An overwhelming desire to touch is frequently noted when experiencing a Nevine Mahmoud sculpture. In addition to tactile surfaces, Mahmoud’s sculptural installations offer an exploration of nature and the body through dark humor, shifting forms, unexpected colors, and surprising materials. Fragile glass, hard stone, and molded resin compose many of Mahmoud’s objects. At once sensual, ambiguous, and menacing, they evoke lips, breasts, and buttocks as much as fruit, flowers, mechanisms, and toys. *Cherry Viçosa (lush cherry)* (2019), made of pale pink, polished Portuguese marble, represents a fleshy derrière as much as an oversized stone version of a fruit, its cleavage suggesting the separation between the two buttocks. By contrast, the bright-green, powder-coated stem with a coil-spring tip introduces a mechanical element, albeit with a neon pop sensibility. With a dose of humor, Mahmoud’s sensual, provocative objects embody a complex combination of contradictory and shifting narratives.

Based in Los Angeles for the past ten years, Mahmoud relocated to the region after graduating from Goldsmiths, University of London, to attend the MFA program in sculpture at the University of Southern California. At that time, she made individual objects in metal and plaster. California’s stone offerings initially became apparent to the artist during graduate school after a visit to a Los Angeles area stone supplier. Alabaster, calcite, onyx, and marble would present new opportunities for her sculptural practice. Captivated by the unique stone carving setting at Art City Studios, Mahmoud returned to study with JoAnne Duby, her future mentor and friend. Arguably an escape from the conceptual confines of art school rhetoric, Mahmoud pursued an attraction to the demanding process of stone carving. And Duby, now seventy years old, is a rarity of her generation as a woman stone sculptor.

Stone sculpting has traditionally been a male-dominated craft, often attributed to the rigor and muscle required to carve stone. Mahmoud’s attraction to stone is multifaceted. The focused, tactile, and subtractive approach—carving, grinding, sanding, polishing—is both methodical and meditative, which appeals to the artist. Each stone’s qualities, such as color and opacity, are matched to her vision for a sculpture’s subject and concept. Not a purist, she mixes media within objects. Like *Cherry Viçosa* with its marble cherry and stainless-steel stem, *Triple Swell* (2020) combines marble and glass in another alluring object. Mahmoud renders hard forms as visually soft. Here, Azzurro Aquamarina blue marble from Brazil forms a giant peach with three fleshy swells—created by three cleavages—on which a single, shiny blue-glass teardrop trickles. Artist Patrick Jackson wrote, “As always, there’s a mixture between refining her materials and experimenting with new ones, then bringing them together and considering the juxtapositions with the provocative content.”

**COVER:** *WAX LIPS SEATED*, 2021. PHOTO: ED MUMFORD; COURTESY THE ARTIST AND M+B, LOS ANGELES
CHERRY VIÇOSA (LUSH CHERRY), 2019.
INSTALLATION VIEW AT NINA JOHNSON, MIAMI. PHOTO: COURTESY THE ARTIST AND NINA JOHNSON, MIAMI
The subtle tonalities of the pale blue stone are offset by the strong blue of the glass teardrop. In recent years, Mahmoud has been engaged with the glass medium—cast and hand-blown—which offers an expansive palette of vibrant color and textures. *Toy/Intruder (2020)* exemplifies this idea with its shiny, bright pink breast form extruded through and cinched by brushed aluminum hardware and tipped with a hard resin nipple. The duality of its title (her leading titles infer the sexual humor) offers both playful and dangerous associations. A friendly pink fluid form could be a baby’s rattle or teething toy, but at three feet in height and made of hard glass, it’s also a menacing, eroticized, and comical breast/phallus hybrid.

Surreal, fragmented body parts with shifting associations abound throughout Mahmoud’s sculpture with specific connections to a feminist discourse. The artist stated, “I think it is my way of inscribing a kind of authorship into the works. I am a female artist, I identify that way and have been identified by culture as such. I think women artists are under-represented and historically overshadowed by male artists. So, I want to write the female form, from my perspective, continually into the history of sculpture. Many have done this before me, and I intend to join forces.” Mahmoud has noted specific forebears in this feminist art history, including Louise Bourgeois (French American, 1911–2010), Alina Szapocznikow (Polish, 1926–1973), and Kiki Smith (American, born Germany, 1954), who have also worked with the fragmented female form.

