

# PRECOG

I WILL KILL IT IF I MEET IT AGAIN

FOLLOW THE TROLL

TRASH HEAP

SOMETHING MUST BE KEEPING  
NOTHING AFLOAT

JOKER

CONFESSIONS FROM  
THE IMPERIAL CORE

WHITE WOMAN ON A BICYCLE

ENEMY MINE

TOUGH LOVE

THE REIGN OF THE DEODANDS

# Trolletariat

The TROLL is the figure that stands between two realms, the guardian of the portal, the gatekeeper which allows passage based on passing a test.

TROLLS on the internet harness negativity and criticism toward ends which might be personal, political, or just for lulz. political, or just for lulz.

TROLL dolls activate the space between grotesque and cute, with rainbow hair and jewel belly buttons. Trolls do not have inherent power, their power comes from their actions, and sometimes their solidarity—the way that BTS fans disrupted Donald Trump's campaign rally; now political parties hire trolls to take down their opposition to win elections.

There are also bots which are TROLLS (on purpose) and AIs which seem to learn a sense of dangerous mischief. Are trolls figures of change, or just of chaos? Do they inhabit a world of magic, or reality? *Who is the troll, and who is being trolled?*

**Alex Santana** PG. 64–67  
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**Alicia Mersy** PG. 20–23  
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**Alison Kuo** PG. 98–101  
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**Nacoca Ko with  
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Land of Rivers and a Moon  
A Mysterious Shining Night  
A Mystical Place

**Priscilla Fusco** PG. 04–07  
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Trolls: When the Sunlight Hits  
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and Explode

**Ricardo Alberto  
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Stripping Copper Wire to  
Build an Iron Dome

**Wells Chandler** PG. 68

**Yanira Castro** PG. 134–139  
Exorcism, Revenge Score from  
*I came here to weep*

# MARSHA PELS INTERVIEWED BY FLORENCIA ESCUDERO



Beginning on April 16, 2021 and over the following months, the sculptor Marsha Pels responded to the following questions posed by Florencia Escudero.

1 CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE INITIAL IMPULSE THAT BROUGHT YOU TO CREATE THE NECKLACE?

2 WHAT IS YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO TECHNOLOGY AND HOW IT HAS CHANGED AMERICAN POLITICAL DISCOURSE?

3 CAN YOU TALK ABOUT HOW OBJECTS, IN PARTICULAR WAR TROPHIES, FRAME IDEAS OF HISTORY AND NATIONAL IDENTITY?

4 DO SCULPTURES CHANGE THAT DISCOURSE AND, IF SO, HOW?

5 WHAT DO YOU THINK WE SHOULD DO WITH MONUMENTS?

6 IS THERE A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WAR ARCHITECTURE AND MONUMENTS?

7 WHAT SHOULD WE DO WITH THE SOMETIMES PROVISIONAL STRUCTURES CREATED FOR VIOLENT CONFLICT?

8 WHAT IS THE CURRENT STATUS OF YOUR PROPOSAL FOR THE PIECE RECLAIMED SITE?

9 WHAT HAVE BEEN THE CONSEQUENCES OF MAKING THIS KIND OF WORK?

10 HOW HAS MAKING POLITICAL WORK AFFECTED YOUR CAREER?

11 WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF CENSORING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS?

12 WHAT HAS THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PHYSICAL PROCESS OF TRANSLATING THESE PERSONAL MOMENTS INTO STRIKING OBJECTS BEEN LIKE?

13 WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO MAKE WORK ABOUT PHYSICAL LOSS AND THE DEGRADATION OF THE HUMAN BODY?

14 CAN YOU TALK ABOUT YOUR USE OF LIGHT AND TRANSPARENCY IN THESE AND OTHER WORKS?

15 CAN YOU TALK ABOUT SENSUALITY?

16 HOW HAVE YOU PERSONALLY EXPERIENCED BEING A WOMAN IN THE ART WORLD AND WHAT DOES FEMINISM MEAN TO YOU?

17 WHAT ARE YOU CURRENTLY WORKING ON?

FALLOUT NECKLACE, 2018.

Patined cast aluminum, patined steel, flame-worked glass, powder printed glass  
Installation view at Lubov, New York, 2020  
84"D x 120"W x 180"D



## QUESTION 1

I worked on Fallout Necklace over 4 years and during this time the American political landscape drastically changed, when Trump was elected. This sculpture is the centerpiece of the series Trophies of Abuse (2013-2019). This series started as an investigation into gentrification but soon turned into a global questioning of the abuse of power. When I returned to New York City in 2010 after commuting to Detroit to teach, I found my Brooklyn neighborhood transformed into a construction site for expensive, high-rise condos displacing residents from their homes and changing the fabric of the community.

