

ARTFORUM



View of "Shahryar Nashat," 2019.

New York

Shahryar Nashat

SWISS INSTITUTE / CONTEMPORARY
ART
38 St Marks Pl.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari once described desire as a machine. The way Shahryar Nashat grapples with it, especially in the face of death, is compulsively machinic.

In the artist's first institutional solo show in New York, coldly lit and antiseptic spaces—some of which have windows tinted a sickly pink—feature a suite of sculptures called *Bone In*, 2019, which look like chunks of red meat Saran-wrapped around stiff boards. The works are appended with little printouts of statements to a theoretical lover: "Since I met you I've been trippin,'" "Why you acting like you don't know me?" Directly adjacent is *Untitled*, 2018, two spectral X-rays of hip joints marred by glitchy, candy-colored striations. Downstairs is "Rib," 2019, a series of brittle-looking, papier-mâché, walker-like objects. One is bandaged, as if it were a human leg. In the back room is another crutch-sculpture, *Sex Position for Broken Ribs*, 2019, covered in more gummy-looking papier-mâché and bracketed to the wall, ready and eerily willing.

While Nashat's titles can be tongue-in-cheek, the tone is not; everywhere the body is in the process of breaking down, or is already damaged. The sculpture *Start to Beg*, 2019—which looks like a cross between a felled column, a boulder, and a piece of fat redolent of Matthew Barney's slowly shifting Vaseline sculptures—is literally marked by discombobulated bites, scratches, and arm indentations. But it's in the video *Keep Begging*, 2019, where the human gets fully subsumed by the technological. In it, the camera jerkily toggles between a man's elbow and his armpit, zooming in so closely and mechanically that a hair on the former resembles a computer wire, while the latter becomes an alien landscape. A disembodied female voice intones, "Do we go to war?" It's not stated whom the fight is against, but if it's our digital analogues, they're already winning.

— David Everitt Howe