

GALERIE LESSIRARD

ART ANALYSIS

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ALBA SAGOLS

BETWEEN FLESH AND THE SACRED

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Alba SAGOLS, Fuzzy Preacher, 2021-2024,
Sculpture in wood, nails, and wrought iron.
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«*Flesh is neither matter, nor spirit, nor substance. It is the element of Being.*»

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The visible and the invisible*, 1964 (posthumous ed.)

At first glance, it is a sculpture. A trunk covered in lead, marked with nails. But as you approach, the work becomes something else: a space of tension, where matter and belief, body and myth, ritual and memory confront one another.

Inspired by the “nail trees” found in many traditions—pagan or Christian—this sculpture reactivates an ancestral gesture: nailing to ward off, to pray, to heal or to harm. This ritual spans the centuries, oscillating between care and violence, between offering and condemnation.

Here, the wood is covered in lead, that opaque metal, laden with history and toxicity, used since Antiquity to protect bodies, cover tombs, seal memories. Beneath this heavy, closed shroud, the sculpture becomes a sepulcher. It becomes flesh: an absent but incarnate body, a body that was once an individual and that, through the artistic act, attains a form of sanctification. The nails, driven in one by one, pierce the material like points of contact. Each strike is a repetitive, obstinate gesture, between care and domination. These nails mark, pierce, fix. The surface becomes a porous skin, where the violence of the ritual leaves its trace.

Around this sealed flesh, a mantra resonates: “Essence of wisdom who considers the noises of the world, teach me to respect all that exists.” A hybrid prayer, woven between Buddhist compassion and Wiccan spirituality. These words, chanted in a loop, accompany the hammering of the nails, like a persistent breath.

The viewer is caught in this in-between: between the weight of lead and the lightness of the voice, between enclosure and calling. The work confronts them with their contradictions: how to honor without confining? How to sanctify the body without subjecting it? How to affirm life in a gesture inherited from violence?

It is here that the work aligns with the focus of our gallery, which is resolutely oriented toward representations and perceptions of the body. This body is neither celebrated, nor idealized, nor offered up for contemplation: it is covered, protected, but also muzzled, made fragile. An absent body, yet omnipresent through its imprints. A body that questions our gaze, our gestures, and our relationship to otherness.



The sculpture also engages a broader reflection, one that can be linked to phenomenology. It allows us to perceive what escapes the immediate image. It is not the body that we see, but the body we feel, the body we imagine beneath the layer of lead. The work activates what Merleau-Ponty called the "flesh of the world": that sensitive fabric where the human and the non-human, the interior and the exterior, the visible and the invisible, come together.

The viewer is not confronted with an object, but immersed in a perceptual experience. Here, vision alone is not enough. One must listen to the voice, follow the rhythm, touch with the eyes the roughness of the lead, guess what is sealed within. The work calls upon our memory of ritual gestures, our sensitivity to materials, our awareness of life beyond the human.

A work like a nailed body, yet alive. A prayer suspended between lead and air. A tribute to what endures, despite the gestures, despite the layers, despite the weight.