Construction Chatelaine (2013-2015) is the second piece in the series (recently shown at Frieze NY), a giant pin of dangling chains holding deconstructed construction equipment taken from photos in the vicinity of my loft.

My dead-end street on the waterfront used to be a dumping ground filled with hookers, burnt out cars, dead animals, and drug paraphernalia (ah, The Good Ole Days). Greenpoint was one of the Brooklyn neighborhoods where the city placed homeless shelters and hotels. When Upper-East siders complained about sex offenders living near them, the city transferred them to a 200-bed facility 2 blocks from my loft. As I was researching the urban planning (or lack of it) in my neighborhood and struggling for a way into this subject matter, a friend turned me onto Berlin Cast Iron & Welded Steel Jewelry.

This exquisite, highly-crafted European genre of jewelry (1904-1918) became a symbol of patriotic nationalism when aristocratic German women were urged to give their



TROPHIES OF ABUSE  
[CHATELAINE OF EVICTION], 2013–2015  
Patined cast aluminum, flame-worked glass,  
pewter chains  
10'D × 5'W × 2"D



jewels to the war effort in exchange for a less expensive form of adornment. The creation and transfer of wealth through feminine artifacts to solidify and abuse power became the metaphor for the imagery in Trophies of Abuse. Not only could I address the exploitation of women in any war effort, but it also seemed appropriate to exemplify the effects of gentrification: the dislocation of wealth from one group to another.

At first the glass cameos of the necklace were going to be images of eight sex offenders who lived down the street. Well, it was 2016; my little corner of the world didn't matter anymore—the whole world was sinking faster into the apocalypse. Trump was expanding his “Bro-Love” from Putin to Kim Jong-un.

I woke up one morning knowing I would replace “those guys” with “these guys”: the world leaders responsible for pushing that little red button or saving us from mass destruction. And yes, those guys included two women: Angela Merkel & Theresa May. Now, of course, the necklaces nuclear threat is prescient, making the sculpture too eerily apropos.

Fallout Necklace was shown at Lubov in December 2020, with Pieta, made in 1998. This is another political-charged, but very personal sculpture dealing with the recurring discourse surrounding abortion, as well as my own miscarriage many years ago.

## QUESTION 2

Technology and I are not good bedfellows. I'm a Neanderthal who welds but can't use a computer. It's effect on the American political discourse is a double-edged sword. Yes, you can find or do anything, but children don't read anymore. They have no awareness of their physical surroundings which can flaw their inner being. People are getting killed on the street because they are glued to their cell phones. It's not to my credit that I don't use it in my work, but I really can't relate to it. I hate technology and technology hates me.

## QUESTIONS 3–11

It seems I always go back to the horror of war since the mid 80's and my work about the Holocaust. For decades during my twenties to forties, I'd have these nightmares where I was dragging myself bloodied through war-torn landscapes, just like the opening scene of *Saving Private Ryan*.

I'm not interested in war per se as a construct, more so in man's inhumanity towards his fellow man and the vicissitudes of power. War is just the most obvious existential manifestation of this dilemma. In Susan Sontag's book, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, she reflects not only on why we KEEP DOING these terrible things to one another, but why we are obsessed by “Fascinating Fascism”; the artist's need to document the horrors and the public's need to witness it, whether in art, photography, or the media.

You ask about the difference between war architecture and monuments. Monuments are built to glorify the victors and dehumanize the victims. Memorials are about honoring the dead. In his groundbreaking study of Holocaust memorials, *The Texture of Memory*, James E. Young explores both the idea of the monument and its role in public memory, discussing how every nation remembers the Holocaust according to its own traditions, experiences and ideals.

On my Fulbright to Germany (1997-98) to research a Holocaust Memorial in Emden (the town of my paternal ancestors), as an American Jew of German descent on German soil, I didn't realize how many threads of national identity and cultural memory I had to fuse to actualize my proposal. Having also read *Twilight Memories* by

RECLAIMED SITE, 1997–2000  
Proposal



Andreas Huyssen, who throws new light on the politics of remembering and forgetting in a globalized Postmodern culture, I had to acknowledge my complex identity so I could examine how a war memorial differs from a war monument in its relationship to individual vs. collective memory.

However, the initial inspiration for the project was Paul Virilio's *Bunker Archeology*, a meditation on the meaning of the bunker; defensive architecture as the edifice of abomination, which he first encountered as a child walking along the beach on the French coast.

