

It's a Mannequin's World



Lucy McKenzie and Antonio Canova:
Vulcanizzato
3 November–2 April
Pinacoteca Agnelli, 230 Via Nizza,
10126 Turin

Lucy McKenzie has long been interested in mannequins. Since 2007, alongside her artistic practice, she's worked with the designer Beca Lipscombe on the fashion label Atelier EB, making kooky garments and objects. It's the only place I know that sells 'an enamel badge illustrating an armed Amazon woman in a trouser suit'.

McKenzie's latest exhibition is the third in the Pinacoteca Agnelli museum's 'Beyond the Collection' series, which connects the work of contemporary and historical artists. (It's an apt venue for such a time-travelling endeavour: a 1920s Fiat factory repurposed by Renzo Piano in the late 1990s, it looks as though a crystal spaceship has landed on its roof.) McKenzie's interest in fashion clearly influences her art. One problem she and Lipscombe encountered was that mannequins 'lacked the idiosyncrasies and personality traits of their counterparts in fine art'. This prompted her to explore the relationship

between these humanoid objects, statuary and sculpture – a journey that led her to the work of the Neoclassicist Antonio Canova, whose idealised rendering of female beauty finds parallels in 20th-century dummies. His sculptures *Dancer with her Finger on her Chin* and *Dancer with her Hands on her Hips* are displayed at the centre of McKenzie's installation.

She chose *Vulcanizzato* as a title for her conversation with Canova as an allusion to both 'the infernal imagery of Classical Greek culture' and 'vulcanisation', a type of rubber processing common to both the automotive and footwear industries. Turin has a long association not only with Fiat but also with the artist Giorgio de Chirico – who, along with many of his fellow Surrealists, was fascinated by the sense of unreality mannequins evoke.

Two huge canvases form an enigmatic backdrop to the free-standing figures. A naked mannequin from a discount warehouse, cast in fibreglass with a faux-bronze finish, gazes into the distance. McKenzie replaced the heads of two other mannequins with a sculpted portrait of a young partisan, Zoya Kosmodemyanskaya, murdered by the Nazis in 1941. They're dressed

in handmade replicas of a 1921 dress by the couturière Madeleine Vionnet, whose modernity was indebted to Classicism. By contrast, the demure Canova sculptures are as dislocated from lived experience as marble is from flesh and blood.

The backdrop was painted, in McKenzie's words, 'in the spirit of that originally executed by Felice Giani in 1814' – he had produced a preparatory study for an unrealised monument to Canova, who died in 1822. It depicts an interior inhabited by two of Turin's famous sons: the architect and designer Carlo Mollino, relaxing in an armchair with a copy of *Domus*, and the industrialist Giovanni Agnelli, holding sheets of paper. The table in front of them is covered in colour samples (and an open copy of *Wol*, perhaps for inspiration), while the room is crowded with a vase of tulips, a spiral staircase, an antique foot, a room divider and fitness equipment. The adjacent painting is a trompe l'oeil of an old wall and a private garden; to its right, an empty Turin streetscape. There are worlds within worlds here. Time is slippery and meaning elusive. It's as compelling, and as baffling, as a hallucination © Jennifer Higgie is an author and critic

One of two murals for the display of statues, 2023, acrylic and oil on canvas, 3 × 5.5m