



**Shahryar
Nashat**

**CC
VA**

**Skins and
Stand-ins**



**Carpenter Center
for the Visual Arts**

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Skins and Stand-ins**

Oct 29, 2015–Jan 10, 2016

Shahryar Nashat

The work of Swiss artist Shahryar Nashat (b. 1975) has been included in the Venice Biennale (2005, 2011) and the Berlin Biennale (2014). He has exhibited his work in venues such as Palais de Tokyo, Paris; Kunsthaus Zurich; Haus der Kunst, Munich; Tate Modern, London; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Art Unlimited, Basel; and Frieze Projects, London. Upcoming exhibitions include Portikus, Frankfurt (2016, solo); Schinkel Pavilion, Berlin (2016, solo); and Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2016, group).

Shahryar Nashat uses photography, sculpture, performance, and video to disrupt and reframe acts of looking in order to bring the uninvited or disregarded into the forefront. He works with figurative and abstract sculpture to push against frequently circulated—and often idealized—canonical representations in visual and intellectual culture. His impulse is to direct our gaze toward the appearance of objects and movement of human bodies that art history, modern dance, sports, Minimalism, fashion, and advertising have ignored or pushed aside. Nashat thus draws attention to and prioritizes the vulnerable and the fragile—the seemingly imperfect. And as part of this process of reframing the way we see things, he emphasizes the permeability of human skin and its susceptibility to scratches, punctures, and tears. In doing so, he fixates on both the concept and construction of the prosthesis. This extension and support for the body is laden with great potential for release from deeply engrained interpretations, and thus expectations, of how a body should look, move and perform, something other than notions of perfection—something that is independent and autonomous from canonical orders.

Installed on Level 1 of Le Corbusier's 1963 Carpenter Center and intervening in the galleries of the adjacent Harvard Art Museums, the exhibition *Shahryar Nashat: Skins and Stand-ins* features a combination of video, sculpture, architectural interventions, and commissions that create a cohesive environment where the sensibilities and physicality of spectators become formally implicated in the artist's inquiries.



Hustle in Hand, 2014

This video interweaves two scenes: the first, an outdoor setting in a quiet urban space with two protagonists, a woman and a man, whose torsos and arms are the focal point while faces are (mostly) withheld from viewers. They undergo a series of repeated movements and transactions (eating fried chicken, counting money, putting on and taking off a coat) where each time the action is the same but slightly different, revealing the inability of humans to engage identically in each and every iteration of performance. The scenes include split-second shots of the woman flexing her arm and the man's face. This video footage of the performers is interspersed with a second scene inside a museum. The protagonist in this narrative is a dodecahedron—about the size of a basketball—safely installed on a pedestal inside a vitrine in a gallery. The geometric shape with twelve flat surfaces, one of Plato's five solids and long theorized as a sign of perfection, is the visual manifestation of mathematical ideals. For Plato, it symbolized the cosmos and the perfect order of all things. In Nashat's video, the dodecahedron is personified with a voice vying repeatedly for the attention of spectators. Our gaze is aligned with the camera lens, which frequently drifts away distracted by a nearby camouflage painting by Andy Warhol that never comes fully into focus.



At the Carpenter Center, *Hustle in Hand* is projected onto a wall constructed especially for the video. The integration of projected image with sculptural form joins seemingly disparate parts into a unified whole comparable to the nearby sculpture *Two Thighs Rooted in Marble*. Whereas the two brass forms are essential to the marble plinth, the video image of *Hustle in Hand*, too, appears perfectly embedded into the material, uniting both image and surface into a kind of projection-sculpture. The video installation is conceived to intersect with one of Le Corbusier's iconic columns (or *pilotis*) that he and other modernist architects relied on so dearly to release walls of their weight-bearing responsibility, providing opportunity for the majestic screens of windows that frame views for spectators, inside and outside the building. Indeed, the large floor-to-ceiling windows illuminate the interior, and Nashat has elected to counter the typical wash of sunlight in the space by placing magenta filters over the glass. He uses Le Corbusier's signature architectural qualities to create a glowing atmosphere for *Hustle in Hand*, *Two Thighs*, and other sculptures titled *Beach* and *Muscle*, immersing and uniting spectators, video, sculpture, and architecture into a cohesive composition.



Beach, 2015
Muscle, 2015

A bench frames our perspective—it directs our attention to a particular scene, setting, or focal point. A position of authority, such as a park service, museum curator, or public transit office, determines the site and position of a bench. Nashat uses the form of a bench within the context of exhibition and museum displays to draw on its function as a source of repose and respite as well as its authority to isolate the attention of spectators. In the two sculptures *Beach* and *Muscle* (pictured), the artist uses the bench form—exaggerating the typical variegated marble surfaces and solid weightiness—to place spectators in situations where their bodies and perspectives are arranged within the overall spatial composition of the installation. They are framed, as it were, into repose. Nashat’s titles further reinforce these intentions, where “beach” is often a place of relaxation and contemplation, while “muscle” simultaneously conjures parts of the human body and the substantive strength—marble, granite—associated with museum benches.

