

About the Artist by Caroline Furr

Laura Frazure is a figurative sculptor, a classicist in practice and spirit. She doesn't make static figures. All of her work appears in a state of movement, usually purposeful movement where the figures expand past their beautiful selves out into the world of ideas, culture and politics. Formed by hand, they are impeccable; perfection recognized by the Central Academy of Fine Art in Beijing, where she led an "International Anatomy Intensive" for professors from the eight top art schools in China. Before COVID, she was a visiting scholar for several years in Beijing and Xi'an. Frazure also taught anatomy at the New York Academy of Art and is now Assistant Professor and Coordinator of Sculpture within the Department of Fine Arts at The University of the Arts in Philadelphia.

She has expanded into theater, set design, and film. Notably the feature film *Dogma*. Her sculpture has been exhibited in Shanghai, Beijing, New York, and throughout the Mid-Atlantic region. She has twice been a Discipline Award winner for the PEW Fellowship in the Arts and was the recipient of the Robert Engman Award for sculpture from the University of Pennsylvania. She's been featured in *Sculpture Review Magazine*, and most recently has been included in Reinhard Fuch's book, *Women in Art, Volume 1*. 520, "Masterpieces of Visual Art, The Great Female Artists: From the Middle Ages to the Modern Era".

Laura Frazure is an accomplished artist. She makes work of immense purity in her singular practice and yes, there is the occasional animal too.

BODILY RHETORIC

"Bodily rhetoric" is defined as denaturalized figural attitudes or poses, invented to express ideas intrinsic to a particular medium. In sculpture, the Greek Kouros figures serve as notable examples of a derived pose specific to the medium. My interest in these conventions was sparked by the study of anatomy, which heightened my awareness of bodily gesture and expression, their communicative potential and cultural meanings. An ongoing series references the idiosyncratic, media generated poses of contemporary fashion photography, with the presentation of the body, as in the Kouros figures, lying outside the realm of normal posture and colloquial gesture. A more recent series, "Poses of Resistance" was inspired by the 2020 social justice protests in Philadelphia, with specific poses pulled from media generated images. Referencing a literary term, I think of this set of figures as *historical fiction*. In each sculpture the pose, ethnicity and hair style are taken directly from the images, with the rest of the figure derived through invention. In this series, the naturalistic, situational poses become contemporary metaphors for heroic resistance. Presenting the women nude, pulls them away from the specifics of time and place and transports them into the realm of the tradition of figurative sculpture. An upcoming series, "Poses of Labor", in part informed by my union work with the American Federation of Teachers, will follow a similar approach, with all poses derived from pre-curated media derived imagery, including film stills and 19th century European photography of women farm laborers.

Laura Frazure 2022

Seduction, Desire, and Rage

What is beautiful is loved and what is not is unloved.

Theognis mid-500s BCE

Sculpture binds together material, form, and space. Traditionally the materials of sculpture were clay, marble, and bronze, each possessing its own inherent psychology, presence, and history. Since the twentieth century sculptural materials have expanded to include almost anything. Using translucent wax, dense modeling compound, shimmering gold leaf, sumptuous furs, and hair both synthetic and human, Laura Frazure's sculptures are firmly planted within the contemporary dialogue of materiality. The works in the two concurrent exhibitions titled *Bodily Rhetoric* are all figurative and tied to the tradition of figurative sculpture and perhaps most closely akin to the mannerists' works. Like that of the mannerists, Frazure's extraordinary knowledge of anatomy allows her to subvert it to her own ends. Coupled with a remarkable sense of materiality, Frazure's work possesses an erotic tension that teeters between a heightened theatrical sensibility and a vulnerability that reminds us all what it means to be human.

"Beauty is only a promise of happiness" Stendhal is an almost life-size figure in translucent wax seated on a settee of synthetic human hair, the form bearing some resemblance to an animal, a kind of spent horse with rear legs splayed and head bowed down. The figure's gesture, or more accurately a pose as in the kind found in a high couture fashion spread, is turned in; a slight svelte figure one may encounter in the pages of Vogue gently bearing down on the animal's back. The figure's toes aloft, just kissing the floor, sit counter to the downward thrust of the body against the back of the animal-like settee.

