

BLOWOUT is co-organized by the Renaissance Society and The Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts at Harvard University, where it was on view January 31-March 24, 2019. It is co-curated by Dan Byers, John R. and Barbara Robinson Family Director of the Carpenter Center, and Solveig Øvstebø, Executive Director and Chief Curator of the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago.

A publication featuring new texts by writer Sheila Heti, artist and critic Mitch Speed, and an interview with the artist and exhibition curators will be available in Summer 2019.

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LIZ MAGOR
BLOWOUT

"My garden is open, and the deer are everywhere and they eat everything. But they don't eat peonies and lavender, so I have those. Peonies will hold their great big ball of petals for a few weeks, and then all of a sudden, it just goes 'blop,' and it all drops down. I happened to be standing there one day when a peony suddenly just dropped all this stuff, its whole head. It was intense drama from an unexpected source. I thought of the trajectory of a flowering plant. You know; nothing, something, a huge something (the flower), and then nothing again. And so 'blowout' is a word for that last moment in the cycle, when there's no point in saving anything and you let go. The promise in that means, okay, no more hanging on, I'll blow it all, like, I'll put all my stuff on the street."

— Liz Magor

For more than four decades, Liz Magor's practice has quietly dramatized the relationships that develop among objects. Drawing on materials familiar from daily life, she carefully pairs elements of tenderness and exposure, often playing soft against hard, weak against strong, hand-made against mass-produced. Each artwork conjures broad social histories and is driven by intimate, contingent dynamics of power, desire, and vulnerability.

Manipulating found objects much in the way an author gathers fragments of stories, the Vancouver-based artist brings them together here into a newly commissioned body of work that she describes as "a collection of tiny intense narratives." Magor makes use of a wide array of sculptural interventions and spatial arrangements as she brings individual elements together into a complex web of relationships. Across all the works in *BLOWOUT*, the artist is interested in how the objects might express or conceal conflicted emotions through their own physical vocabularies, at once active, awkward, humorous, pathetic, and joyful.

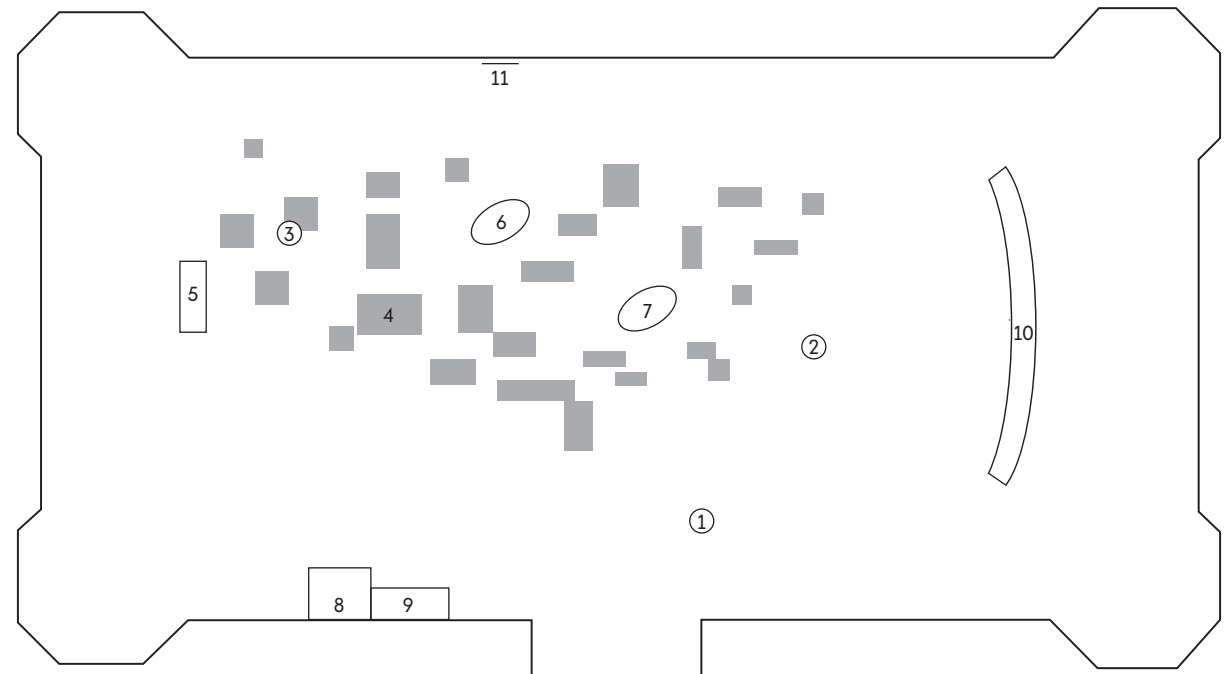
A series of three hanging works (1-3) cascade from the Renaissance Society’s vaulted ceilings: long, messy tangles of colorful yarn, twine, and ribbon ensnare the feet of enigmatic animal figures, which in turn grasp in their arms garment bags and swaths of fabric that dangle to the floor. Linked together in this vertiginous chain, the sculptures embody feelings of insecurity and of care, as if the individual elements had been falling but were caught just in the nick of time.

