



HARD LOVE
Hannah Perry
15 May — 1 August 2026

Over the past years, Hannah Perry has developed a practice that arrives in our body before it reaches our mind. The primary language of her work is drawn from the most involuntary registers of human experience: breath, rhythm, flow, contraction. It lives in the frequencies of hyperventilation, trembling pulses, throbs and quivers. Yet the materials through which this language is articulated are resolutely industrial: steel, aluminum, concrete. They are surfaces that carry the memory of manufacture. Through her work, the industrial and the visceral intertwine until their tension dissolves into a disturbing harmony. By drawing these parallels, she brings metal back to the registers of bodies, exposing their circuit of veins filled with iron-rich blood.

Perry's work has lived inside this language spanning sculpture, video, installation, and sound. Spending time with her work is to become increasingly aware of how thoroughly the structures we build to contain and organise life end up shaping the very texture of feeling. For her first exhibition in Belgium, *Hard Love*, she presents a constellation of works that sprawls across three floors. In the anatomy of the building, corroded rebars erupt from the entrails of concrete pillars whose surface trembles between the polished and the friable. In **Rogue Aggregate**, vulnerability becomes structural. Chaos takes over. Lines fuse with the accuracy of a three-dimensional drawing (a practice Perry is currently rekindling) and suspend the logic of material weight. The poles curve and bow as though gravity has been renegotiated, each rod bent with the lightness of a breath.

The work breathes out. Melted red resin hearts sit nestled within the structure. Residues of an exhalation already gone, the body's air pushed into solid form and left there to harden. They carry something of a deflated balloon. But perhaps also a rawness that's almost perverse. Too soft for the steel they are lodged in. The heart is a symbol so well-worn it has been largely evacuated of meaning, but Perry insists on its weight and its capacity to carry feeling. She returns to the debased image and finds it still beating.

Perry's work has long articulated the experience of being a working artist and a mother. What it gives form to is the confluence of contradicting feelings held at once. The ambivalence of not being enough and being too much. The rebars echo the chaos of an overstimulated nervous system, the heart caught within it. Floating. Weightless and yet heavy with the specific gravity of a long day. A perpetual and exhausting labour of love.

Above this towers *Antagonist* (2024), first shown at Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art in Gateshead as part of Perry's exhibition *Manual Labour*. A colossal steel pelvis. At the Baltic, the structure moved. Fitted with stepper motors, it mechanically choreographed the act of childbirth. Gyration. Bearing down. Here it is stilled. Its mechanics remain implied, the capacity for motion held in suspension. Something of the effort seems caught in the metal itself, a residue of past exertion held in the joints. In fact, the pelvis is the body's deepest structural site. To enlarge it to monumental scale is to insist on its architectural function, to position it as a piece of infrastructure rather than an anatomy.

Perry has spoken about matrescence as shattering. The self temporarily eradicated in the process of becoming a mother, a division that persists long after physical recovery. In *Hard Love* that body is rebuilt from the ground up. The pelvis as its apex, fleshed out now with veins and hearts and gut.

An architecture of feeling assembled piece by piece. Yet *Antagonist's* scale exceeds the intimate. Standing near it carries the specific unease of proximity to heavy machinery, the sense that you should not be this close.

There is a useful adjacency in Julia Ducournau's *Titane* (2021). Not in the violence but in the rawness. The film's protagonist Alexia, impregnated by a Cadillac, finds her body overtaken. Motor oil where blood should flow. The industrial and the biologically fused until they are indistinguishable. The coexistence of tenderness and violence inside a body being destroyed is the condition Perry makes the ground of her own work. A body generative and exhausted at once: the capacity for tenderness and the evidence of exhaustion are the same thing.

To descend through the exhibition is to go deeper into that body. The basement has the quality of an engine room. A deep resonant hum runs through it, as if something down here is still breathing, exhausting itself through the architecture. Industrial ventilation pipes pierce the structures that contain them, growling. Perry insists on this pre-linguistic register of the body, the somatic knowledge that precedes and often exceeds the frameworks imposed upon it. Sound functions here the way it does throughout her practice: as a physical event! A low-frequency pressure that registers in the chest before it is recognized as anything else.

The body in Perry's work is never just a body. It is a body that has been interpreted. Managed and projected onto and sorted into categories it did not choose. The pelvis becomes a monument and then a medical fact and then a social event. Coming into labour. She grew up in the post-industrial North of England, in a landscape shaped as much by the proximity of heavy industry as by its systematic dismantling. What Mark Fisher, drawing on Derrida's concept of hauntology, might describe as a place haunted by futures that were promised and never delivered. By the spectral presence of a working-class culture whose material conditions had been eroded while its emotional residue persisted. What remains is the ghost of that relationship. Perry's work does not romanticize this condition. It takes it seriously as the ground from which her materials and her forms emerge. Her work is alive to the ways those structures seep into the body, shaping its rhythms and its capacity for emotion. She is equally alive to the way the body exceeds those structures. Leaks out of them. Continues to pulse and gush beyond what is sanctioned or legible. *Hard Love* is the record of that double movement. A heart, lodged in steel.

Text By Marie-Charlotte Carrier

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