In another sculpture, *"Beauty is only a promise of happiness" Stendhal—Reclining*, a figure reclines against a hair-covered pouf, the hair cascading down to form a bed with a figure whose gesture also turns inward. The sculptures are both within the world we inhabit and within a world of their own. The sumptuous bed of hair originating from the taut curls atop the pouf splays about the floor, separating and feathering out into tendrils that create a transition between the world of the sculpture and the world of the beholder. It is a taut membrane that separates or perhaps it is more accurate to say forms, a co-mingling between the world of the work that is viewed and the world of the one who is doing the viewing. Or as the nameless character in Kobe Abe's *The Box Man* says "In seeing there is love, in being seen there is abhorrence. One grins, trying to bear the pain of being seen. But not just anyone can be someone who only looks. If the one who is looked at looks back, then the person who was looking becomes the one who is looked at." It is a mutual exchange. A sculpture is made to be looked at. Frazure's figures with their translucent *skin* seduce us. Her acute material sensibility is witnessed in the careful building up, layer upon layer, of microcrystalline wax akin to the layers of skin composing a human body that reveal the muted blue of our veins seeping to the surface. The wax and synthetic human hair are seductive materials. The gestures, while turned inward, come from the world of fashion: a world in which people call out to be seen.

Hair gave Sampson his strength, a teenager uses it to hide behind, a seductress tosses it back with the flick of her head. The literal hair—synthetic and real—in the works here forms the world of the sculpture, a sumptuous luxurious world. But the depicted hair of the figures is a solid surface, separating only to part before falling down the back and draping across the clavicle. The hair on the upholstery is appealing to the beholder, one can almost feel the sensation of running their fingers through its thick mane while the hair on the figure is massed in helmet-like sections provoking an opposite response.

Counter to the flesh-like vulnerable wax is the black modeling compound used in the series *Poses of Resistance* and *Picnic*, a rapturous figure absorbed in a state of reverie suspended on the wall with a monkey seated on a shelf slightly above and to the left sensuously eating an mango held in long sinewy fingers. The density of the black modeling compound is counter to the figure's open gesture, legs gently parted, the hands aloft on either side of the head. Both monkey and figure in their own individual reverie yet tied in proximity one to the other.

In the five *Poses of Resistance: Arms raised, Speaker, Yelling, Fist, Returning tear gas* all are exposed in their nudity and yet the density of the material asserts it as an armor. Their size, a mere twelve to fourteen inches, belies their presence, firm and powerful in their stance. At this scale the figures themselves could easily be grabbed and used as weapons. The larger than life-size gold leafed *Protesting Heads: Detroit, Philadelphia, USA, Austin 2021, and Austin 2022*, with their mouths stretched wide in palpable rage, hang at eye level. Their tightly stretched mouths thrust their rage into as well as engulfing the face of the beholder. The gold leaf and the grand scale set these works within the range of the monumental, of the commemorative. It is no mistake that *The Poses of Resistance* and the *Protesting Heads* are all women. Frazure deftly weaves the history and tradition of figurative sculpture, one that more frequently depicts a nude figure. Using actual images taken at protests across the country, she firmly acknowledges the power and strength of these individual female voices.

The arresting *Horn Series: Jealousy*, a life-size female figure directly modeled in plaster and finished with a chalky white casein paint, gazes straight ahead through piercing glass and alabaster eyes. The hands are pressed together as in the gesture prior to a bow. Ram-like microcrystalline wax horns extend from the Geiko Shimada styled hair, a tradition of geishas in western Japan. Standing atop a low black plinth reminiscent of a wooden sushi plate that sits on a swath of red silk that follows down the wall behind and onto the floor underneath the sculpture, the figure is ceremoniously presented and simultaneously being *served up*.