At the Carpenter Center, Le Corbusier’s design on Level 1 includes a pair of permanent, concrete, L-shaped benches, one sited on the inside while the other directly opposite is outside in the plaza area and visible through the plate-glass windows. The architect, too, was well versed on the power of the bench to situate perspective and create a social space. Nashat and Le Corbusier explore and acknowledge the critical role of the spectator-cum-performer as essential components in the experience of art and architecture.





Two Thighs Rooted in Marble, 2010

The pedestal is a base for an object that sets it apart from the architecture, signifying a certain remove from the surroundings and staging a relationship between spectator and object. It usually frames the way an (art) object is experienced and it is typically, but not always, distinct from the object on display. In *Two Thighs Rooted in Marble*, the slick green marble pedestal presents itself at first as a standard (albeit superior) base on which a pair of identical, polished brass poles stand tall. Upon closer inspection, however, viewers discover that two holes have been drilled into the stone in order to insert the brass objects. These knobby rods—which could be interpreted as abstract figures or dildos—draw on our familiarity with this scenario of pedestal and object combined with the recognizable appearance of twentieth-century abstract sculpture (Romanian artist Constantin Brâncuși comes immediately to mind) only to point our attention to ways in which these are fragments of an entire sculpture that, in fact, includes the marble pedestal. This interest in bodily fragmentation is further emphasized by Nashat's title, while also visually overlapping with his exploration of parts of the human body explored in other works—from a scraped elbow and pair of torsos in his nearby video *Hustle in Hand* to the figurative sculptures he pulled from the Harvard Art Museums' storage, such as the disembodied *Head of a Girl* (ca. 1913) by Wilhelm Lehmbruck.



Private Practice

This intervention comprises a selection of twentieth-century Symbolist and Expressionist figurative sculptures culled from the storage of the Harvard Art Museums by Nashat and arranged in Gallery 1510 of the Busch-Reisinger Museum. The gallery has floor-to-ceiling windows and, not without coincidence in this context, frames a view of the adjacent Carpenter Center. Here, works such as *The Dancer* (1913) by Georg Kolbe are placed next to Gerhard Marcks's *Prometheus Bound II* (1948), situated atop pedestals that are raw, chipped, or painted colors in striking contrast with the sanctioned museum palette. Nashat's selections are sited among existing works on view, such as *Daphne* (1930) by Renée Sintenis and *Kneeling Youth with a Shell* (1923) by George Minne, creating a palpable tension in the overcrowded or unexpected arrangement of figurative sculptures placed at different heights and facing various directions. Nashat disturbs the order of things. His intervention contains one of his sculptures, *Repose on Display*, a bench comparable in size and color palette to the sculptures at the Carpenter Center. The artist adopts the ubiquitous form of museum display tactics, positioning spectators on pedestals comparable to the art, where they become both viewer and performer integrated into other representations of other bodies from the history of art.





Exhibition Checklist

- 1 *Hustle in Hand*, 2014. HD video. 9:40 min. Courtesy of Rodeo Gallery, London, and Silberkuppe, Berlin.
- 2 *Muscle*, 2015. Plaster, oil, wax, steel. 15.75 x 54 x 13.75 in. Courtesy of Rodeo Gallery, London, and Silberkuppe, Berlin. Commissioned by Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts.
- 3 *Beach*, 2015. Plaster, oil, wax, steel. 15.75 x 54 x 13.75 in. Courtesy of Rodeo Gallery, London, and Silberkuppe, Berlin. Commissioned by Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts.
- 4 *Two Thighs Rooted in Marble*, 2010. Marble, brass. 24 x 15.7 x 15.7 in. Collection of Avo Samuelian and Hector Manuel Gonzalez.
- 5 *Repose on Display*, 2015. Plaster, oil, wax, steel. 15.75 x 54 x 13.75 in. Courtesy of Rodeo Gallery, London, and Silberkuppe, Berlin. Commissioned by Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts and Harvard Art Museums.

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Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts

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Gallery Hours 12–7 pm, Wed–Sun
Free and open to the public

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Curated by

James Voorhies
John R. and Barbara
Robinson Family Director

Mission

Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts at Harvard University is dedicated to the synthesis of art, design, and education through the exhibition of existing works and production of new commissions. In addition to a site for exhibition and public events, CCVA is home to the Department of Visual and Environmental Studies and Harvard Film Archive. At CCVA, visual literacy, knowledge production, contemporary art, and critical inquiry seamlessly meet, ultimately enriching the creative and intellectual lives of our audiences. The Carpenter Center is the only building in North America designed by Swiss-born architect Le Corbusier.

Program

The Carpenter Center fosters meaningful engagement among artists, art, and our audiences. Choreographing exhibitions, lectures, residencies, publications, performances, screenings, and informal gatherings, CCVA brings people, ideas, and objects together in generative ways that provide unparalleled experiences with contemporary art.