In Keith Mallory and Arvid Ottar's *Architecture of War*, the differences between the evolution of war architecture and monuments illuminates the contradictions of Hitler's failed architectural ambitions during the Third Reich, exemplified by the hundreds of bizarre bunkers he built throughout Germany and subsequently in the Atlantic Wall from Portugal to Norway. Emden had more indestructible bunkers sprinkled throughout the German landscape per capita because Hitler lied about the whereabouts of the U-boats.

This research formed the conceptual basis for Reclaimed Site (1997 – 2000), my Holocaust Memorial proposal for Emden. Reclaimed Site recreated the synagogue destroyed on Kristallnacht in 1938 to scale in photo-etched glass, which opened onto a courtyard of cobbled, recycled glass stones juxtaposed against the *Bahnhofs bunker* (train station bunker). This is where the Jews were herded to board the trains to their death. The bunker would become a regional research center/archive for Germans and Jews alike under one roof, which had never been

done before: the records were always kept separate. A concrete reality and a glass ghost in conversation.

Reclaimed Site was never built, because in Emden's decision to take the project seriously, they realized that the train station area (which included a major bus depot) and the entire surroundings needed to be re-structured, meaning millions and millions of more dollars and years of urban planning and building. I opened up a can of worms, but not the one I was hoping for. I did change the face of the town, but without my memorial.

The recent controversy surrounding the removal of politically-charged monuments shows how revisionist history has irrevocably changed how events are memorialized in our country. The most egregious statues of historical figures should be taken down and melted. The metal can then be re-used for the creation of new monuments on the same site which are chosen by a committee from the community. I know I wouldn't want to be on that panel (HAHA), but this seems like a democratic solution, though perhaps not necessarily an excitingly aesthetic one (unless, of course, it was up there with Hans Haacke's horse in Trafalgar Square).

TOWARDS BETHLEHEM, 2021  
Patined cast iron, steel, leather, rubber  
58"H × 28"W × 36"D







DEAD MOTHER, 2006-2008  
Cast epoxy resin, fluorescent lights, plexi-glass, steel,  
21 mink coats, argon-mercury text on wall [not shown]  
36"H x 84"W x 120"D



BINGO'S LAST TOY, 2021  
Patined cast bronze  
16"H x 7.5"W x 12"D

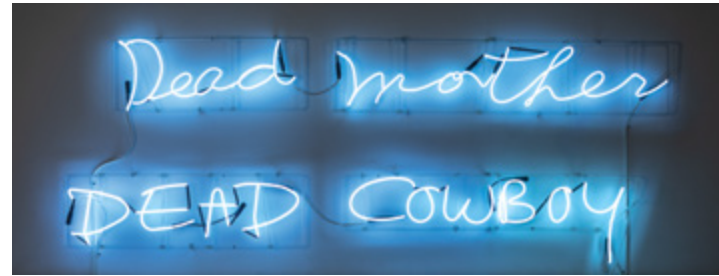


Sculptures are not capable of changing any discourse. They can only comment on the world at large or capture it and hopefully make people think about history in a new way, such as Maya Lin's Vietnam Memorial. They don't change minds. I'm not making political work invested in a message, such as Krzysztof Wodiczko, Adrian Piper, or William Pope L.

As a bona fide object maker, I'm emulating sculptors such as Doris Salcedo and Robert Gober, who make powerfully symbolic work which people walk away from differently than when they first encountered it. Besides, I don't consider my work necessarily 'political' because it shifts from personal loss to universal trauma. It's when the personal becomes political, that's when I get into trouble. And the personal is political and vice versa.

You ask if making this kind of political work has affected my career? Of course it has, by placing me in a certain category that can have negative or positive connotations depending on who you are speaking to and which particular discourse they proclaim to be a part of. Some are troubled or disgusted by my work (I love when it's called "deviant"); others applaud its bravery and honesty and see the humor or irony in my critique.

DEAD MOTHER, DEAD COWBOY, 2006-2008  
Argon-mercury text  
13"H x 100"W



DEAD COWBOY, 2007-2008  
Cast epoxy resin, cast rubber, deconstructed motorcycle, steel, neon lights, argon-mercury text on wall [Above]  
48"H x 120.5"W x 36"D



Once you start to become a known quantity, "Hey, they gotta label you." For instance, let's take Philip Guston as an example and all this recent bruhaha over his retrospective, which is ridiculous. His work is about the drudgery of a painter's life, the struggles of the creative process, along with the passing of time, the horrors of aging and the specter of death, as much as it was about the KKK or the Holocaust. IT WAS ABOUT SMOKING, for God's sake. Just let's see this amazing work and get on with it.

