
REVIEWS PARIS

Garance Früh

Ciaccia Levi, Paris

By Mara Hoberman 𐄂





Garance Früh, *High hopes*, 2025, molded leather, dense polyurethane foam, polyurethane paint, 26 3/4 × 16 1/2 × 3 1/8".

The title “Hard shells, tender skins” described the materiality of the mixed-media sculptures on view in Garance Früh’s recent exhibition and alluded to the many often conflicting ideals associated with femininity. The eight sculptures combined found objects (including teething beads and shapewear undergarments) with Früh’s own fabrications in metal, leather, ceramic, and polyurethane foam. Suggesting nests and wombs, but also cages and traps,

they articulated relationships among fertility, maternity, and entrapment without passing judgment.

Four wall-mounted pieces, *Lure*, *Hatching*, *High hopes*, and *Reach and grasp* (all works 2025) had eerie masklike presences. Their underlying oval bas-reliefs in glossy pale-yellow polyurethane foam looked vaguely physiognomic as they peeked out from beneath stiffened sheaths of molded and laser-cut leather. The polyurethane was carved by a computer-controlled machine following a 3D scan of the inside of a bike helmet, filled, like a basket, with a range of personal items, including a comb, a barrette, and baby toys. The polyurethane carvings functioned as skull-like supports for peach-brown leather that could appear taut and opaque like skin over bone, but that we could sometimes see through, thanks to areas of delicate lattice. Essentially self-portraits, they also suggested broader biological and societal links between femininity and nurturing. Large eggs nestled among the other objects inside the helmets made these works look like hanging nests. Presenting her head (and by extension her consciousness) as a site for the gestation of a new being, Früh suggested an existential incompatibility between selfhood and motherhood.

Conceived as a single work, *Eggs* consists of a dozen ovoid forms in black and white enameled porcelain ranging between less than three inches and about nine inches in height, dispersed throughout the exhibition. A white component the size of an ostrich egg was laid underneath the tentlike sculpture *Muscles lullabies*, which was installed on the floor in the center of the gallery. With its armature of varnished, welded steel covered by tightly stretched peach-hued shapewear (complete with dangling straps and hook-and-eye fasteners), *Muscles lullabies* looked like a giant crinoline fragment.

Hanging from the crinoline, a long strand of teething beads in a similarly fleshy pink was draped gently over the egg like an umbilical cord of sorts. Seeming to represent protection and nourishment while also referring to fashions based on physical confinement and unrealistic beauty ideals, *Muscles lullabies* acknowledges motherhood as both life affirming and life limiting, the sculpture also reflected how femininity is as much about bondage as it is about babies.

Two other wall-mounted works featuring metal and fabric bodices recalled Lee Bontecou's welded-steel and canvas sculptures from the 1960s. Bontecou created optical illusions whereby her sculptures seem to be simultaneously expanding and receding, suggesting both phallus and void; Fröh similarly plays with coded imagery and optics. *As young as you feel* presents two overlaid symbols of confinement: a polyamide elastane corset (whose brand name gives the work its title) and a metal cage. Both elements suggest discomfort and limitation, but as in all the works on view, an element of kink also makes bondage appear sexy and empowering. Like Bontecou, Fröh encourages multiple perspectives. By shifting focus between experiences of maternity and feelings of sexual desire, Fröh reveals a complex and relatable vision of femininity.

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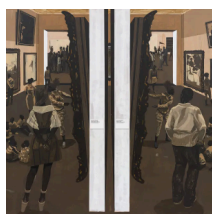
Carmen Winant, *The last safe abortion* (detail), 2024, ink-jet prints, 10' 6" × 24' 6".

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