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ArtSeen

## *Three Christs, Sleeping Mime, and the Last Supper; Pagan Paradise*

Charles Ray and the Hill Collection

By [Amanda Gluibizzi](#)



Installation view: *Three Christs, Sleeping Mime, and the Last Supper and Pagan Paradise: Charles Ray and the Hill Collection*, Hill Art Foundation, 2019. Courtesy the artist and Matthew Marks Gallery. © Charles Ray. Photo: Charles Ray.

ON VIEW

### **Hill Art Foundation**

*Three Christs, Sleeping Mime, and the Last Supper; Pagan Paradise: Charles Ray and the Hill Collection*

September 28 – February 15, 2020

New York

Charles Ray is a slippery artist for me. In the time that I have been engaging with his work, I have often been surprised by what gives me pause, and by what I find myself returning to days, sometimes even years, after I have seen it. So often, it is something slight: witnessing the slow ripples created by the edges of a woman's fur sleeve as it dragged through *Ink Box* (1986), installed in Ray's 1998 Whitney retrospective; observing the sheen of flowing ink in 1987's *Ink Line* and becoming aware, before even reading the title or anything about it, that the line moved. I wondered what, if anything, would strike me when I visited the Hill Art Foundation's current exhibition, *Three Christs, Sleeping Mime, and the Last Supper; Pagan Paradise*, which is

curated by Ray from the Foundation's collection and features, in addition to four of his own pieces, intimately-scaled bronzes made by Italian, French, and Netherlandish sculptors of the 16th and 17th centuries.



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While viewing the show I was confident that *Golden Jewelry* (undated), a tiny shriveled apple, complete with gold stem, gifted by the artist to his wife, would make the greatest impact. But no: what I have been turning over, again and again, is Ray's recumbent *Mime* (2014), and more precisely, the sleeping *Mime*'s soft-soled shoes. They are aluminum, as is the rest of the sculpture, and presumably metallurgically stiff, but visually they are also undeniably ductile and respond believably to the figure's bony feet. Similarly, the aluminum cot on which *Mime* rests strains and bows under his weight: we can notice these effects if we get down on our hands and knees because the sculpture does not sit flat on a podium. Instead, it rests lightly on the floor on the four legs of the cot, rendered fully in the round, even underneath. And then there is the fact that these qualities were not made by the artist at all. Rather, *Mime* "was carved by a robot," as Ray writes in an essay that accompanies the exhibition. Any visible hand is purely metallic, the material's or the non-human maker's.



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The effects created by the surface finish of *Mime* are further explored in a sterling silver sculpture nearby, *Mountain Lion Attacking Dog* (2018), which Ray describes as “an essay in mark making.” This work portrays, through different methods of chasing, the respective pelts of its animal protagonists. Ray’s attention to such technical challenges also creates a dialogue with the Renaissance and Baroque sculptures he has selected to appear in the exhibition. The installation is a lesson in withholding: there are only nine pieces included over the two floors, with every wall-mounted object given its own wall and each sculpture in the round provided its own generous floor space. As a result, we can draw quite close to objects that would more often be seen sharing cases with others.

This decision provides opportunities to note, for example, the ripping flesh of Barthelemy Prieur’s *Lion Devouring a Doe* (probably cast before 1583), the fact that the grotesque figure in Adriaen de Vries’s *Bacchic Man: Lomazzo Personifying the Accademia della Val di Blenio* (cast circa 1578-1580) wears a mask (seen from a distance, this is very difficult to understand), or the varying patina of Alessandro Algardi’s *Christ at the Column* (circa 1630s), molten chocolate across Christ’s back, but lighter and more mottled at the knees and the back of his legs. This suggests the touch and caress of an earlier owner (or owners), and, while we can’t embrace the sculpture ourselves, *Christ at the Column*, in the company of *Mime*, encourages us to imagine the materials’ properties and the strangely animated suppleness that is at play here. Algardi’s *Corpus Christi* (circa 1646), suspended high and alone on the gallery’s stark white wall, emphasizes its figure’s enunciated fingers and toes—as Ray comments, the Algardi Christs are depicted as if alive, and this articulation is mimicked in the splayed toes of Ray’s attacked *Dog*. Antonio

Susini's gilded bronze *Cristo Morto* (circa 1590-1615) is hung at head height so that we can easily make out his bulging eyes. This Christ is truly dead, or so the artist makes the sculpture and its bronze medium—one I just described as living—seem.



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Materiality, finish, the artist's hand or lack thereof, and the imitative potential of sculpture: Ray is, in this installation of his work and its important bronze precedents, presenting a philosophical discussion of sculptural possibility. In his essay, Ray asks, "Does my mime sleep, or does he mime sleep?" and his question is justified: sculpture can *only* ever mime the real. *Mime* does not sleep or dream; the apple will never fully rot; statues of Christ are neither living nor dead; and the dog and doe "let... out no heaven-rending scream."

## Contributor

### [Amanda Gluibizzi](#)

**Amanda Gluibizzi** is an art editor at the *Rail*. An art historian, she is the Co-Director of The New Foundation for Art History.