

Ivana Bašić

Metempsychosis: *The Passion of Pneumatics*

June 7 - September 1, 2024

Unfolding like a choreographed journey across the Schinkel Pavillon, the solo exhibition of Ivana Bašić (b. 1986, Belgrade, Yugoslavia) examines the material and metaphysical bounds of humanity.

The journey begins in the back room of the Schinkel Klaus space where drawings emerge of elliptical, womb-like forms. The dissolved pigments, and the paper warped from moisture, invoke nebulae, birth, and the beginnings of life. In the adjacent hall, figures are caught in states of transformation, hovering between forms. Evoking insectile bodies and amniotic fluids, the sculptures suggest primordial forces of the underground and unseen. A chimeric figure resembling a praying mantis—in ancient Egypt considered an oracle and guide into eternal life—guards the passage.

The upper room's centerpiece, inspired by 17th-century depictions of the *Immaculate Heart of Mary*, concludes the journey—with the sculpture's stone core gradually pounded into dust. Moving in the cadence of the artist's breath, the pneumatic hammers invoke the Gnostic idea of the Pneumatics—the highest order of beings capable of transcending the material realm—those driven by *Pneuma*, Greek for "breath" and "spirit."

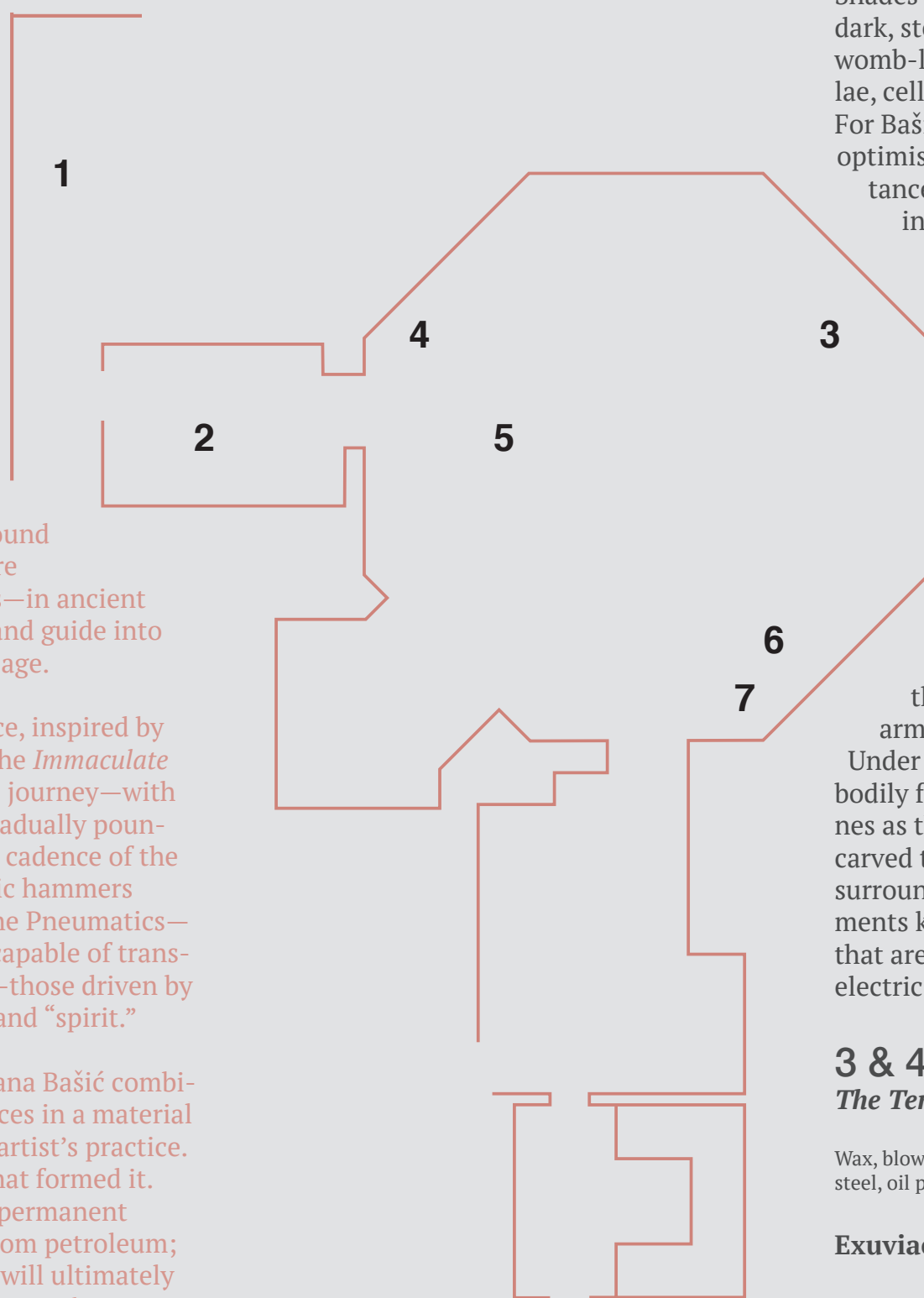
In each of her sculptures, Ivana Bašić combines vastly disparate substances in a material codex consistent across the artist's practice. Glass speaks to the breath that formed it. Wax connotes malleable, impermanent flesh—paraffin wax comes from petroleum; the fossils and soil the body will ultimately return to. Stone evokes matter under pressure: Bronze suggests armor, the protective strategies of an organism. Stainless steel speaks to the violence of inevitable forces that act upon the body.

