

ARTFORUM



Jumana Manna, *S-pipe*, 2021, ceramics, glass, wood, metal, 14 x 31 1/2 x 27 1/2".

ANTWERP

Jumana Manna

MUSEUM VAN HEDENDAAGSE KUNST
ANTWERPEN (M HKA)
Leuvenstraat 32
May 2–August 29, 2021

Twisting a line from Natalie Díaz’s poem “Ode to the Beloved’s Hips” for its title, Jumana Manna’s exhibition “Thirty Plumbers in the Belly” conjures agricultural and urban

infrastructures using the limbs of disconnected sewage pipes, the type of mesh dust catchers that cover scaffolding, and ceramics shaped like leftover bread. For *Bread Series (Sidewalk)*, 2020, concrete blocks line the floor around one corner of a wall. Atop the blocks, plastic bags and ceramics emulating broken bits of flatbread are laid out as a kind of public offering. Other limb-pipes are mounted on plinths and meticulously strewn across the bright atrium, where the walls are hung with patchworks of dust catchers in blue and purple. In continuation of and contrast with Manna’s previous sculptural installations on power and potential evasions of tropes of masculinity, this surgical theater of a construction site feels gentle and ripe for possible reconstruction.

In Manna’s artist statement, she describes the suggestion of improvisation in this new body of work as an homage to “taking matters into our own hands.” Yet unlike in her previous work, with its specific historical and geographical contextualization, here it is unclear what exactly is the matter at hand. These pieces all point to internal (and typically invisible) fluids, yet there are no signs of life in the space. The sewage limbs are defunct. The bread remains unconsumed and undigested. The scaffold coverings have caught no dust. We could just as well be stepping into some future archaeological museum, where the display about our times leaves us to marvel at what might have been.

— Hera Chan