

ARTFORUM



Zoe Barcza, Polycule Cringe, 2021, acrylic, vinyl paint, and collage on canvas, 48 x 40". Photo Jan Sondergaard. Courtesy the artist and Bianca D'Alessandro.

COPENHAGEN

Zoe Barcza

BIANCA D'ALESSANDRO
Frederiksholms Kanal 28A
May 28–July 3, 2021

Within the five canvasses that form the core of Zoe Barcza's solo show "Birth Refusal," the artist takes the piss out of our obsession with taste and manners through caricature and satire. Alongside airbrush and acrylic paint, the artist uses collage both as a technique and as a methodology, constructing layers of heavy-handed metaphors only to see them collapse under the weight of their own ciphers.

Text is an integral part of the artist's work, where it serves as both a clear signifier and thwarts any possibility of a univocal reading of the images. The bifurcated gaze between language and forms is reflected in the doubling up of images, a strategy Barcza has developed across previous bodies of work. A Satire (all works 2021) presents two versions of the artist's naked body, both wearing a pig snout.

One figure is on her hands and knees, suckling on the other's multiple breasts. Milk spills out to form the word NEUROSES, while three syringes, labeled OH, ME, and UNIQUE, prick the first woman's haunches. In Polycule Cringe, a female figure canoodles with two men (identified as TASTE and MANNERS), whose foreheads have been pasted over with images of a woman's eyes, conflating views of "self" and "other."

In another self-portrait, Subculture Beyotch, Barcza heightens the tension between her complicity with the commercialized art world and her identification with subculture as a space free from mainstream taste and norms. A caricature of the artist's seminaked body rides a motorbike over images of herself, her friends, and her gallerists, all clustered around a quote from a Frank Zappa album sleeve that is itself a satire of the Beatles' iconic Sgt. Pepper's cover: WE'RE ONLY IN IT FOR THE MONEY.

— *Francesca Astesani*

Art in America

Zoe Barcza, “Nukeyface” at Bodega



Zoe Barcza, *Bring the Ruckus*, 2019, acrylic, vinyl paint, and collage on linen, 59 x 86 1/2 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Bodega, New York.

Zoe Barcza, “Nukeyface.” Canadian-born artist Zoe Barcza presents a new series of hyperreal paintings, this time portraits of female friends whose distorted nude bodies serve as hosts to a variety of frightening objects and noxious substances, from ominous-appearing sprays to gasoline-fueled fires.

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Zoe Barcza, *Animorphs.S01E17.Not.My.Problem*, 2015, acrylic and flashe on linen, 39 1/2 x 36 1/4».

NEW YORK

Zoe Barcza

SHOOT THE LOBSTER | NEW YORK
138 Eldridge Street
May 31–June 21, 2015

For her New York solo debut, Toronto-born, Stockholm-based artist Zoe Barcza has turned the gallery into a cryptic crime scene. Nine stretched linen canvases painted with trompe l’oeil rips and tears line the walls in a continuous band. It looks as though a claustrophobic tiger tried to claw its way out of the room. While Barcza’s painted gashes play on the actual slashes Lucio Fontana famously made in his monochromes, cheekily codifying them, they’re more than art-historical one-liners. Flat yellow stripes—visible through

some of the “tears”—suggest stretcher bars supporting the linen. By stylizing these beams instead of making them resemble wood, Barcza deliberately transforms the experience of spying them through the holes into a humorous anticlimax, undermining her own illusion.

Surrounded by these spare yet complex paintings stands a cartoony sculpture of a striding man fashioned out of curvy pieces of black-painted steel. *International Loner*, 2015, sports swooping arms, pointy shoes, and a too-small hat. He leans forward with purpose but glances back over his shoulder, as if wary of being recognized while skipping town. He carries two TVs like suitcases, one of which shows a golden wheat field undulating in the wind while the other plays footage plucked from a bizarre French porno. In it, crudely animated condoms clamber over a sleeping woman like so many dwarves merrily molesting Snow White. The baggage-laden loner could be peddling desires—the serenity of the first video, the voyeurism of the second—and we’re his marks. Or maybe he mirrors the way we all nervously tote around our ideals and the weirder, kinkier realities of longing. Together, Barcza’s sculpture and paintings, both of which partly owe strength to her light touch, create a show about confines and freedom, economically packaging these concepts into offhandedly perspicacious pieces.