In *Pink Tongue Slide (2021)* the artist repurposes a plastic slide from a children’s playset. Custom pink autobody paint transforms the object into a slick monochromatic sculpture. With the object’s connection to automobiles (high-gloss automotive paint) and surfboards (abstract slab form), Southern California’s Finish Fetish movement of the 1960s has found a new counterpart in the artist’s work. Finish Fetish focused on slick, machine-made surfaces in abstraction and minimalism. There are aspects of these qualities in Mahmoud’s work, but more clearly a shift to emphasize the body. The pink slide doubles as an undulating tongue emerging from a wall, disconnected from a face or body, both taunting and comical.

Three blown-glass sculptures continue this dialogue taking control of the fragmented female body: *yellow Toy, Leg (Lila)*, and *Leg (lilac)* (all dated 2020). Generally similar in size and form, the objects are equally dissimilar in color, transparency, and references. From a stretched-out squash, a toy bat, and an elongated breast to a ham leg, a woman’s leg, a cyborg limb, and a closed flower bud, the three works inspire curiosity and invite comparison presented on a raw plywood, customized stepped platform designed by the artist.
PHOTO: DANIEL Terna; COURTESY THE ARTIST AND SOFT OPENING, LONDON
PHOTO: PAUL SALVESON; COURTESY THE ARTIST AND SOFT OPENING, LONDON
LIPSTICK SLIDE, 2021.
PLASTIC AND AUTOBODY PAINT; 54 X 20 X 9 IN.
PHOTO: EVAN BEDFORD; COURTESY THE ARTIST
AND M+B, LOS ANGELES
Mahmoud takes a great interest in display furniture and structures, never opting for the traditional, white, geometric pedestals and risers. Instead, she designs alternatives, and harnesses the objects with metal hardware, or presents them on tinted-Plexiglas plinths and colored-Formica pedestals that unite with her objects and the overall exhibition environment. The material and formal interplay between the highly polished, curvaceous, colored glass sculptures and the matte-finish, hard-edged, plywood steps present a fascinating contrast in form and function. Mahmoud offers that steps also are a surrealist convention, a theatrical stage for these living objects.

An ordinary, white, molded plastic patio chair serves as the stage or pedestal in the sculpture Wax Lips seated (2021). Red lips have enduring associations with female sexuality, epitomized by surrealist Salvador Dalí and Edward James’s Mae West Lip Sofa (1937-38). The sexy female lips were plucked from Dalí’s earlier work paying homage to American actress Mae West’s pout. Mahmoud’s extra-large, disembodied red resin lips allude to that history of male desire, but she also proposes darkly humorous criticism. Oversize wax lips were originally intended as Halloween fun for children, but in today’s culture, full lips represent female desirability and have come to resemble real women’s lips augmented by plastic surgery. The vivid red lips balanced on the simple white plastic chair portray a desirable woman seated in a chair as well as a playful pop aesthetic, a pair of graphically strong objects in juxtaposition. Deeply engaged in exhibition design, the artist extends her interest in unusual material combinations—like resin lips and a plastic chair—by intuitively placing a variety of related objects in her exhibitions. Across the gallery space, erogenous body parts commingle with lush fruit and built structures. Thus, Mahmoud invites the viewer to draw associations within and between each sculpture.

In Nevine Mahmoud’s MATRIX presentation, conversations connect and blur the lines between surreal content and a pop aesthetic, the handmade and the manufactured, art objects and display furniture, and longstanding notions of masculinity, femininity, and eroticism. Artforum critic Gilda Williams perfectly captures the discomfiting, sensory experience: “Mahmoud’s living sculptures create unexpectedly intimate encounters, like accidentally brushing against a stranger’s sweaty skin in a club, complete with the unspoken frisson. Sometimes a peach is just a peach, but not here.”