My work is either loved or hated: no gray area in between. It's sex and death without the rock n' roll. It always elicits a strong emotion and that's all I care about, no matter which way the pendulum swings. It was pretty wild witnessing the hordes at NADA in Miami trying to circumvent my little pony, 'Towards Bethlehem,' like it was exuding a contagious toxic odor! They were horrified watching their kids run up to climb on it.

This is a good example of the personal becoming political. During COVID, I had to put my beloved dog Bingo to sleep while COVID was raising its ugly head again. I merged all these emotions and realities into two sculptures made in 2021: Towards Bethlehem and Bingo's Last Toy (also shown at NADA in Miami).

## QUESTIONS 12-13

In answering your questions about the experience of making sculptures about grief and personal loss: I'm compelled to do this and never even think about it. You close your eyes, dive into the pool, you know you can swim, but will you drown in sentimentality? That's the challenge. I know it sounds dramatic to say I have no choice but to make "this kind of work" directly from my life experience, but it's true: I must make this work.

And death is always around the corner: a person or a thing whether it's someone I loved or didn't even know, whether it's a group of people, a civilization or a culture. I must memorialize the loss to freeze it in time, to confront the sorrow and achieve some sort of artistic redemption. So, in a way, I am always memorializing something. *Dead Mother, Dead Cowboy (2008)* was a show about two people I loved (my mother and my ex-partner), and upon leaving me, their individual but combined Freudian inability to love me. *Dead Cowboy* and *Ecorche* (both shown at Frieze, NY) transformed personal items of clothing that they each left behind; my mother's in death, my partner's in motorcycling out the door.

## QUESTION 14

Why I use light in my work, (I suppose you're referring to glass & neon), is quite simple. I had an epiphany in my early 40's and felt trapped in my dependence on cast metal. It was all so dark and heavy, tied to the ground. Then I saw a Brancusi retrospective and my reflection in his polished bronze surfaces signified how he had created light. It is the only way to create light within metal sculpture, but that shiny process never conceptually belonged in my program.

The only thing left was to use real light. In the early 90's, I began to cast glass and use real lighting in my work. It was a seamless transition, because the process of casting glass is very similar to casting metal. Technically, it was easy; conceptually, it gave me a whole realm of possibilities and material choices. The light bulb literally went on and using light gave breadth to my work with fluidity, transparency, and luminosity.

Like any other material choice I make, using glass is conceptually based and must work with the meaning of the object itself and the overall dimensionality of the sculpture. Light also, very importantly, gets things off the ground and creates a different kind of space or atmosphere around a sculpture. Using neon and photo-etched glass allowed me to further understand the material's potential and expand my language.

## QUESTION 15

I don't know about sensuality, but I can talk about the ugly/beauty dynamic in my work. It's always been there from the onset and I don't really know why. I do, however, think it has something to do with my direct relationship to my materials, my love of working with them and how they are in sync with the content. But when I started to make work with more difficult subject matter in the late 80's, I became conscious of this dynamic because I knew I had to seduce people with my materials and presentation, otherwise they wouldn't dare look at it. Most reviews about my work touch upon this phenomenon.

I've recently reread Maggie Nelson's *The Art of Cruelty*. Rather than just see puzzlement, fear or disgust on people's faces when they encounter my work, I needed to hold them there as if in a trance, so they could walk around the sculpture, hopefully touch it. They had to be held in suspension long enough to get beyond the impact of the narrative and their initial emotional reaction so they could psychically enter the space. I do create an environment for each sculpture, even in an indoor gallery I work site-specifically. You must be seduced to enter the sphere of my sculpture to fully comprehend it.

## QUESTION 16

Ah, the "F" word.... We all have our horror stories, but this is not the place to tell them. I am fortunate for my experiences, even with the struggles and setbacks in my career. I'm only a product of seminal generations of women artists before me who had a much more difficult time. And I am grateful for my friendships with Louise Bourgeois, Ana Mendieta, and Joan Semmel, who each in their own way shared their struggles and experiences with me and continue to enlighten me.

The distinctions surrounding Feminism to me have been either about race (black, white, or other), sexuality (lesbian, straight, or other) or class (single mothers, doctor's wives, or your daughter) and/or specifically in the art world: essentialism vs. constructivism vs. ideological Postmodernist discourse. However bottom-line, Feminism (no matter under what hooded guise) is fundamentally a critique of power.