Charged by her early experiences of war, violence, and brutality during the collapse of her native Yugoslavia, Bašić's work contemplates the disintegration of the body and the material realm. In *Metempsychosis: The Passion of Pneumatics*, however, the process of dissolution is envisaged not as a loss but as a moment of radical potential—a passage from human to non-human; telluric to celestial; form-bound to limitless.

The exhibition soundscape is composed of live sound from the central sculpture *Metabole* (2020-2024) played in synchronicity with Eliane Radigue's sonic mediation *Kuome* from *Trilogie de la Mort* (1985 - 1993).

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Though separate from the material study of her sculptural work, the *Ungrounding* series show clear throughlines with Bašić's larger formal imagination, suggesting entities even more transient and ephemeral than the artist's sculptures of glass or paraffin wax. Shades of pale pink and white are bound by dark, steely curves; forms are elliptical and womb-like, evoking cyclical images of nebulae, cellular life, becoming and unbecoming. For Bašić, this sort of quantum return is an optimistic, generative space—a reacquaintance with the most basal and indivisible ingredients of existence.



2 *I sense that all of this is ancient and vast. I had touched the nothing, and the nothing was living and moist #5 and #7, 2022*

White alabaster, wax, copper, pressure, grounding rods, stainless steel, petroleum jelly.

In the narrow hallway leading from the backroom to the Schinkel Klaus hall are two sculptures that resemble insect chrysalises with armor-like bronze protective shields.

Under the bronze armor, wax that evokes bodily flesh unfolds to reveal alabaster stones as the nucleus of the sculptures—gently carved to look wet and intestinal. The rods surrounding the sculpture are safety instruments known as Grounding rods—devices that are used as pathways for magnetic and electric forces to safely connect to the earth.

3 & 4

The Temptation of Being, 2024

Wax, blown glass, white alabaster, bronze, breath, stainless steel, oil paint.

Exuviae, 2024

Copper plated bronze, drywall, steel frame, fortan, dust.

The *Temptation of Being* and *Exuviae* embody a singular, genderless being, speaking of the delicate boundaries between birth and death. *The Temptation of Being* captures a figure in an impossible pose pressing its own amniotic-hued glass head through its loins. *Exuviae* resembles the shedded shell that has previously protected the figure, in the same way that an insect's exuviae protects its fragile organism during the process of metamorphosis. Cast in bronze—a material which illustrates protective strategies in Bašić symbolic material language—*Exuviae* speaks to the fragility of existence and the perpetual cycle of transformation. Both

Ground Floor

1 *Ungrounding, 2022-2024*

Mixed media on paper. Dimensions vary.

A series of watercolor drawings on paper, titled *Ungrounding*, serves as the exhibition's starting point. The elliptical forms, dissolved pigments, the warping of the paper from

works transgress the boundaries of what the body could be and test the limits of plasticity. They speak of the fragility of the human condition, the delicate balance between concealment and revelation and the necessity of mutation when escape is unattainable.

