

# NO MAN'S LAND

FRAN  
LEBOWITZ

JENNY HOLZER / KAMALA HARRIS / AIDY BRYANT / JAMEELA JAMIL



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STORY—COLLEEN KELSEY  
PHOTOGRAPHY—AMANDA HAKAN

# Genesis Belanger— Objects of Our Artifice

SCULPTOR GENESIS  
BELANGER CARICATURES.  
GENDERED IMAGERY AND EXPOSES  
THEIR ARBITRARY MEANINGS



*Sharp  
tongues  
extend  
out  
from  
lipstick  
tubes  
and  
lighters*

The first time I saw a work by Genesis Belanger I wanted to go over and squeeze it, despite the implicit invisible social contract between viewer and artwork: *please, do not touch.*

In Belanger's work, sharp tongues extend out from lipstick tubes and lighters. Cigarettes crawl like cartoon millipedes, while disembodied fingers reach through the surface of a paper-wrapped flower bouquet. A wooden-heeled clog, adorned with a decorative pom-pom, grins a toothsome smile. Oversized pills the length of a pinky finger look cute, rather than lifted from the cover of a first-edition copy of *Valley of the Dolls*. In slightly desaturated shades of confection-colored pastels, these *objets* have a fluid, taffy-soft tactility that is inviting but leaves a sinister sweetness in your throat. I had the unsettling feeling that her work could come to life at any moment.

The uncanniness is by design. For the past three years, the New York-based artist has sculpted a continuing series of sly, surrealism-injected consumables out of porcelain and clay that read as critical case studies for the feminine experience and how it has been bought and sold.

Belanger's studio, located on the fourth floor of a building on an industrial strip wedged between McCarren Park and the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, is clean, bright, and meticulously organized. A kiln sits in the corner like an engine at rest. She shows me a piece that will be exhibited at Galerie Perrotin on the Lower East Side—a vanity strewn

*DISEMBODIED*

*FINGERS*



*REACH*

*THROUGH*

*THE*



*SURFACE*



with ceramic renderings of an ashtray, a cosmetics compact, nail polish, perfume, a bottle of popped Champagne stuffed with a limp hot dog, and a sentient ice cube of an eyeball spilling out of a knocked-over glass.

The vanity is the latest arena of fascination for Belanger, who has also made work about gentlemen's clubs and kitchen counters. "I have an interest in spaces that, to me, almost seem arbitrarily gendered," Belanger says. "A lot of images online of vanities are from films of woman characters that were 'hysterical.' I was thinking about this hysterical woman and the idea of female hysteria being a mental disorder. There are contemporary manifestations, like a 'hot mess.' What are the signs of a hysterical hot mess? Pills, spilled drinks, lots of makeup. How can I make it feel even more ridiculous?"

Before getting to work, Belanger pulls reference material from the internet and studies her subject's political or historical moment. "I think about these spaces as sets for a narrative to unfold," she says. A valuable source of research were the years the 40-year-old New England native spent working as a prop stylist on advertising jobs. "Being in the industry, it was fascinating to me how constructed all of our images are," she tells me. "I was also really impressed with how effective this method of working was in creating desire."

Belanger first started sculpting ceramics while getting her MFA at Hunter College. "I didn't see a lot of contemporary art and I didn't really have an idea about what