— Zoë Lescaze

AQNB**

Zoe Barcza @ Ghebaly Gallery reviewed

The paintings that make up Zoe Barcza's most recent solo show, *Dr. Awkward* at Ghebaly Gallery, exist in an imagined narrative. Together, the works both compartmentalize and examine the human form, while also tapping into a deeper psychological space. It evokes a feeling without elaborating on what that actual feeling is.

Upon first viewing the exhibition, running November 12 to December 23, I felt a little hopeless. There's something truly special about seeing a show unlike you've ever seen before, but that also proves to be a bit daunting, especially when tasked to write about it. Sol Lewitt's 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art' which was first published in a 1967 issue of *Art Forum* often provides a level of clarity whenever I feel lost. In it he explains the existence of not only conceptual art, but also perceptual art. Barcza's work exists somewhere between them.

The former relies less on aesthetic meaning and more on intent, while the latter is made obvious through a primary reaction to the art that you're looking at, a reflex one might experience in its presence. The press release, written by artist Alfred Boman, leaves much of the show's meaning up for interpretation and avoids particulars. The piece reads more as a stream of conscious writing exercise, jumping from various questions about politics, society, life and beyond, and only actually referencing the artist and her work in a few sentences. Aside from the available descriptions offered by Boman, the most effective way to ingest the show was to jump right in.

The first piece, 'Evade Me Dave' (2016) hangs on a wall to the immediate right upon entering the one-room exhibition. A curious start, it is the only painting with text on it. In crudely-stenciled letters, the titular, capitalized words cut into the ivory-white background of the canvas. Above the writing there's the profile of a menacing half-masked face, with a glaring expression. Upon following the gaze of its eyes, we're met on the adjacent wall by another face, staring back with similar intensity. The swath of gallery wall separating these pieces, in conjunction with the *trompe l'oeil* checkered border around the face peering out from the center, 'Dr. Awkward' (2016) throws the space off kilter in an unnerving manner.



Zoe Barcza, 'Dr. Awkward' (2016). Installation view. Courtesy the artist + Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles.

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Derosia

Lauren MacKenzie Noice, AQNB, December 5, 2016

On the opposing two walls we encounter a series of three triptychs. Each creates the illusion of a body reclined in three parts; a head, a maze and the feet. 'So Ida, Adios' (2016) is the only apparently female body and the only piece whose body parts are sketched in blue. The maze linking the head and feet of the composition is also the only one shown with a line wandering its way from one seemingly random beginning to an equally trivial end. The following two 'bodies' are both men's — 'Bob, Level Bob' (2016) and 'Poor Dan is in a Droop' (2016) — both sketched in red, and each of their respective mazes appear blank besides the complex net of angles and dead ends.

Isolated and compartmentalized on separate canvases (each with the same palindrome title, intrinsically joining them as a set), the series is reminiscent of an exquisite corpse. Although the feet and head paintings stylistically go together, drawn in the same monochrome, sketched-outline style, the maze in between each set becoming the most cryptic and intriguing part of these anatomies.



Zoe Barcza, 'Dr Awkward' (2016). Installation view. Courtesy the artist + Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles.

Wholly to our benefit, the press release avoids telling you exactly what the show is about, a vague indication that we, the viewers, are on our own: "what is it that you are looking for? Are you some kind of detective??" There is comfort in drawing seemingly obvious conclusions between the reversible titles (referencing the cyclical nature of life), while the mazes hint at complexity. The physical and philosophical tangling of human insides and the clinical 'vibe' of *DR AWKWARD* presents a layer of perceived information that shines through. Here, the power of experience, of wandering through the exhibition space is vital to its comprehension and success.**

Zoe Barcza's 'Dr. Awkward' is on at Los Angeles' Ghebaly Gallery, running from November 12 to December 23, 2016.

