

## GARAGE

### **From Stripper Cakes to Gym Selfies, Gina Beavers Paints the Life We Deserve**

By Scott Indrisek  
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Gina Beavers likens herself to an Impressionist painter capturing the everyday landscape; it's just that the world she's rendering is experienced mostly online, and is full of bad selfies, awesome manicures, and lots of junk food. The artist scavenges Instagram, Google, and stock-photo databases for imagery that she then translates into thick, sculptural paintings: a kimchi hotdog here, a make-up tutorial or novelty cake shaped like a male stripper there. "I always think: This could be so elegant," she tells GARAGE. "Then after I end up making it, it looks fucked up in this way. I can't help it—it's the process."

Sometimes fucked up isn't a bad thing—sometimes, it's the whole point. New Yorkers will have a chance to explore the past seven years of Beavers's career in "The Life I Deserve," opening at MoMA PS1 on March 31. Meanwhile, the artist herself has moved out of the city—she's now based in nearby Newark, New Jersey. Her

studio shares a building with a hip-hop recording studio and a factory that produces garments for exotic dancers.

When I visited this week, several works were in various stages of completion. One is based on a found image of hands holding water glasses at various angles; Beavers reckons it's used as a visual reference for digital animation or video game design. She's replicating it in thick acrylic, creating the forms by layering inches of gel medium that she sculpts with a deli knife before painting. The piece is called *Sober*—Beavers has stopped drinking, and the titling is a way to sneak something personal into imagery that is essentially generic or anonymous. "I'm definitely picking things that are saying something, however superficially, about my life," she explains.



Elsewhere in the studio, a painting of a man's torso leans against the wall. The figure's massive pectoral muscles have collapsed, and are oozing down the surface of the work. She has kept the painting as a cautionary tale: Leave the medium time to dry, or bad things will happen. "The Life I Deserve" contains a number of similar works from a series Beavers has made based on Instagram selfies taken by bodybuilders and gym rats. The artist was intrigued by the formal possibilities—literally sculpting images of bodies that were themselves sculpted—but has found that there's not much of a market for the works. Most of the examples at PS1 are being loaned directly from her studio.

"For collectors in this era, to have in their homes—they're less interested in the male figure," she shrugs. "But I like making them. I guess we're all kind of self-fashioning, especially online—trying to make a version of ourselves." A similar thread of self-improvement or transformation runs through most of Beavers's subject matter. It's there in some of her most recognizable images, oversized depictions of women applying lipstick or mascara. The devil is in the details: the brittle cracks on lips, the spidery tendrils of eyelashes.





While Beavers finds most of her imagery online, the imposing, physical heft of her works doesn't always translate onto the screen. Her paintings bulge and flex, pushing their own limits. She's begun incorporating sports references as well—tennis balls, soccer balls—partly as an experiment to see how sculptural she can go. "What's the most three-dimensional form that I can make on a canvas?" she wondered, before crafting shapes out of papier-mâché that she then painted. All the macho athletic trappings also became a way to riff on gender. "Somebody had said, 'oh, your work is really feminine,'" she recalled. "I started making a bunch of lips with these balls on them, a dumb way to answer that: Is it masculine now?"

While Beavers seems reluctant to use her work to plumb her own psychology, the themes she's fascinated by are their own sort of diary. Sometimes that's very basic—an image of french fries and ketchup arranged to form a heart shape, because the artist loves french fries ("very deep," she laughs). But elsewhere, stock imagery—a cheesy picture of a woman who appears to be painting her own lips with an actual paintbrush—can be an oblique way to contemplate her own aspirations and anxieties.

The photographs she finds online are there to be appropriated and transformed into something idiosyncratic and new. Working that way ends up being more interesting than simply starting from scratch. "I don't think that anything that I come up with myself is that interesting," she admits. "It's the effect of being on Instagram—it makes you see how much you are just like everybody else. It follows that things that I come up with about my life, everybody has that—it's not really that distinct or that interesting. There's a flattening of identity. For some reason, I don't really want to delve deeply into my own shit." That might sound like the artist is hiding out, but the sum of all this strange, borrowed imagery ends up being almost achingly personal.