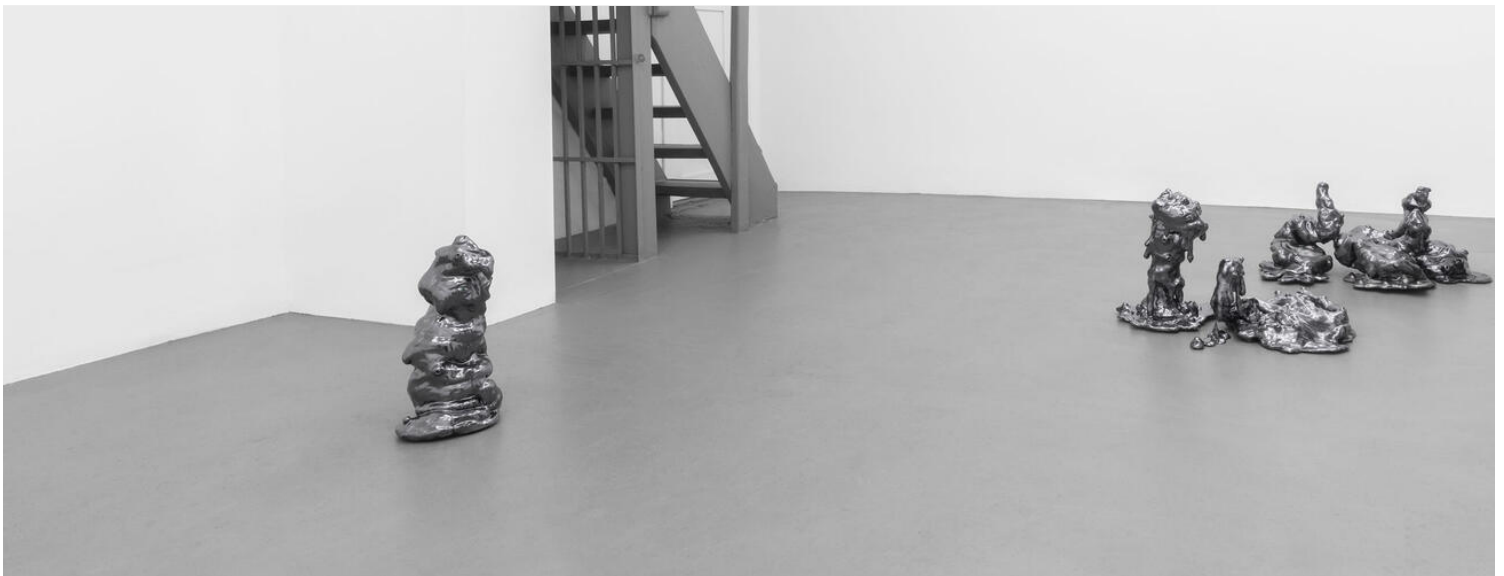




## The Sleeping Ceramic Dolls of Nschotschi Haslinger

At EXILE in Vienna, the artist explores the consequences of an overproducing world on the brink of environmental collapse

R BY RAMONA HEINLEIN IN EXHIBITION REVIEWS | 19 FEB 24



The oily-looking clumps of matter scattered across EXILE's ground-floor gallery glimmer ominously. Nschotschi Haslinger might call these creatures *Wächter* (Guardians, 2023), but there is nothing protective or stately about them. Rather, their black metallic surfaces and tiny eyes remind us of aliens from a sci-fi movie or the hazardous by-products of industry. With their ugly formlessness, they appear more like tired anti-heroes at the service of a dark force than noble saviours coming to the rescue in a time of need.

In 'Symptom Couverture', her second solo show at EXILE, Haslinger explores the ubiquitous malaise of exhaustion through the destabilizing power of the grotesque. Mixing symbols of capitalism, pop culture and spirituality, this minimal show concentrates on a handful of small ceramic pieces presented directly on the gallery floor. While her 2019 exhibition, 'Introesque', used ceramics, drawing and installation to explore mythological motifs, 'Symptom Couverture' focuses on the constant stream of crises afflicting our overheated world – a reality far more evident than the exhibition title might imply.



Nschotschi Haslinger, *Tasche VI*, 2023, glazed ceramic, 30 × 45 × 41 cm. Courtesy: the artist and EXILE, Vienna

In EXILE's upstairs space, a light-blue handbag lies on the floor in the back of an otherwise empty room (*Tasche VI*, Bag VI, 2023). Orange-red flames flicker out of its opening, while the zipper looks like the sharp teeth of a *vagina dentata*. The handbag, a motive that Haslinger has worked with for several years, is not only a practical personal item but also a status symbol that speaks to (over) consumption. Haslinger's brightly coloured, high-gloss versions are always on fire – indicating not only the heated desire for luxury possessions but also, as the exhibition literature suggests, the destruction that accompanies excessive and reckless production.

The two *Regenerationspuppen* (Regeneration Dolls, 2023) in the show's final room look as though they just can't take it anymore. Instead of being positioned on pedestals or beds, as the artist has staged her puppets in the past, these ceramic dolls lie flat on their bellies with their delicate faces touching the wooden floorboards. Patently exhausted yet calm, as if every tension has left their bloodless white bodies, the only hints of colour stem from their coral lips and flame-painted nails. The *Regenerationspuppen* might equally suggest a crime scene or, given that various cultures and religions believe dolls invoke higher powers and provide protection, the remains of a spiritual ritual.



Nschotschi Haslinger, *Regenerationspuppe II*, 2023, mixed media, 17 × 53 × 100 cm. Courtesy: the artist and EXILE, Vienna

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figures function as mini versions of herself. Their positioning on the floor, we learn from the exhibition materials, suggests 'regeneration by taking route and drawing new strength from the earth – an essential step to be able to participate in the outside world'. Despite partaking in this longed-for rest and relaxation, however, the dolls, which are significantly larger than children's toys but smaller than life-size, have a profoundly eerie quality. The soles of their outstretched feet show skin so smooth and pure that it looks as though it's being exposed to the cold air for the first time. This vulnerability may be brave, even poignant, but it also accentuates the puppets' submissiveness. It's an ambivalence that leads us to question whether Haslinger truly believes it's possible to cure endemic societal fatigue and to save the planet from environmental destruction. Maybe, when there is nothing left to burn, we'll have to set ourselves on fire.

*Nschotschi Haslinger's **'Symptom Couverture'** is on view at EXILE, Vienna, until 24 February*

*Main image: Nschotschi Haslinger, 'Symptom Couverture', 2024, exhibition view, EXILE, Vienna. Courtesy: the artist and EXILE, Vienna*

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## TAGS

[Nschotschi Haslinger](#), [Exile Gallery](#), [Vienna](#), [Ramona Heinlein](#), [EU reviews](#)

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