

STARS

Brontez Purnell, "Head Rush," *L'Officiel Art*, April 2021: pp. 56–59.

L'OFFICIEL

HEAD *rush*

Legendary artist *Pippa Garner* is an *anomaly*. She lives at once at the *center* and on the *fringes*. Her *latest* show at Stars in Los Angeles explores the *genesis* of creativity itself.

In the November 1973 issue of *Esquire*, a car built by the artist Pippa Garner muscles along California's highways, across the Golden Gate Bridge, and through the surrounding suburbs. The car, a '59 Chevy, is designed to look as if it were about to crash into oncoming traffic when, in fact, it is safely moving with the flow. The secret is that the seats, steering wheel, dashboard—the whole interior—faces the rear of the car. The driver, Garner herself, is literally sitting comfortably within the paradox of absurdism: something that follows the letter of the law, but gleefully antagonizes the *spirit* of the law.

Garner, a trans artist who lives in Los Angeles, describes herself as an "introvert" and an "outsider." There's a kind of record-skip cringe moment that happens when one hears the term "outsider artist"—it could be genuine appreciation of an artist's unique insight or little more than a backhanded compliment. Either way, there is something that feels othering about it, and yet somewhat redundant: in a world where the title "creative" is given to everyone who insists on it, is it possible to claim oneself "outside" of art? Enter Garner.

By BRONTEZ PURNELL
Portrait by REYNALDO RIVERA



STARS



In the early '60s, Garner was studying automobile design at ArtCenter in Los Angeles when she was drafted into the Vietnam War. Upon returning to school, Garner's car designs became more astutely absurdist; she was kicked out. Bouncing between the Bay Area and L.A., she expanded in all directions. Garner became a peripheral member of the Left Coast avant-garde architecture collective Ant Farm, all while promoting her own satirical inventions, such as a palm tree crossed with an umbrella or bunk-bed easy chairs, through both performance and parody catalogues. She acted as a recurring contributor to glossies like *Domino* and maintained a multimedia fine art practice which spilled over onto the canvas of her body as easily as it did into West Coast museums.

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Born outside Chicago in 1942, Garner fits into the pocket of the oft-hallowed legacies of Boomer Left Coast artists who made work as both deep homage to and scathing critique of American consumerism. These were the artists who we consider the prime movers of the Postmodern Art landscape, dreaming it into existence. Beyond the hysteria of #shutupboomer, one need not go very far back to discover that Boomers were actually *pretty fucking cool*, though the coolest ones either died or were severely overlooked. Given Garner's reputation as a firebrand, the latter of these two "tragic" cool-Boomer destinies is perhaps not lamentable, but is in fact fortunate, and the source of her authority as self-styled demiurge. "Outsider artist," for Garner, is not a defiance of categorization; it is a vantage point for observation.

LEFT IMAGE TOP—"Tear-mans (Half Human Half Car)", 1969, by Pippa Garner; "Reversed Car", 1973, by Pippa Garner
MIDDLE—"Palm-tree", 1982, by Pippa Garner

In Garner's latest show, *The Bowels of The Mind* at Stars Gallery in Hollywood, she considers where the spark of creation resides. In the center of the storefront space, a set of cloth balls—vulgar eyes might read them as bean bags—collapse and rise, as though heaving with breath, under a fisherman's net that has been thrown across them. A flickering light bulb levitates on a bent metal rod that emerges from the center of the viscera: an idea, an epiphany.

The title of the show, which is also the title of this central work, unapologetically summons the subconscious. The material reality of the piece is so literal it's almost as if it's winking at you. The privacy of artistic thought is rendered as spectator sport. If we confront the notion that sculpture is, in some form, inspired by the body, it's a small step to read "The Bowels of the Mind" as universal autobiography—about the way that idea comes from breath itself. The message is as profound as it is ergonomic.



THE PAGE—"The Bowels of the Mind", 2021, installation view, photography by Bennett Perez



A pair of vintage T-shirts flank the entrance to the windowed gallery, facing the street. They are in earnest dialogue with one another, respectively reading:

Critic: "Where do you get your ideas from?"
Artist: "The sh*t just pops into my head."