*It leaves a  
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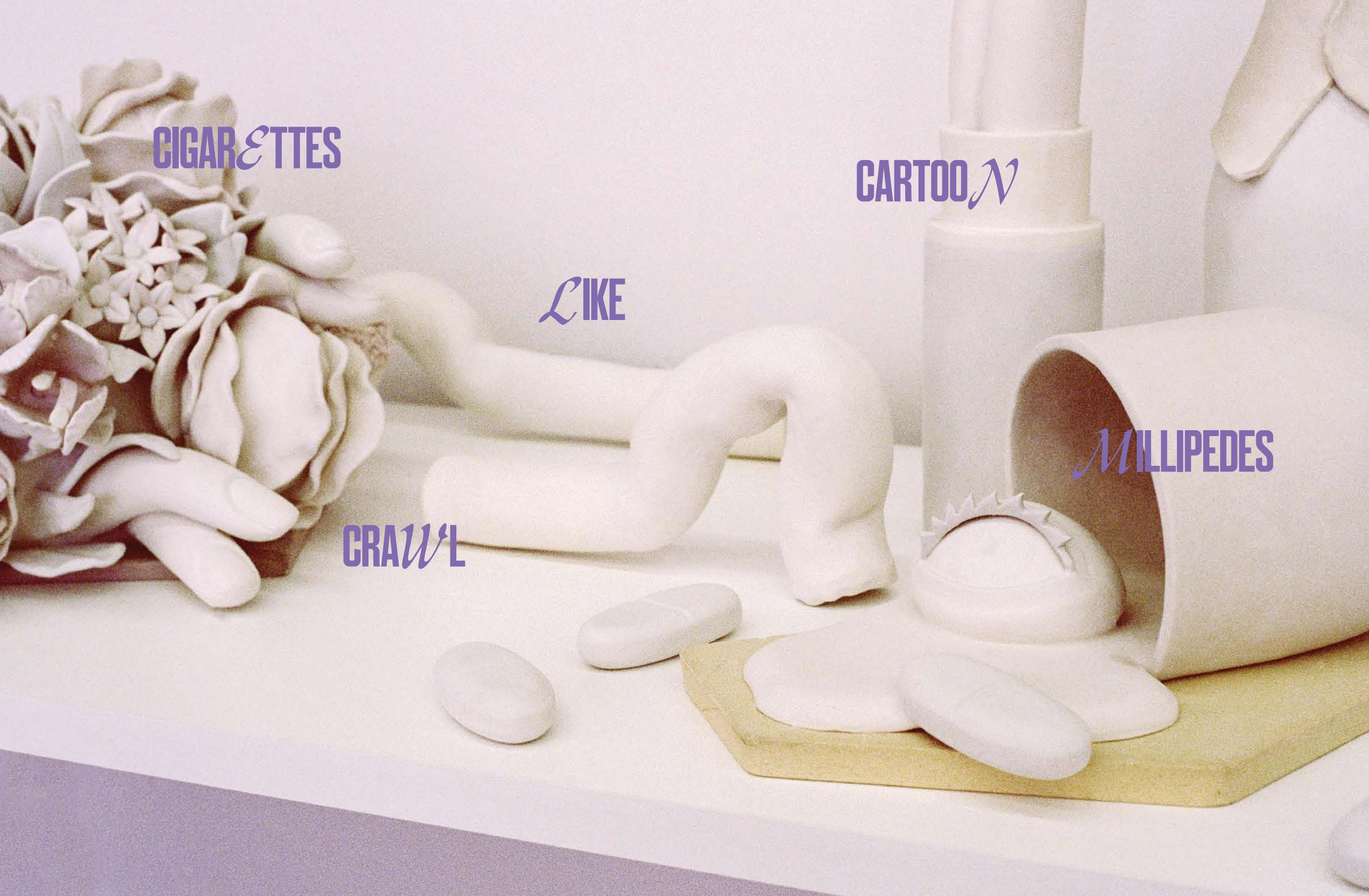
**CIGARETTES**

**CARTOON**

**LIKE**

**CRAWL**

**MILLIPEDES**



*A sentient ice cube of an eyeball spilling out*



an artist was," she says. "I thought any person in a creative field was an artist. So I really didn't discern between art and design."

She constructs each of her pieces out of sheets of clay, tinkering with pigment to find the exact shade of prescription saccharine. She returns to certain motifs again and again, like the cigarette, which was originally marketed to women in the 1920s as a vehicle for liberation. She refers to these things as "weighted symbols," which also include bitten apples, flowers, and hands. "I really like how an articulated finger can be a stand-in for the whole body," she says. "You realize in all vintage advertising and contemporary advertising, there are random women's well-manicured fingers in everything."

A pair of lamps entitled *Stepford Wife/Sister Wife* is an apt summation of Belanger's holistic thinking. Through one of her internet deep-dives, she came across an online forum called the "Stepford Wives Club," that reads like a manual for those with a submissive fetish, but is instead a rallying point for women insistent on maintaining the patriarchal order. Belanger's lamps, dressed in high-necked, bell-sleeved dresses reminiscent of the wardrobe of the 1975 film, put the female form on an eerie pedestal. "I think if you make anything beautiful it instantly creates a desire," Belanger says. "So, I try to make objects of these absurd things, but I try to make them as luscious and beautiful as possible."