There are reasons figurative sculpture has traditionally often been unclothed. It removes the specificity that ties it to a particular time in history and allows the artist to use form, that is the language of sculpture to establish its content and express its ideas. Right at the outset of Sir Kenneth Clark's *The Nude* he states, "To be naked is to be deprived of our clothes, and the word implies some of the embarrassment most of us feel in that condition. The word 'nude,' on the other hand, carries, in educated usage no uncomfortable overtone. The vague image it projects into the mind is not of a huddled and defenseless body, but of a balanced, prosperous, and confident body: the body reformed."

The question Laura Frazure's figures ask is whether they are nude or naked. I think they are both. They are naked in their vulnerability as witnessed in the gesture and materials of "*Beauty is only a promise of happiness*" *Stendhal* and "*Beauty is only a promise of happiness*" *Stendhal—Reclining* and resolute in *Horn Series: Jealousy*. These works show us what it means to be human and female and, for all the vulnerability that entails, they firmly resolve to hold fast what is rightfully theirs.

Elizabeth Mead
Williamsburg, Virginia 2022

"History and Eternity and the Sculptural Figure"

Laura Frazure adduces a remarkable array of sources, inspirations, occasions for her work. There seems to be for her no anxiety in this matter—only an awareness of the various ways her work arose from within her encounters with meaningful precedents, current events, mass media, a variety of traditions. On one hand, this makes the critic's job feel easy. But Frazure has made most of the art-historical identifications already. Ask her. Her knowledge of her references is lucid and wide—kouroi, Praxiteles, Donatello, Leonardo, mannerism, rococo decorative cartouches, Franz Messerschmidt, Eadweard Muybridge, Gaston Lachaise, Henry Moore, Shinto ceremony, the Old Testament, nineteenth-century photographs and paintings of women engaged in agricultural labor, classical Hollywood cinema, contemporary cinema, fashion photography, news photographs. Her work can be seen very clearly in relation to a wide range of references and sources.

And yet. Maybe it seems a little soon to be questioning standard procedure, and yet—none of this seems to explain Frazure's motivation or tell us too much about what we see. A wax figure, *Athlete*, from a set of roughly two-foot figures displayed on purpose-built cylinders. (The spiral seams on the cylindrical plinths *do not* refer to Solomonic columns; the concrete-casting tubes from the hardware just come like that. The source-hunting does have limits. This isn't a postmodernist lumberyard of references.) The figure comes from a fashion layout. It looks elongated, but Frazure points out that it is only eight heads tall; the impression of elongation owes to the narrow frame of the gamine. The pose makes me think of Bernini's *David* (1624), but the fashion photograph seems to account fully for the torsion of the figure and the low-reaching arm. My historical reference dissolves fully in the contemporary one. Mannerist and baroque drama overlie the exaggerations of the fashion layout with scarcely a remainder. David's effort is not the model's languor. I'm not sure I can point to the difference

between an emaciated eight-headed fashion model with a large head and her ten-headed mannerist counterpart. I suppose they would look the same. But both the similarities and the differences are real.

I think listening for the differences between these enharmonic notes, so to speak, helps us see Frazure's point. Her approach to contemporaneity and history encourages it. Her "*Down South in Dallas, a high school teacher was arrested...*" makes me think of Antonio del Pollaiuolo's bronze *Hercules and Antaeus* (1470s). Small, but not as small as Frazure's little figure group, Pollaiuolo's shows two figures in physical struggle. In both cases, the advantage goes to the fighter who is planted firmly. In both cases the figures are essentially nude—Pollaiuolo studied anatomy carefully; the lion's skin is more identifying attribute than drapery or costume. Where are the Texan educators' attributes, the iconographic clues that permit us to identify them? There are none. They have brought nothing but their anatomy and their press photograph's legend. Like Pollaiuolo's, Frazure's decision to reveal the bodies beneath what, in the teachers' case, was surely appropriate dress owes everything to her study of anatomy—some time ago, Frazure abandoned or severely moderated her reliance on direct observation and began devising figures from her understanding of anatomy—using a system she first learned from her professor Walter Erlbacher that was based on volumes within the human figure and their relations to one another and which she then reconceived along more technical anatomical lines.

