

# You shall not think 'the past is finished' / Or 'the future is before us'

by [Nadine Droste](#)

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Giulia Cenci

*dry salvages (lady)*, 2022  
168x124x70cm  
Photo : Blaise Adilon



Giulia Cenci

*figurehead #6*, 2023  
172x70x157cm  
Photo : Blaise Adilon

Huge scissor arms open towards the visitors and welcome them. Scissors without bodies, larger than life. They occupy the space in order to take hold of the viewers, to lead them into the centre of the exhibition, into the installation entitled *progresso scorsio*. Between two almost identical, playfully constructed arms made of mechanical machine parts, of iron, of aluminium, held together by a metal construction, the industrial age seems to tilt into the present, the construct of progress seems to pause between the past and the future.

With the exhibition "être rares", the CAP · Centre d'art de Saint-Fons hosts Giulia Cenci's first institutional solo presentation in France, and, in turn, an artist whose installation practice succeeds in re-perspectivising time as a continuum. The work *progresso scorsio* is thus not only a questioning of the industrial age's narrative, but also an addressing of growth from the perspective of the present: how far can the capitalist logic of exploitation be taken? The earth's resources are finite. The dictum "higher, faster, further" penetrates the human body. In earlier forms of capitalism, according to Karl Marx, the "owner of labour power" brought their "own skin to market".<sup>1</sup> Today, the appropriation of the body takes on a completely new quality, as the individual personality must be brought to market. Giulia Cenci shows the resulting alienation process of people not only from their environment, but above all from themselves, by creating fragmented beings in her sculptures.

Six sculptures can be seen in the exhibition, five of them in relief, arranged serially on a specially retracted wall. They are immersive anthracite grey assembled beings full of contrasts, hollow casts of plants, animal parts and CPR dolls connected with metal rods, half moulded, half skeleton, partly made of industrially manufactured materials such as metal, mineral resin or quartz paint, partly formed from the grown wood of grapevines. The creatures appear to be under tension, as if they are about to make a movement, yet motionless in their expression. Cenci's series of sculptures is entitled *figureheads*, a reference to the historical figureheads that were considered patron saints for sailors. The fact that seafaring must be seen as the driving force behind early capitalist expansion plays a role here. In a separate room the sculpture *dry salvages (lady)*, a three-legged, Janus-faced creature, half human, half animal, half rod, half bone, can be seen. Cenci's title refers to the third part of *Four Quartets*, the great late poem by T.S. Eliot, in which the poet thematizes spiritual survival in the modern age. Based on the four seasons and four elements, they take the reader to four places from Eliot's biography, including the Dry Salvages, a group of rocks off Cape Ann, Massachusetts, which can only be seen at low tide and near which Eliot experienced the rough sea, the elemental force of the sea, in his youth.

Cenci's practice is concerned with the nature of life, the interweaving of humanity, spirituality and the natural world, the complexity of existence, reflection on human struggles and the eternal dance of time.

Eliot writes in *The Dry Salvages*:

"You shall not think 'the past is finished' / Or 'the future is before us'."<sup>2</sup>

Cenci's work makes it possible to experience that, yes, the future cannot be thought of without the past. But also— and this is perhaps the remarkable moment— that the past cannot be thought of without the future. This is the strength of “être rares”, an exhibition of poetic quality.

Notes

1. Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*, Buch. I, in MEW, Band 23, Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1962 [translated by ND].
2. T.S. Eliot, *Vier Quartette / Four Quartets*, Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2015.

“être rares”

Giulia Cenci

CAP · Centre d'art de Saint-Fons

Cur. Alessandra Prandin

02.12.2023 — 10.02.2024

Giulia Cenci

*progresso scorsoio*, 2021  
950x675x214cm  
Photo : Blaise Adilon

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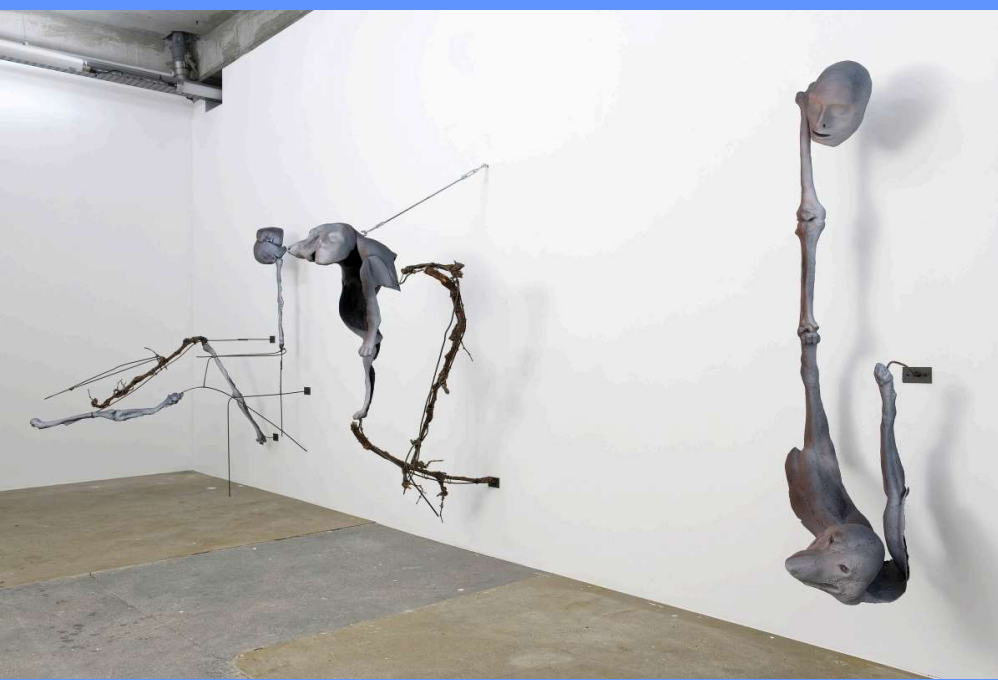
Giulia Cenci

*figurehead #7*, 2023  
154x90x126cm  
Photo : Blaise Adilon



Giulia Cenci

*figurehead #5*, 2023  
145x70x100cm  
Photo : Blaise Adilon



Giulia Cenci

*être rares*, exhibition view, 2023

Photo : Blaise Adilon

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