Beyond talking about those distinctions (and believe me, even more so today because it has gotten much more complicated—just eavesdrop on any Graduate Seminar on the subject), I'd like to address the category of "Generation." This history has affected me the most: what generation I am in the continuum, what the women artists of decades before me had accomplished, what



ECORCHE, 2006-2008  
 Patined cast plaster; 10 pairs of Pels' arms cast in her  
 Mother's gloves, her Mother's mink coat  
 48"H x 48"W x 12"D



my decade of women have done and what is passed onto the women artists after me. As the cultural and social signifiers of a specific time might change, so do the problems, but the underlying critique of the structure of power remains a constant.

Mira Schor organically dissected the history of Feminism (as well as the specific issue of my coming of age in her Chapter 'Generation 2.5' in her book *A Decade of Negative Thinking Essays on Art, Politics and Daily Life*). Since I was born in 1950, I'm technically part of what she calls this missing or 'anonymous' generation. We were looked over even though many of us were developing a strong body of work influenced by feminist experience, if not feminist politics. Subsequently, we came of age at different points in our careers: the '70's, 80's or the '90's.

Because I was somewhat embarrassingly late to the party (as a macho metalworker trying to keep up with the boys while throwing off the chains of Formalism), I feel more like a third generation Feminist because I came of age in the mid 80's. Even though I was living a Feminist life and making quasi-Feminist work, was I really a Feminist?

I hadn't identified with the movement nor been an activist nor declared myself a Feminist until the mid 80's. My mentor in the 70's had been Louise, who never mentioned Feminism, even though she was on the outskirts of its circle. She only became the icon of the movement later in her life and then she had no choice but to embrace it. Neither considering the content of my work as Feminist nor my consciousness of being a Feminist materialized until I was 34, with the death of my friend Ana in 1985.

As I mentioned in my interview with Bryce Kroll in *BROOKLYN MAGAZINE*, Ana's death politicized me. As a witness at Carl Andre's murder trial, I saw firsthand the brutal power struggle that existed in the art world and continues, to some extent, till this day. I still wonder what (in the wake of the Me Too movement) would have happened if Ana was pushed off that roof yesterday. And it gives me the chills.

#### QUESTION 17

What I'm working on now is a prime example of my process. It usually, but not necessarily, starts with a found object and how I can conceptually and materially transform it to make a sculpture successful. This usually, but not necessarily, evolves into a series of work using other found and fabricated objects. But there are no rules, one just tries to repeat oneself as meaningfully and interestingly as possible, so one can grow accordingly and not be 'branded' as a one shot pony.

This present sculpture (which does not yet have a title) is also an example of the personal merging with the political. I was at a friend's house for dinner last Thanksgiving. She is an antique dealer. In her basement was a magnificent late 19th century stained lace and satin ivory wedding dress. Underneath it was a complicated hoop petticoat, which she gave to me after I oohed and aahed.

Then a few weeks later, my parking lot attendant pulled me aside (how did he know?) to ask if I wanted this equally derelict vintage cloth dressmaker's mannequin (sans head, arms and feet). It was the same color and scale as the hoop petticoat. I put them together, hung it up high on a hoist in my studio so you were under the umbrella of the skirt. Obsessed with the imagery coming from Ukraine, I started to make a steel structure in relationship to the absent figure resembling a gibbet—a medieval torture device. Somehow this is my next piece because it's about to get creepy.

TROPHIES OF ABUSE [THE MAYOR'S COMB], 2013-15  
 Patined cast aluminum, steel, photo-etched glass,  
 flame-worked glass  
 65"H x 48"W x 16"D



TO BREATHE, TO WALK [DETAIL], 2009-2011  
 Cast bronze and iron, flame-worked Pyrex glass,  
 found objects  
 68"H x 62"W x 18"D





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A SHORT HISTORY  
OF MOUNTAIN TROLLS

I CAME HERE TO WEEP

LATIN DADDY

A MYSTICAL PLACE

A BAKER'S ELBOW,  
MY BROTHER'S SWELLBOW,  
GOING THROUGH A  
NARROW CARPAL TUNNEL

YOU ARE WHAT YOU  
(WANT TO) OWN

BOOTS: BOOTS THE  
BOOTS DOWN BOOTS

DIGITAL DEVOTION

IDENTIDAD MULTIPLE

TODT: LAST ALIVE,  
TROLLING THROUGH TIME

STRIPPING COPPER WIRE TO  
BUILD AN IRON DOME

MERKEL MALL

FALLING FROM TREES