What both pairs of figures have in common, moreover, is a smallness that controls, in a way, the way we see them. They are both small enough so that the silhouette of the tangled, struggling figures impresses itself from some distance. Frazure's were constructed in digital form, printed using a three-dimensional printer. The dark resin—in a way strangely similar to the way bronze works—makes the apprehension of small details secondary to the larger volumes and lines that register at first glance. The resin transmits light where it is thinnest, so the figures' extremities glow, emphasizing gesture. This draws attention to hands, especially, as if to illuminate, literally, the positions within the overall arrangement of the key agents of mayhem. Setting aside the choice of color and the choice of scale, which is surely determined to a large extent by the possibilities of the printing apparatus, Frazure's sculptural group seems designed to function this way. (She could have chosen one of her other processes or materials. She is an expert modeler. She could have built the figures in wax, as I assume Pollaiuolo built his or as she built her reclining nudes on hair-covered upholstery, which are nearly life size.) That is, the sculpture seems designed to make the dynamic, even violent tangle of limbs and bodies function from a distance and more powerfully than the dramatic facial expressions—and well before or apart from Pollaiuolo's spare indication of lion-skin iconography or Frazure's newspaper legend.

Topicality and facial expressions arrive later, so to speak. That's not an empirical claim. I have no wish to insist that one look at the figures' gestures before reading the title or peering at their faces; rather, it's a claim about how the work addresses its beholder. The scale of the works along with the dark colors make the silhouette more forceful and from farther away than the effective range, as it were, of either facial expressions or wall text. The result is a mute action—a kind of tableau vivant. Larger gestures serve here as the body's vehicle of expression, but that act of expression is certainly very meaningfully inflected by the chilling subject, which appears on reading the title taken from the news photograph's legend.

My point in this is to say that, in the case of this small figural group, the history-transcending affinity with Pollaiuolo comes on with what feels like a priority in experience over the recognition of a local, timely subject, but does not quite survive it. If one sees a parallel between the teachers' scuffle and the battle between Hercules and Antaeus, it will be a real and an ironic one.

Something similar would obtain, I think, for the *Athlete* to which I referred earlier. And for the protesting figures. Art historical sources do not announce themselves quite as readily there, but Frazure has spoken of the "heroic nude" in connection with them, and that does not seem wrong. Still, the nude lacks historical reference. Without attributes like Hercules's lion skin, the nude floats free in history. Source hunting and connoisseurship feel decidedly unequal to the task of locating them, giving them definite coordinates in the art-historical matrix, and the only attributes in sight are hair styles and a tear-gas canister—which, like the wall text, only make their contribution after the silhouette has spoken.

So, while Frazure's figures are fully of the present moment, they are also fully of a tradition. The nude is the medium, so to speak, of this ambiguity. One toga, one pants suit, and the game might easily be up. But the odd attribute—a tear-gas canister or a pouf or a sushi platform—cannot quite fully motivate the specificity of expression, of hairstyle, or self-portraiture (the more you look, the more of Frazure you see); nor can specificity overcome the timeless, or the transhistorical, or the historical resonance.

