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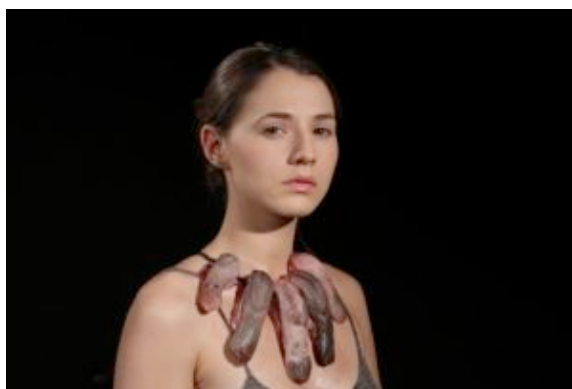
Aesthetica

Alice Maher | Becoming | IMMA @ NCH

by Sarah Allen

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Spanning painting, sculpture, photography, animation and video the work showcased in Alice Maher's mid-career retrospective exists in a state of metamorphosis, a state of 'becoming'. In keeping with the notion of change the show forgoes a chronological layout in favour of rooms that mix media and periods prompting the viewer to uncover the overarching themes and preoccupations of the artist. Playfully renouncing divisions of high and low art, kitsch figurines are cast in bronze (a material typically reserved for monumental sculpture), drawings of humble subjects are hung at a height suggestive of a Classical frieze, decorative illustration is not dismissed but celebrated and the unassuming objet trouvé becomes the uncanny source of new meaning.

In *Ombres* giant figures shrouded in hair simultaneously call to mind Christianity's Mary Magdalene as well as Pop Culture's Cousin Itt and in one element of *Familiar 1* flax reminiscent of Rapunzel's hair cascades from the gallery wall and trails onto the floor. The artist's focus on hair is laden with reference to the female and its recurring presence is only one instance of the feminist undercurrent which runs throughout Maher's oeuvre. The dual video animation *Flora* showcases the artist's distinctive drawing style which seems rooted in the primitive, mythic and medieval. We see figures transition between human, animal and plant forms set to an emphatic sound track which enhances and punctuates the surreal imagery.

Maher's work engages both physically and psychologically. Like the thorns which appear in choice works, her art seems to prick our unconscious, sting our sensibility and remain lodged in our thoughts. Atmospherically lighted and highly considered, *Becoming* confirms Maher's position as a singular artist of immense intrigue.