

Post-



Courtesy of Jonathan Viner, London

Nicolas Deshayes
Acids 2, 2012

Nicolas Deshayes customizes industrial production processes through works that pit aesthetic referents to the body against the sterile backdrop of corporate and public interior architecture.



Courtesy of Carlos Ishikawa, London

Steve Bishop
III, 2011

London-based artist Steve Bishop roots his concern in the architecture of the gallery: if we usually ask how the art object affects us, how do we affect the exhibition space?

Materiality

As the reskilled brushes up against the outsourced, artists return to specialized production processes, the centrality of the body and the phenomenological presence of the viewer, reveling in the materiality of their own anatomy. Words by Karen Archey



Courtesy of the artist and Fluxus, Milan

Marlie Mul
Puddle (Green pool), 2012

Consisting of fiberglass, resin, sand and anonymous-looking waste culled from the street, these works by Marlie Mul encapsulate banal, fleeting scenarios that are at once quotidian and playfully existential.



**Magali Reus
Parking (Window), 2013**

Magali Reus explores how architecture can dictate human behavior in shared space, eliciting concepts of support structures and protection.



Courtesy of the artist and Bortolami Gallery, New York

**Ben Schumacher
The More the Desert of the World
Expands Around Him, 2013**

A trained architect, Schumacher frequently utilizes freestanding, industrially fabricated tempered glass plates overlaid with semi-distracting vinyl privacy film like those commonly found on the windows of mass transit vehicles.

Perhaps the most soporific soundbite of our age is the all-too-common platitude that technology has sped up our quotidian chronologies with harrying, damaging persistence. Technology hurts, man! The deluge of your Twitter feed drowns me and—ugh—my attention span self-combusts by mere mention of your Facebook timeline. Forget self-control, this is the 21st century and germanium rules the earth. So much art that consciously relates to technology is unfortunately contextualized this way, yet what of us who don't buy it? There are artists, believe it or not, who consider technology and its extension of the body in an investigative rather than critical light. Further, we live in a fast and cheap time equally characterized by the disposability of mass-produced, common objects, and we see a bevy of broader cultural producers ranging from graphic designers and restaurateurs privileging the slow, the *reskilled*, as it were. Could this throwback to artisanship and craft relate to the artworld awkwardly or potently? The reskilled could brush up against the outsourced, alienated modus operandi that has largely come to define Western culture as of late. We see sculptors such as Nicolas Deshayes, Marlie Mul, Magali Reus, Steve Bishop, Ben Schumacher and Alice Channer return to specialized, often industrial production processes as an attempt to logically and emotionally connect with common objects and even public spaces. Their work returns again and again to the body: the body as content, the body as viewer, the body as maker, the body as the tool through which we experience the world—yet it often builds upon the formal and conceptual logic of Minimalism and Postminimalism. As in Minimalism, this reskilled work considers the phenomenological presence of the viewer in the exhibition space. It becomes activated, or embodied, in the presence of the viewer, but also works to question what the definition of the body is.

Nicolas Deshayes customizes industrial production processes through works that pit aesthetic referents to the body against the sterile backdrop of corporate and public interior architecture. The French-born, London-based artist anodizes his own aluminum at a metal anodizing plant and creates his own vacuum forms from warty, body-conjuring plaster spills at a molded plastic fabricator. These panels appear at once painterly, slightly digital and exceedingly chemical. (Several anodized works take on the appearance of gasoline swirling in a puddle.) Deshayes uses either heavy-duty aluminum sheets or "public amenity board"—the artist's euphemism for the antiseptic board that demarcates urinals—as backdrops for his vacuum form plastics. These industrial, spill-proof and scratch-resistant materials consciously consider the human body and how best to neutralize the fluids, vapors and other contaminants it produces. That Deshayes pairs these human-resistant backdrops—the heavy-duty canvas of corporate interior decor, the piss-resistant bathroom cubicle wall—with vacuum forms indexing the more base parts of the human body suggests that the public spaces created to shepherd humans almost *apologize* for the body's baseness. His plastic carbuncles enforce the idea that each one of us is essentially a big sac of occasionally leaking liquid, and need not apologize for our corporeality.