SFAQ

ZOE BARCZA: DR AWKWARD



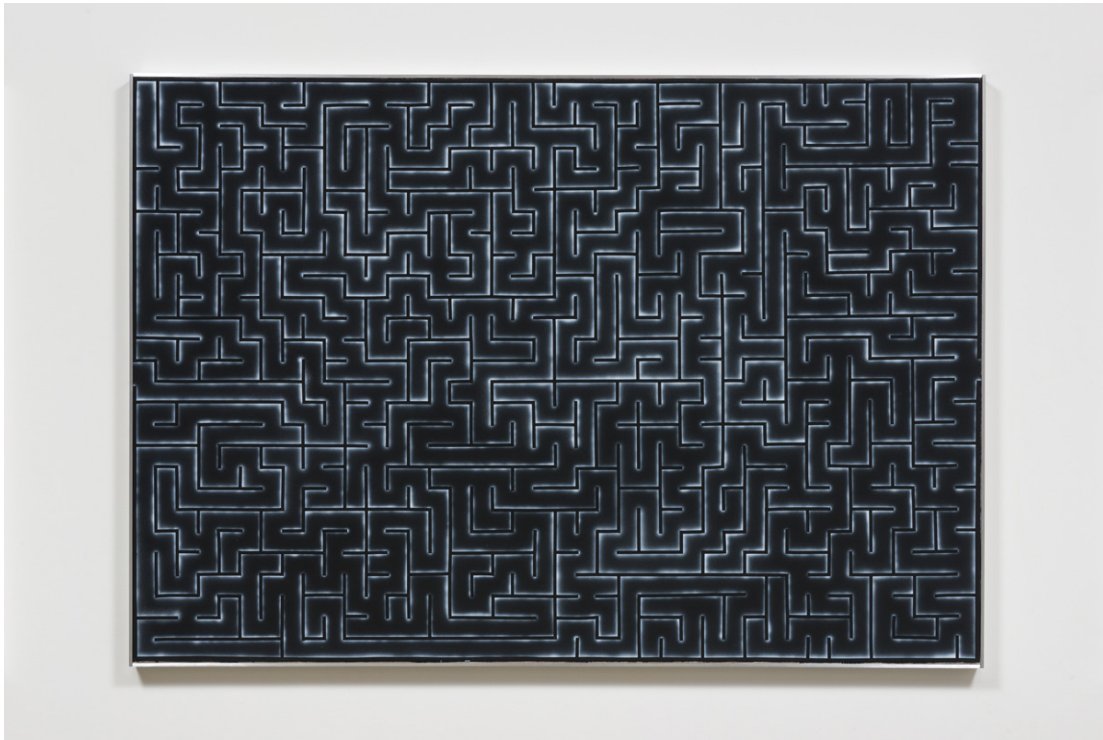
Zoe Barcza, *So Ida, Adios*, 2016. Installation view, Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles. Photo: Jeff McLane

I'm inside an anatomical theater. That, I'm sure of. Where and who I am in this theater is still unclear to me. It's likely that I occupy multiple locations and roles simultaneously. The autopsist, the lecturer, the student, the corpse, or even the hound that laps the blood from the alley gutter. This metaphor of medical staging has best come to describe my feelings about the current reality. In the wake of the 2016 presidential election, something has seemingly died. A dream? An ideology? A collective body? A delusion? Like most things, this death isn't wholly good or bad. It's just here on a surgical table, unimaginably complicated and subject to dissection and study. Whatever knowledge is gained from the ensuing scientific or analytical theatrics, it is ultimately misunderstood. Luckily, the psychological space I inhabit while experiencing *DR AWKWARD*, Zoe Barcza's latest exhibition of paintings at Ghebaly Gallery, is remarkably similar to my, and much of this country's, current mood.

Upon entering the space audiences are confronted with three large triptychs that crowd the walls directly in front and to the right. To the left there are two smaller paintings which are farther away, have their own walls, and plenty of breathing room. Because of this, the

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Santi Verneti, SFAQ, December 1, 2016



Zoe Barcza, Bob, Level Bob, 2016. Acrylic on canvas and aluminum artist frame. 63 x 43.3 x 1.75 inches. Courtesy the artist and Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles. Photo: Jeff McLane

architecture already sets in motion an awkward and disorienting experience. The first thing to notice after quickly surveying the scene is the palette. Red and blue, black and white. So I put on my conceptual 3d glasses and head for a work titled *So Ida, Adios* (2016) at what seems to be at the center, or at least central. The first panel of the triptych depicts the head of a young woman lying face up, at rest, in peace, or perhaps fully “resting in peace.” Her mouth gapes open and her eyes are almost entirely shut, with just a sliver of eyeball peeking through. The tendrils of her hair succumbing to gravity, framing the side of her thin face with its well-defined chin and cheekbones. Could this be a self portrait? It bares hints of resemblance to the artist. At least to images of her that I have seen online, but that may be neither here nor there. A bonus easter egg, maybe.