In another group of works, Magor uses Mylar—a thin, transparent film frequently used in commercial packaging—to construct modular support forms, which she has stuffed with a variety of objects and stacked into a rhizomatic display. As a sheet material, Mylar lacks structural integrity, but when folded on itself to create voluminous boxes, the film develops enough strength to buttress the lightweight materials housed within. This precarious situation sets the scene for the sprawling vignettes of *Pet Co.* (4), *Seasonal* (5), *Closet (fur)* (6), and *Closet (jacket)* (7), in which mangled toys, empty wrappers, rat skins, and other detritus attend to one another with evocative gestural vocabularies.

Two other new sculptures, *Valet (violet)* (8) and *Valet (pink)* (9), elaborate on these themes of modification and display. On top of stacks of IKEA’s Lack tables and Billy bookcases, still in their original packaging, a pair of handbags lay perched, releasing rivulets of swirling purple drool. Their familiar forms are betrayed, however, by their true nature as sculptures of cast polymerized gypsum created in the artist’s studio. This material bait-and-switch forestalls our ability to comfortably sort the objects into categories consistent with our experiences, a strategy that recurs frequently in Magor’s work.

Shoe World (10) features 32 pairs of second-hand shoes that Magor considers “great examples of the near-miss,” items of fashion whose designs reflect certain aesthetic ideals but somehow fall short, whether through inferior production, outmoded styles, or signs of deterioration. The shoes themselves remain unaltered, lovingly placed into customized boxes and surrounded by embellishments intended to heighten their appeal. As tools for shaping the way we appear to others, shoes can be thought of as focal points in the intense narrative entanglements between individuals and the idealized selves they aspire to present. But as tastes and preferences shift, the materials produced to satisfy their demands remain in the world. Through several registers of removal from these original contexts, here the shoes draw parallels to the peony flowers that inspired the exhibition’s title: no longer carrying the particular trappings we find most appealing, but nevertheless continuing to live on different terms.

Throughout these and the other sculptures in the exhibition—including the wall-based work *Toolshed (Woodstain)* (11)—Magor brings into view what she identifies as “the meeting or interface of subjectivity with the material world.” The objects she uses in her work are, to her, receptacles of human dreams—plans that are as precarious and transient as life itself. By collecting these materials, handling them, making alterations, and ultimately arranging them into artworks, the artist seeks to employ them in a new way, as active “agents” who are unstuck from their original associations and capable of producing a range of affect all their own.



1 *Delivery (Red)*, 2018
Silicone rubber, textiles, twine

2 *Delivery (Brown)*, 2018
Silicone rubber, textiles, twine

3 *Delivery (Siena)*, 2018
Silicone rubber, textiles, twine

4 *Pet Co.*, 2018 (all forms in gray)
Polyester film, various textiles, stuffed toys,
miscellaneous paper and plastic items, rat skins

5 *Seasonal*, 2018
Polyester film, foil, paper, stuffed toy, plastic
decoration, tape

6 *Closet (fur)*, 2018
Polyester film, paper, cardboard, fur coats,
stuffed toy

7 *Closet (jacket)*, 2018
Polyester film, paper, cardboard, fabric jacket,
stuffed toy

8 *Valet (violet)*, 2018
Polymerized gypsum, silicone rubber,
IKEA Lack tables

9 *Valet (pink)*, 2018
Polymerized gypsum, silicone rubber,
IKEA Billy bookcases

10 *Shoe World*, 2018
33 pairs of second-hand shoes, 32 mat board
shoebboxes with polyester film lids, plywood
with fabric platform, porcelain mug, coffee

11 *Toolshed (Wood Stain)*, 2017
Wool, oil-based wood stain, acrylic sheet

All works presented courtesy of the artist and Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver; Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York; Marcelle Alix, Paris; and Susan Hobbs Gallery, Toronto.