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4 Art Gallery Shows to See Right Now

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Marsha Pels

Through Feb. 7. Lubov, 5 East Broadway, Ste. 402, Manhattan; 347-496-5833; lubov.nyc.

Jewels, in addition to being pretty, are symbols of culture and status. They can signify wealth or something less obvious, like patriotic pride. Such was the case with early-19th-century cut-steel and Berlin iron jewelry, which was given by Prussian royals to citizens who donated more valuable gems to help fund military campaigns.

Marsha Pels's "Fallout Necklace" (2018) is a supercharged and supersized version of those unusual pieces. Part of a series called "Trophies of Abuse," it hangs from the ceiling and fills an entire room. The artist has wielded an impressively intricate design from patined cast aluminum and steel, with inset glass portraits of world leaders. They run the gamut from autocratic to democratic — Kim Jong-un to Donald J. Trump to Angela Merkel — all equalized within the display. The necklace has the air of a speculative artifact, an imposing piece of treasure that suggests the distortional effects of power.

Suspended in the next room is a more intimate work that Pels — a longtime sculptor who's invested in mastering materials as much as in crafting large, conceptual installations — made 20 years prior. "Pieta" (1998) creates the phantom form of a woman from a cast-bronze fetish outfit and gas mask. Rather than cradling her child, though, she holds a cast-crystal baby away from her, as if it were an offering.

This exhibition is titled "Solace," but Pels's artworks challenge more than they soothe. Maybe the consolation comes from transmuting complex emotions and weighty observations into objects that are boldly and beautifully precise.

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