

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

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ArtReview

Rebecca Warren

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Seven of the sculptures from the series *Los Hadeans* (all works 2017) in Rebecca Warren's exhibition take their names from a geologic era known as the Hadean period, which passed roughly 4.5 billion years ago. It may not be wise to take these names at face value. In interviews, Warren has claimed a preference for 'misleading titles', which can lead the viewer up the interpretive garden path. Yet, with their inchoate limbs and rough, textured surfaces, Warren's ambiguous forms do look like protohumans recently emerged from the primordial soup (even though the Hadean period only saw the rise of single-celled organisms). Made in clay, then cast in bronze, the twisted postures and gnarled forms of the sculptures bear a resemblance to ancient bog bodies, believed to be victims of pagan sacrifice and long since mummified in peat.

It is in the sculptures' intimations of gesture that their most recognisably human traces can be found. See the thick, splayed fingers issuing forth from the back of *Los Hadeans (II)*, and the hands-on-hips pose of *Los Hadeans (VII)*, whose head, crowned by what looks like a bun, is turned away to face the wall. The proud stance of *Los Hadeans (III)* could be that of a Viking warrior, proffering his shield, or a matador waiting for his bullfighting cape to be run through. There is a violent intensity to the figures' angles and amorphous, fleshlike lumps, which have been forcibly hand-wrought by Warren – her fingerprints remain visible on the surfaces of the works.

The exhibition also includes a number of welded-metal sculptures featuring sharp, polished angles, which are at odds with *Los Hadeans*. These include *Early Sculpture*, a grey patinated steel pillar that rises to eye-level,



Los Hadeans (III), 2017, hand-painted bronze and pompom on painted MDF pedestal, 226 × 100 × 68 cm. Courtesy the artist and Matthew Marks Gallery, Los Angeles & New York

and *Let's All Chant*, a geometric composition of flat, intersecting metal planes painted in a gleaming candy-pink. If Warren's figurative works recall Umberto Boccioni and Alberto Giacometti, then these steel works look back to artists such as Richard Serra and John McCracken, among others.

While Warren cribs, liberally, from her artistic forebears, she is no slavish copyist. In her hands, the weighty arsenal of sculptural materials and strategies – bronze and steel, figuration and geometry – is lent a personal

touch by hand-painted criss-cross patterns and messy splotches in ice-cream tones of mint, vanilla and strawberry. Several works sport cheery pastel-pink and -blue pompoms, and the head of *Three* is topped by a fetching bow. Even the cool, minimalist form of *Let's All Chant* acquires an animated quality, with its diagonal plane, poised between stillness and movement, resting on a pompom. That animation is underscored by the work's title, which it shares with the 1977 disco classic by the Michael Zager Band that exhorts the listener to 'move your body'.

Set next to the exaggerated, overtly sexualised bodies of her early sculpture, the amorphous figures of *Los Hadeans* would be unrecognisable as work by the same artist. Her shift away from the grotesque, which began almost ten years ago, has been replaced by a more subtle anthropomorphising seated in allusions to clothing, to skin tone and to body language. By adding this relatable detail to otherwise antediluvian anatomies and abstract forms, Warren crafts a subtle intelligibility within otherness, a kind of training ground for recognition, which is very welcome today.

Ciara Moloney