The faces, *Protesting Heads*, gilt in a composition gold leaf, thematize timelessness itself. The golden backgrounds that dislodged assemblages of sacred personages from history in pre-renaissance altarpieces cleave here to faces distorted in rage. What rage? Need one specify? The news is full of it, and it has been for years. Police brutality? Climate protest? *Dobbs*? White suprematism? Counterprotest? Stop the Steal? Lock Her Up? Rage threatens to transcend occasion, to form its own eternal chorus, like that Duccio di Buoninsegna's *Maestà* (1308-11), transposed to a gold-leaf eternity. Yet the intensity of the expressions, released from narrative, seem like an aggressive attack on G.E. Lessing's idea, articulated in his *Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry* (1766), of a comfortable relationship between the medium and the subject matter, in which, Lessing argued, a static medium like sculpture should avoid, as the sculptor of the *Laocoon* did, extremes of expression, opting instead for an agreement between the static character of the medium and an action, gesture or expression that could be thought of as extended in time. There is a clear disagreement between the fury of the expressions—not a pregnant moment, but one in the midst of delivery—and the very idea of its eternity, which is implicit in sculpture and thematized by gold leaf.

Again, the present and the history-transcending medium come together in the work, challenge one another, contradict one another.

Charles Palermo
Williamsburg 2022

Laura Frazure, a contemporary American realist, is a hard and unflinching witness to her time. Her work represents a continuum of American realism over the last two centuries, without the romantic expression. Both imaginative and insightful, her work reflects a penetrating perception of our culture. From the pages of Vogue magazine to protest marches to news events, Laura draws from a seemingly dissonant array of ideas that have informed her repertoire of images. The figures she imagines are not perceived from models in her studio but constructed from her knowledge of anatomy and her memory of form and gesture.

The sculptures are of women. Frazure's aim is the empowerment of women, giving voice to their sensuality, anger and action. The gestures of her figures are precise. The forms are not extravagant. Their expressions are seriously felt and rendered. Her knowledge of anatomy enables Laura to work from memory. This method allows her to be more immediately engrossed in the form with less filtering from a live model. Laura has found a way of avoiding the act of mimetic modeling. Her belief in her abilities allows for flexibility in the figure's formal development.

The recent series of over life-size portrait heads "Protests" modeled in self-hardening clay and finished in composition gold leaf depict screaming women. These portraits are a real tour de force. The difficulty of rendering these heads with this particular expression can be a technical and form making quagmire. The expression of anger in these portraits is palpable.

In the series of works titled "Vanity" she employs a luminous wax for the figure and synthetic human hair as a base form, presenting an eerie juxtaposition in both form and content. This is intended as a complex reaction to the portrayal of women in fashion, a duality that is both seductive and debasing.

Laura's use of materials from resin to wax and self-hardening clay always seems an appropriate choice for the intended ideas and related expressions.

Laura Frazure's figurative work is thoughtfully articulated with a power that is both quiet and overwhelming.

Louis Marinaro
Sculptor
New Orleans
2022

In *Zen and the Fine Arts*, the late Zen Master Shin'ichi Hisamatsu writes of "an endless reverberation which comes from a never completely revealed, bottomless depth." He continues: "If content exhausts itself — if the process of disclosure finishes at any point — any reverberation will be similarly limited. But what appears out of a bottomless depth and never discloses itself in its entirety — whether it appears even in the form of a spot or a line — has a reverberation beyond expression."

Hisamatsu calls this reverberation the "infinite echo reverberating from a single thing." My favorite example: Bashô's

The temple bell has ceased
but the sound lingers in the flowers.

Certain works achieve what we are left with when the work ends. After all of Hamlet's failed thinking, talking, feeling, doing and not doing, what *IS* the rest that is Silence? In Laura Frazure's *Fight*, the battle is only incidentally between the two struggling figures. Each of the two women molt the created situation, pulled by a power beyond the other and beyond self. Both perpetrator and victim are enthralled by a preoccupation they probably cannot name, which at once makes the aggressor's aggression inconsequential to the victim and to herself. The victim's brow, down-turned mouth clarify that her antagonist is *metaphysical*; in this fight her physical attacker, rather than harming, breaks her fall. The attacker's free arm shows her disinterest in finite squabbles, even the one she has initiated. What her face is drawn to — something akin to what Viktor Frankl meant in citing the phrase: "The angels are lost in perpetual contemplation of an infinite glory" — is the question that matters (to me) in this sculpture.

Steve Antinoff