5 *I had seen the centuries, and the vast dry lands; I had reached the nothing and the nothing was living and moist*, 2018-2024

Stainless steel, pink alabaster, wax, blown glass, breath, pressure.

This chimeric semi-insectile, semi-machine-like figure resembles a praying mantis—in Greek and Egyptian lore considered an oracle and guide to the afterlife. Painstakingly sculpted, the creature seems to step backward, head bowed, facing a landscape of dust as if confronting the impending end. As the sculpture appears to shed its body, it reveals a seemingly soft and moist pink core, which will eventually be reduced to dust, with glass bubbles—representing breath—expelled as a byproduct of the shedding.

Embodying both violence and vulnerability, the grotesque and the sensual, this work questions the nature of form and liberation from the material realm.

Bašić's interest in insects is linked to chthonic forces and primordial matter, as their age testify to the pre-human world: most insect species have inhabited the Earth for more than a hundred million years. Informed by the concept of symiosis, this work represents a symbiotic being thriving through mingling with a different species. Reflecting on the cyclical nature of matter under pressure, the sculpture, like the other works presented in Schinkel Klause, questions whether having a body or form is an enablement or entrapment.

6 *Hypostasis*, 2024

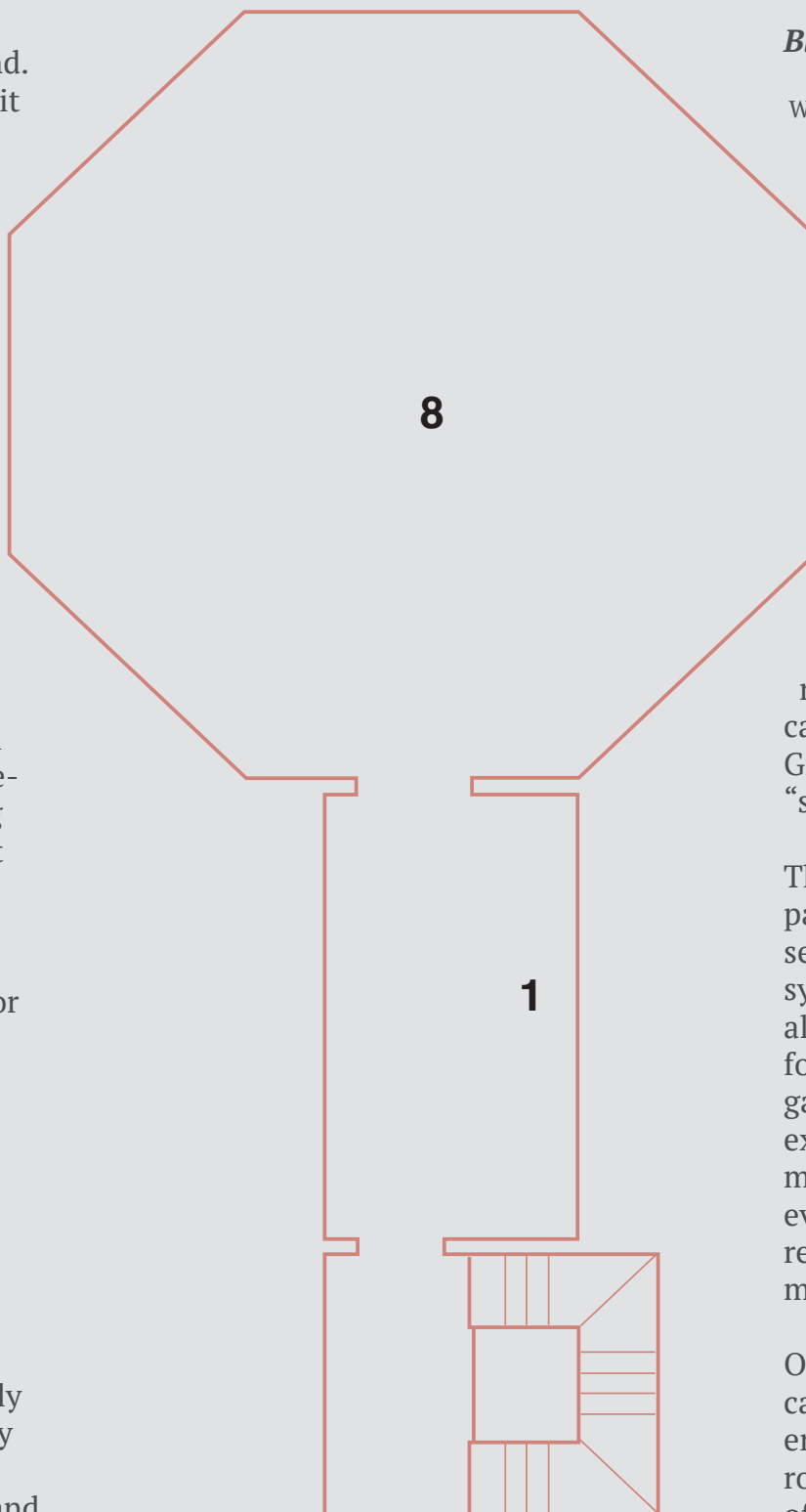
Blown glass, breath, dust, race-car exhaust hose.