I decide to leave that speculation behind on my way to the second panel which reveals a large maze. Entry and exit points are found at the left and right sides of the rectangular canvas. The black walls of the maze are accented with a white outer glow. A hard edged red line runs along a direct course through maze’s path. In the third panel a set of feet, disproportionately larger in scale to the head in the first panel despite the canvases being the same size, leaves one wondering. Does the maze take the place of the torso of this body? Do the panels have less to do with each other than is implied by their sequencing? Things are getting weird here. The next two triptychs, *Bob, Level Bob* and *Poor Dan Is In A Droop* (both 2016) mostly follow suit with the exception of a couple key differences. For starters, it’s

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Santi Verneti, SFAQ, December 1, 2016

probably safe to say the second figure's head is not human, and the third's belongs to a man. The ogre-like creature and the man's eyelids are not shut, but instead wide open, revealing blank eyeballs, and they are painted in red instead of blue. Then there's the fact that the lines connecting the maze paths in the center panels for these two works are absent, and the man's maze is white instead of black. I can't help playing games when they are placed before me, so like an obedient participant, I went about solving the other two mazes and became struck by how amusing, clever, and humorous the device is. Abstract op art meets children's game meets art appreciation lesson meets dark allusion to the internal body. The airbrush technique here and in the other paintings is remarkably impressive for someone who has claimed they learned how to airbrush paint by looking at Youtube videos on motorcycle refinishing and studying examples from Heavy Metal Magazine to prog-rock album covers. The viewer's eyeballs dart around the canvas, as if forensic pathologists struggling to draw a line of conclusion from a fresh body, or art authenticators deconstructing every inch of a gesture in a painting that could be the missing link in so and so's oeuvre. We've seen Barcza employ this maze technique earlier in her solo exhibition *Texas Liquid Smoke*, at Loyal Gallery in Stockholm. There, the titles were much more insinuating, such as 'Erotic Maze Painting (Young Lady and Witch).' Figures were imbedded into the image of the maze, so that you "exited" through an image that was accompanied by a titular description. Here Barcza has separated the maze from other images, complicating not just our role and goal in the maze, but the maze's purpose as well. Whatever role the audience takes on, Barcza's role is certain and undoubtable. She's off stage, sitting in the director's chair, scalpel firmly in hand.

The creepy and clinical atmosphere inherent to the white cube is amplified by Barcza's palette and the ghostly application of airbrush paint. Not to mention the cold, thin, sleek aluminium frames around each painting. As you approach *Evade Me, Dave*, the creepy factor ramps up to 11. It's easily the most complex and haunting work in the exhibition. The work's title is painted directly onto the canvas in the styling of letters. The solid black 'E's on the canvas highlight the linguistic asymmetry within this alphabetically symmetrical palindrome. Above the text floats a fantastically terrifying visage. A figure that, under the talented hands of Barcza, evades becoming an easily recognizable, or fully fleshed-out image (if there even is such a thing). This evokes a sense of constant becoming, of riding the perpetual ebb and flow between abstraction and representation that is inherent in all painting. It's a ghastly trip, resembling something like the desperate illustrations physicists have made in attempt to render a 2d visual model of string theory (google image search "string theory"). For me, it also looks like a panel out of some psychedelic horror comic, one that I desperately want to get my hands on. If *Evade Me, Dave* is the strangest work in the show, the most overtly comical one is on the far wall, *Dr. Awkward*. Here the viewer is confronted with a cartoonish face, scrunched into an Op art landscape nightmare. Of course, your silly-ass face is on the other end of this portal staring back. If you don't laugh while looking this painting you're probably lying on a cold metal table with your eyes rolled back into your skull.

I'll admit that when I heard Barcza had a solo exhibition of paintings at Ghebaly Gallery, I calibrated my expectation a bit low. Over the last few years we've come to know her practice as one that includes a variety of media, sculptures, and paintings in the form of installations. The prospect of seeing what I thought would be just a few paintings in a room disheartened

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Santi Verneti, SFAQ, December 1, 2016

me. Thankfully, this show is deeply, and fascinatingly immersive. It tunnels into some dark reaches of your psyche, burrowing and implanting itself for future reanimation. If considering the exhibition as an immersive installation, then there's something else about it that haunts me. Something that only occurred to me as I was leaving. Unlike mazes, like the ones in the paintings, the entrance and exit to this show are the same, which makes this more of a labyrinth than a maze. You have to leave the way you came in. Maybe I found something at the center of that labyrinth that I didn't expect. Maybe something found me. Something unsettling. Another kind of puzzle. One that's maybe too scary to try and solve right now. Who is Dr. Awkward?



Installation view, Zoe Barcza, DR AWKWARD, Ghebaly Gallery, November 12 – December 23, 2016. Courtesy the artist and Ghebaly Gallery, Los Angeles. Photo: Jeff McLane