

HYPERALLERGIC

ART

Erasing the Binaries that Attempt to Contain Our Bodies

The body glistens. It is naked. It is torqued so that the face faces one bearing and the belly and genitalia faces the opposite. The translucent surface that skins the figure gleams wet.

Seph Rodney 12 hours ago



Barry X Ball, "Sleeping Hermaphrodite" (2008–17) (all images courtesy Fergus McCaffrey, New York, Tokyo, and St. Barth, unless otherwise noted)

MAASTRICHT, The Netherlands — Generally speaking, the “modern” section of the [TEFAF Maastricht](#) is not nearly as strong as its antiques or jewelry. The fair is, as its essence, about selling lovely decorative objects. By being a standout and largely standalone booth in the modern section [Fergus McCaffrey](#) gallery demonstrates this truth with its astounding sculptural work by [Barry X Ball](#).

The body glistens. It is naked. It is torqued so that the face faces one bearing (cradled by arms and a pillow) and the belly and genitalia faces the opposite. The translucent surface that skins the figure gleams wet. This body invites touch. It invites imagining. It should.

The piece, “Sleeping Hermaphrodite,” (2008–17) corporealizes all manner of contrary notions and feelings: It is colored pink similar to the inside parts of our orifices, but is made of Iranian onyx, not tender, feeling tissue. Both the form and the pose and its prone position suggest sensual indulgence, either the figure sleeping, or desiring or waiting for one to sleep with. But its creation is not a reprise of the Pygmalion story; the figure is not animated by love. Instead it is

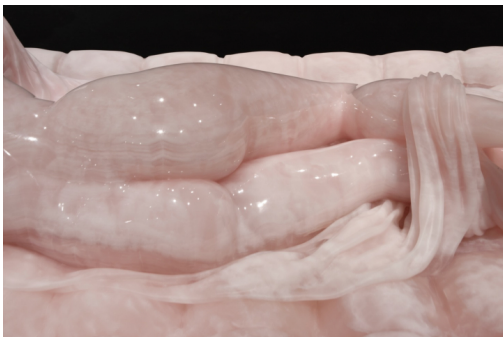
birthed through a process of picture taking, three-dimensional scanning, and a machine milling technique. The maker's hand comes in only at the end stage, to polish the stone. Perhaps the most provocative of its contradictions is that the figure has both breasts and a penis.



Barry X Ball, "Sleeping Hermaphrodite"
(2008–17)

The term hermaphrodite has fallen out of favor (and rightly so because it doesn't accurately describe what it means to define). Now we know it is clearer to say that s/he is intersex. Either way this figure metaphorically makes constant incursions across our more or less well policed borders of gender and sexuality back and forth into the territories administered under the flags of "male" and "female." S/he makes the porosity of those

borders tortuously apparent. Her/his body "looks" in one direction — both actively with their eyes away from the front of the body, and passively in terms of her feminine gender presentation — but her/his sex winks at us from the other side.



Barry X Ball, "Sleeping Hermaphrodite"
(2008–17)

Ball didn't invent this reconnaissance scout who really belongs to both countries — and thus risks rejection from both. The ancient sculpture of Hermaphroditus was discovered in Rome in the first decades of the seventeenth century. The Borghese Hermaphroditus, as it became known, was given a bed, sculpted by the Italian artist Gian Lorenzo Bernini, in 1620. Ball has revived the mythical figure and presenting it here, has made it more apparent

to me why people around me, in my culture, are alternately fascinated by and deeply terrified of those of us who are trans, gay, intersexual, queer, or gender fluid. It's not that the borders between the masculine and feminine become erased — there are still certain biological markers (behaviors and abilities) that serve to separate the sexes from each other (the ability to menstruate, to give birth) — but the domains begin to shrink and get to claim less and less loyalty from its citizens. "Sleeping Hermaphrodite," makes me intimately aware that the human body is a kind of difficult, incautious beauty and we wage battles to keep it tamed.



"Sleeping Hermaphroditus," Greek marble, Roman copy of the 2nd century CE after a Hellenistic original of the 2nd century BCE, restored in 1619 by David Larique; mattress: Carrara marble, made by Gianlorenzo Bernini in 1619 on Cardinal Borghese's request (photograph by [Pierre-Yves Beaudouin via Wikipedia](#))

Fergus McCaffrey has booth 440 at the [TEFAF Maastricht](#) fair for fine art, antiques, and design takes place in Maastricht, the Netherlands (at the Maastricht Exhibition & Congress Center) through March 24.

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