

Marlie Mul

*Das Budget*

16. 4. – 16. 5. 2026

For the exhibition *Das Budget*, Marlie Mul has produced wall-mounted relief sculptures made using silicone sheets that are cut, folded, and rolled into forms. The wriggly, exoskeletal material is held in place by customized metal rods, and the monochromatic colors are the result of pigments mixed into the liquid polymers.

Mul's interlocking pieces look relatively familiar, like alienated fingers or clay roof tiles, and the translucent colors in the patterns suggest fleshy skin tones. Constructed in varying scales, their soft edged repetition and optical patterns offer minimalist precision, and all of the tenets of geometric abstraction are there.

Mul's sculptural nomenclature has an economy of style that emits a latent wit in intelligently dumbed-down, aberrant forms. Her sculptural lingua franca always seems to circle back to the human, or human-like bodies, with all their attendant physiology, weight, and measure. Silicone, that most efficient utilitarian material, has sent rockets to space and back, sealed the windows of homes everywhere, and, is the go-to material of choice for a space-age 2.0 future that encompasses all things AI and the multi-colored ping of digital media.

Mul parlays such altered material into arresting handmade multiplications of elaborate structures. They may initially look machined, as in Fordist mass production, but they're not. It's the opposite, in fact. One sheet gets poured into a pan-like box, modified with precisely bracketed armature to hold the solidified liquid into place; then the square or rectangle is unpeeled. Slits and holes appear, then disappear, overlapping into the finished form. The individual work titles suggest even more. By calling them "Large Charm (Capsule)", "Large Charm (Pellet)", or simply "Pouch," they suggest a necklace or bracelet wrapped on a figure, or of a container, which in essence is both vessel and void. In mastering plastic control of this most temperamental of materials, Mul has developed a strict methodology that is able to recreate similar geometries *ad infinitum*. Hence the new series mutates like alternating currents in an auto-suggestive sculptural language of recognizable characteristics.

Postwar abstraction breached the wall between high and low when synthetic pigments were invented. Eva Hesse broke new ground with *Schema* (1968) and *Accession II* (1968–69), by operating on the margins of diametrically opposed industrial materials. 1980's neo-geo (Peter Halley's *Cell with Conduit*, 1986; Koons, et al.) gave rise to post-conceptual commentary on sleek consumerism. A sad, cheapened Modernity got cut up, then regurgitated with bittersweet irony. Cool appropriation turned into hot commodity art. Art history became post everything, and everything was up for grabs.

Mul is among the last generation that has lived through and absorbed the last warm analog spectrum that gave way to the digital. Cherry-picking the outmoded master narrative, there is new fodder to be explored. As proxy to droopy corporeal skin, her soft-edged rectilinear grids embed the hushed inaudible sounds of mute personas. Each appears as a near-perfect Stepford wife, eerily cloned into uniformly similar gradients and with alternating chromatic sections.

In the lane of her artistic life, Marlie Mul has resolutely produced seemingly inscrutable objects with self-effacing attention to the detail. She broaches the commercial without being commercial. She understands systems of control and rejiggers its mechanisms. In her corpus of reductive allegories of the human body, faux bone and hair have been used with absurdist intent. Her soft bodies and "skins" are compressed into a composite "figuration" that brings to mind sci-fi currents of synthetic biology, robotics, and automation. Despite their apparent emotional remoteness, the attributes of a vital psychological combustion are what produce Mul's challenging sculptural deviances.

For the new AI apparatus excludes the full emotional weight of the human psyche, and the externally driven producer/consumer price index makes for mechanically cold statistical reasoning. Such are the perversities of the fixed mercantile system that a reassessment of the system itself is now underway. Hence, the exhibition's ironic title lays it all on the line where art and commerce are concerned. In a unity of thought, Mul extracts the most out of the least, fashioning a fiercely individualist sculptural oeuvre.

– Max Henry

