George Segal’s The Butcher Shop

Stephen Gibson

Take a plaster body cast of a dumpy butcher, set her across from a plaster customer (the meat cleaver poised above a chicken’s neck), and you’ll understand what sickens about Segal’s sculpture. For all of their homey homespun appearance, her Zen-like stoicism as she holds the cleaver above the bird, the neck stretched out to her on the block—this is not about peace, or tension from all directions bringing about stasis. This is about guillotine blade and carcass, and the cruelly anonymous exchanges of ordinary life. There’s nothing peaceful about Humpty-Dumpty sitting on a wall.