Hypostasis is a poignant exploration of life's ephemeral nature, encapsulated in translucent glass eggs filled with dust and the artist's breath. These eggs, hermetically sealed and awaiting to be hatched, embody the brutality and potential of life forces. Positioned near *I had seen the centuries, and the vast dry lands; I had reached the nothing and the nothing was living and moist*, they suggest a relationship with the semi-insectile, semi-machine being, as if laid by the crouching figure. Bašić's use of non-material media like breath adds an celestial layer, evoking the Gnostic concept of Pneuma. Breath (pneuma) is a central symbol in many ancient traditions, representing life, spirit, and the divine presence. In Gnosticism, breath can symbolize the presence of the divine Pneuma within humans, with the act of breathing seen as a connection to the divine source. Anonymous and irreducible, dust represents the life cycle and the liberation from the material world. It speaks to the longing for life, and the inevitable return to dust.

7 *Breath seeps through her tightly closed mouth | Position II: Swelling #2*, 2019

Breath, glass, stainless steel, torque.

Several of Bašić's new works contemplate flights from materiality into other forms of existence. Evolving beyond wax, stone, and bronze components, this sculpture contains a single blown glass entity suspended on a steel armature—breath in commune with the entropic pressures of life and death.



First Floor

8 Installation *Passion of Pneumatics* (2024)

Metabole, 2020-24

Custom cast & slumped glass, stainless steel, pink alabaster, blown glass, breath, pneumatic hammers, custom race-car exhaust manifolds, custom circuit, microphones, mixer, speakers, air compressor.

Blossoming Being #1, 2024

Wax, blown glass, white alabaster, breath, bronze, stainless steel, oil paint.

Blossoming Being #2, 2024

Wax, white alabaster, breath, bronze, stainless steel, oil paint, Soundscape by Éliane Radigue's Koumé from *Trilogie de la Mort*.

The exhibition title refers to the exhibition's centerpiece, inspired by Italian 17th century depictions of the *Immaculate Heart of Mary*. In Bašić's sculpture, the traditional red heart is substituted by an alabaster stone at the sculpture's core, while the sun-like rays emanating from the *Immaculate Heart* are replaced with pneumatic hammers that gradually pound the stone to dust. Using the force of compressed air, the hammers' repetitive movements are timed to the cadence of the artist's breath, evoking the Gnostic idea of the Pneuma, "breath" and "spirit" in Greek.

The sculpture's core is encased by four panels of pink-hued blown glass—representing the breath that formed it in Bašić's symbolic material language. The body of the altarpiece is constructed from exhaust manifolds, used in racing cars to funnel exhaust gasses away from the engine. By combining exhaust headers, blown glass, and pneumatic hammers the *Passion of Pneumatics* evokes a breathing machine that is gradually reducing the stone at its core, turning solid matter into ephemeral dust.

On either side of the altarpiece, biomechanical figures titled *Blossoming Being #1* and *#2* emerge from each end of the stainless steel rods. The sculptures' flesh-coloured folds of skin are surrounded by shiny plates of armor—seemingly to protect the soft bodies as they emerge and dissolve their shells.