

GAVLAK is delighted to present *WE ARE BODIES*, the gallery's first solo presentation of the work of Mexican artist Anuar Maaud. *WE ARE BODIES* will be on view March 19 through April 23, 2022 at GAVLAK Los Angeles.

Seeking to share profound insights into the human body and the three-dimensional self-image, Mexican artist Anuar Maaud has built a vast archive of 7,000 sculptural self-portraits created by participants in workshops he's led over the past thirteen years. Maaud's sculptures in *WE ARE BODIES* feature a selection of these expressive, handmade clay self-images replicated at large-scale using 3D-printing. Beginning in 2009 as a collaboration in Mexico with the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Monterrey to engage children in underprivileged communities, the workshops have since expanded to include participants of diverse ages and backgrounds. The selected works in this exhibition possess a subtle tension that provokes the increasingly common flattened view of bodies, a prevailing gaze due to the omnipresence of screens. For instance, consider that the self-portraits on the gallery walls were made by adults whereas those on the floor were made by children.

Maaud's conceptual portraits consist of basic forms like stacked spheres, pinched shapes, or rolled tubes, possessing characteristics that are at once lighthearted and deeply philosophical. By approaching a process similar to automatic drawing—a free form drawing method developed by the Surrealists to express the subconscious—Maaud's workshop uses the preexisting skills and imagination of participants to unlock unconscious thoughts about their bodies. The workshops intentionally omit traditional instructional approaches focused on techniques and tools to bypass the rational mind of participants and reveal an uninhibited look at self-image.

However, the authenticity of these works goes beyond the expression of an individual's intimate feelings about their own physical body, as the archive also collectively highlights broader cultural trends. Commonalities exist among the participants' self-portraits; for example, figures created by younger participants are often adorned with canonical smiley faces and exclude genitals, while works made by older participants are increasingly flat—perhaps a reflection of the predominance of screens today. As such, these contemporary works have a strong association with how we commonly interpret historical sculptures as artifacts of civilization or relics of past cultures. In fact, many of Maaud's influences derive from ancient sculptures, including the enigmatic Venus of Willendorf carved some 30,000 years ago or ceramic Mayan figurines used for a variety of rituals. This series touches on the seemingly universal aspect of self-representation and how this unrestrained observation reveals something elementally human that connects us to our ancestors.

Beyond the individual and collective reflection on the body, Maaud's 3D-printing reproduction process introduces a distinctly Postmodern perspective. Through transforming the spontaneous distillations of a person's self-reality into large-scale replicas, the works become imbued with concepts around simulacra. The term simulacra was adopted by philosophers to consider the increasing prevalence of copies, imitations, or substitutes in modern-day life, from photography to manufactured goods, that seek to replace reality with a representation. In Maaud's works, the original thought of representing one's body is first inexpertly translated into handmade portrayals, then further abstracted into sizeable mechanical reproductions. Thus, the final sculptures stand as large interpretations of the original instruction reworked into a more complex state. This process expresses an automated assemblage of the gradual deterioration of the real or objective world, while simultaneously creates hyperreal objects that allow viewers to study

magnified gestures in clay. In this series, the concept's origin remains buried and twisted, as each end result is both an original and an original copy.

Together, the works in Maaud's exhibition explore the collective unconscious mind of humans, depicting a rich range of reflections on the relationship to our bodies, broader trends of self-representation, and the dissolution of the real as seen through concepts of replication, ownership, and participation. Ultimately, *WE ARE BODIES* examines sculpture's relation to social experience through an interplay between action and reaction.

Text by Cortney Lane Stell