

ARTFORUM



Lydia Ourahmane, *bronze belly III*, 2019, bronze, sealed lead, bust 33", waist 26", hip 36".

Lydia Ourahmane

BODEGA

167 Rivington Street Lower Level East
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This is not obvious when you first enter Lydia Ourahmane's "low relief," but the entirety of the gallery floor has been mopped with antiseptics. The atmosphere is surgical, cloying, and yet intimate. Also not apparent is that the show's central bronze sculptures, cast with the exact measurements of the artist's abdomen, have been implanted with lead, which will slowly creep into the bronze and mutate the color. Titled *bronze belly I–*

IV, 2019, these works are laid on the ground, naked and vulnerable, pelvic bones tilting upward.

Renée Falconetti as a weeping Joan of Arc in Carl Theodor Dreyer's 1928 silent film has become something like an emoticon for art-theory invocations of feminine suffering. Ourahmane's plaited hair, which she cut off in the gallery and left like an artifact, seems to me the image's antithesis. In an interview the artist said, "materials I use often have lived through social, political, or economic tensions, and they do carry that weight." With a truly radical understanding of what it means to *make* a sculpture, Ourahmane trusts an object to signify female pain better than a human face, lets ten years of her hair insist on its own register of language.

Tucked behind the show's sculptures, a cryptic wall text, composed by Ourahmane with the writer Carlos Kong, avoids disclosure and privileges a demure withdrawal. It hits a tone between "cooler-than-you" girl talk and a recollection shaped by the kinds of excisions trauma imposes. The reader is left with both a desire to access that artist's intimate history and the knowledge that they won't get the whole story. That's all right. Those struck by the tender poignancy of "low relief" are struck immediately, intuitively. The words come later.

— Theadora Walsh