

Art World

Nicole Eisenman Makes a Dramatic Turn to Sculpture in Her First Solo Institutional Show in Germany

There are more than 20 sculptures on view in Eisenman's show at the Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden.

Kate Brown, November 8, 2018



Nicole Eisenman. (c) 2018 Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden / Judit Fruzsina

On three separate occasions vandals devastated Nicole Eisenman's celebrated contribution to last year's *Skulptur Projekte Münster*, *Sketch for a Fountain*, which featured several figures reclining around a basin of water. Once, one of the heads was ripped off its body; another time, a swastika was spray-painted on it.

The head was never recovered, and Eisenman declined to remake it. Instead, one year later and in a town about five hours to the south, its spirit seems to have multiplied in a new show at the Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden.

The show, cheekily titled "*Baden Baden Baden*," is, surprisingly, Eisenman's first solo exhibition in a German institution—a fact that surprised even the institution itself. The American artist who established herself in New York decades ago, is well-known for her humorous but politically-minded paintings, though these take a secondary role in this show. Enter 20 new sculptural works by Eisenman, encompassing the largest array of Eisenman's sculptural work to date. There are four paintings as well, for good measure.

Reincarnation and past lives abound in Eisenman's ambitious presentation. *Witch's Head*, a work that Eisenman made and then transformed by later punching a hole in it, "was born twice," writes Hannah Black in the exhibition catalogue. "The first time was wrong. She was a smiling head on display at Frieze New York. In this form she was valued at a billion dollars, but received zero—despite her beauty queen smile." (Yes, that sale price is a bit exaggerated, but the rest of the story holds.)

Then there's *Head with Demon*, which is a fountain, but this time in the form of a small demon spitting water—perhaps another reinterpretation of her first sculptural fountain system at Münster.

Altogether, the show casts a wide net of reference points. There are bronze or aluminum-cast sculptures on multi-colored plinths, wall-mounted ski-doo's with working lights, a fallen flag pole with an oversized coffee lid dangling from it. There's a peep-hole door that visitors can look through one at a time to spy a wooden relief of a woman masturbating.



Nicole Eisenman. (c) 2018 Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden / Judit Fruzsina

"She said she always envied all the sculptural materials and tools when she went to art supplies stores," Hendrick Bündge, curator and deputy director of the institution, tells *artnet* News. Certainly, she appears to be championing all the things that paintings cannot so readily do, and so the works are particularly mighty, with some weighing up to a staggering 350 pounds. Eisenman also seems to relish in the many playful viewing possibilities of three-dimensional work, and each of her sculptures looks completely different from any given angle: busts are surprisingly opened at the back with cuckoo clocks dangling from them, or a little devil spewing water, or a witch brooding within.

Eisenman's own practice as a sculptor has a past life, too. Though it's one of the more emergent corners of her practice today, she only returned to it in 2013 after a decades-long hiatus, which she attributes to a personal trauma: As a student, she was nearly expelled from the Rhode Island School of Design for making a massive plaster mess while building a sculpture with a friend in her studio.

See more images below of Nicole Eisenman's "Baden Baden Baden," on view at Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden until February 17, 2018.



Nicole Eisenman. (c) 2018 Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden / Judit Fruzsina



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