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Art **Reviews**

Marsha Pels's Sculptures Offer Little Solace

Pels's work evokes a blinking unease, posing questions about the nature of power in the arenas of sex, war, and religion.

by **Cassie Packard** January 25, 2021



Marsha Pels, "Fallout Necklace" (2018) (all images courtesy the artist and Lubov, New York)

In Marsha Pels's solo exhibition, now on view at Lubov, hard riffs on historical iconographies of women's sacrifice pack a punch. Made twenty years apart, the show's two sculptures attest to Pels's long history of producing outsized, materially driven installations that pose questions about the nature of power in the arenas of sex, war, and religion.

In the main gallery, an absurdly colossal necklace, modeled on [Berlin iron jewelry](#), floats mid-air. Wrought from cast aluminum and steel and inset with glass "jewels," "Fallout Necklace" (2018) hovers between lace and armor. Its ornate tracery harks back to a period during the Napoleonic wars when Prussian women received cast-iron jewelry, sometimes emblazoned with the Prussian king's face, in return for donating their bijoux to the war effort. Pels's version features powder-printed glass cameos with the faces of eight world "leaders," including Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin. There's a sense of blinking unease, the kind that accompanies the receipt of a gift with strings: *What did I trade for this?*

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In a more cloistered space behind a partition, a dangling humanoid figure assembled from cast bronze fetish gear — gas mask, lace-up gloves, corset, and stiletto boots, strung together with wire— holds out a crystalline baby, a modern-day pietà. Made in the wake of a miscarriage, Pels’s “Pieta” (1998) brings the material language of monuments to a messy maternal tangle of power relations, sex, and loss, in this world that so often takes without asking.

Marsha Pels: Solace continues through February 7 at Lubov (5 E Broadway #402, Lower East Side, Manhattan).

<https://hyperallergic.com/616950/marsha-pels-solace-lubov/>

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