Patricia Hickson
Emily Hall Tremaine Curator of Contemporary Art
YELLOW TOY, LEG (LILA), AND LEG (LILAC), 2020.
PHOTO: PAUL SALVESON; COURTESY THE ARTIST AND M+B, LOS ANGELES.
Nevine Mahmoud received her BA from Goldsmiths, University of London and MFA from the University of Southern California, Los Angeles. Mahmoud’s first institutional solo exhibition is currently on view at the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery. Other recent exhibitions include Rosa in mano, a three-person exhibition at the Fondazione Arnaldo Pomodoro in Milan; The Artist is Present, curated by Maurizio Cattelan, at the Yuz Museum in Shanghai; Dreamers Awake: Women Artists After Surrealism at White Cube, London; Romancing the Mirror at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Jacksonville, FL; Holly Coulis, Nevine Mahmoud & Christina Ramberg, Simon Lee Gallery, Hong Kong; The Poet, the Critic and the Missing at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; and MADEMOISELLE at the Centre Régional d’Art Contemporain Occitanie in Sète. Notable press includes Artforum, MOUSSE, Art Review, New York Magazine, Los Angeles Times, and Contemporary Art Daily.

4. Salvador Dalí (Spanish, 1904–1989), Mae West’s Face which May be Used as a Surrealist Apartment (1934–35). Gouache with graphite, on commercially printed magazine page; 28.3 x 17.8 cm. Collection of the Art Institute of Chicago; Gift of Mrs. Charles B. Goodspeed, 1949.517.
WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

*Pink Tongue Slide*, 2021  
Plastic, fiberglass and paint  
40 x 16 x 10 in.  
Courtesy the artist and M+B, Los Angeles

*Wax Lips seated*, 2021  
Polyester resin, plastic, plastic chair, and steel hardware  
38 x 32 x 20 in.  
Courtesy the artist and M+B, Los Angeles

*Formica sticks*, 2021  
4 x 4 x 24 in. (each of two)  
4 x 4 x 16 in. (each of two)  
Wood and formica  
Courtesy the artist and M+B, Los Angeles

*Toy/Intruder*, 2020  
Hand-blown glass and polyester resin  
36 x 10 x 10 in.  
Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London

*yellow Toy*, 2020  
Blown glass  
32 x 8 x 11 in.  
Courtesy the artist and M+B, Los Angeles

*Leg (Lila)*, 2020  
Blown glass  
37 x 7 x 10 in.  
Courtesy the artist and M+B, Los Angeles

*Leg (lilac)*, 2020  
Blown glass  
33 x 12 x 10 in.  
Courtesy the artist and M+B, Los Angeles

*Triple Swell*, 2020  
Azzuro Aquamarina marble, glass and acrylic  
19 x 19 x 19 in.  
Courtesy the artist and Soft Opening, London

*Cherry Viçosa (lush cherry)*, 2019  
Portuguese pink marble and powder coated stainless steel  
120 x 19.5 x 19.5 in.  
Courtesy the artist and M+B, Los Angeles

Lives and works in Los Angeles, CA
ARTIST TALK
with Nevine Mahmoud
Thursday, February 3; 5pm exhibition preview;
6pm – artist talk – In museum
Join Nevine Mahmoud in her MATRIX exhibition to
learn more about her approach to finding fluidity,
playfulness, and sensual qualities through hard
materials. Free and open to the public.
Meet in Avery Court.

CURATOR TALK
with Patricia Hickson
Sunday, March 13; 1pm – In museum
Curator Patricia Hickson gives an inside look at
Mahmoud’s purposeful choice of rigorous materials
and exploration of organic forms with lively and
menacing results. Free and open to the public.
Meet in front of the Museum Shop.

MATRIX PAST AND PRESENT
NEVINE MAHMOUD AND PIPILOTTI RIST
IN CONVERSATION
Thursday, April 28; 7pm – Virtual Program
Nevine Mahmoud and Pipilotti Rist (MATRIX 136
in 1998) discuss ideas of aesthetics, play, and
eroticism. Free virtual program.
Visit thewadsworth.org to register.