work dazzles with ricocheting light and interlocking forms while flattening representational space.

In his painting, Braunig's vision is as visually exuberant as it is dystopian, and it is hard not to see this figure, like her others, as a stand-in for the artist herself. As a case in point, *Unseen Forces* (2017) depicts Braunig's wire-wrought avatar dangling with arms outstretched and thrust out as an effigy through an undulating, bright-orange curtain. The body appears limp, flayed, hung out to dry: an unwilling actor on a stage. What are these forces – capital, politics, social and cultural privilege? One thing is certain: the stage is one that we collectively construct and one that always exceeds our ambitions.