Berlin-based Dutch artist Marlie Mul utilizes a similar approach by customizing elements of public architecture in her series "No Oduur." However, unlike Deshayes', these works bear the mark of human usage. These weathered slivers of metal stuffed with cigarette butts recall mail slots or vents found on the facades of buildings, yet they remain unidentifiable. In actuality, Mul designed these pieces as variations of an object she witnessed in real life: a trash receptacle burned so thoroughly that just the metal plate attaching it to the wall remained. The series comprises custom-fabricated, dubiously functional metal sheets, which the artist bends, etches and burns to convey human wear and tear. She likens the addition of smoking poles to buildings or demarcated outdoor smoking areas to the territorialization of public space resultant from increasing public



Alice Channer
Backbone 1 (detail), 2012

Stretching body parts, casting the flimsy in steel and rendering liquid as solid, Alice Channer's practice produces states of material awkwardness or binary, continually referencing the absent body.

concern with the dangers of cigarette smoking. Further, these awkward sheets of abused metal signify this territorialization and bifurcation of public space, as well as the media one filters to develop a for-or-against stance that dictates where you'll end up hanging out—outside with the smokers or inside abstaining. Like Deshayes's anti-human corporate canvases, Mul's work points to understated architectural elements that guide or herd bodies. Her newer series of trompe l'oeil puddles, recently shown at Fluxia in Milan and Croy Nielsen in Berlin, act similarly as receptacles for human behavior, though unlike metal, these diminutive pools of water cannot be inscribed upon. Consisting of fiberglass, resin, sand and anonymous-looking waste culled from the street, these works encapsulate banal, fleeting scenarios that are at once quotidian and playfully existential.

If Marlie Mul focuses on elements of public architecture that receive marks of human behavior and the territorialization of public space, Magali Reus explores how such architecture can dictate human behavior in shared space. "Highly Liquid," her recent exhibition at Amsterdam's Galerie Fons Welters, features a series of modular stadium chairs donning an inoffensive color scheme of mauves, taupes and greens. Installed at functional height, some chairs hang alone while others cluster in groups. These flip-seat chairs are a hallmark of space-saving public architecture. *Parking (Spine)* and *Parking (Service)*, both made in 2013, combine these custom-fabricated chairs with custom-fabricated parts of crutches. The latter straps one seat semi-closed, propping up the other with half of a green crutch, while the former places deconstructed parts of white crutches (one appearing curiously akin to a spine) on top of and below a row of four seats. Frequently found on subways, busses, ships, gymnasiums and other heavily trafficked areas, they represent an on-or-off binary: when it's on, it supports the weight of a human, when it's off, it dissipates into space; perhaps it's private to feel exhaustion or pain and need to sit down, but public to do so on a structure like a stadium chair, where you'll almost always find yourself camped next to a stranger. The concept of support structures, and even that of protection, frequently arises in Reus's show. One can view these phenomena as metaphors: how can we express support and protection in public, especially in urban areas in which it's impossible to have meaningful interactions with the overwhelming majority of people one encounters on a daily basis?

London-based artist Steve Bishop similarly considers notions of support, though unlike Reus, Bishop roots his concern in the architecture of the gallery. Frequently cutting through gallery walls to create site-specific architectural interventions, Steve Bishop recalls the institutional critiques of American artist Michael Asher. If Asher revealed that our experience of art was dependent upon physical and ideological context, Bishop reveals the subjective and personal components encompassing the gallery space. The British artist splices through drywall and pops doors off hinges to reveal the oft-embarrassing, normally unseen elements laying behind them: a landlord's closet full of dumpy personal effects replete with a cowboy hat, a 1970s kitchen that doubles as a gallery office or an intern avoiding email. His sculpture *Read/Write* (2012) takes a thermo-hygrograph—the analog instrument measuring infinitesimal fluctuations in humidity that one still finds in institutions like the Louvre—and places it in the sawn-out crook of a piece of Portland stone, a bowl of lurid "ocean"-scented floor cleaner resting on top of it. That the cleaner points to an ersatz sterility and the thermo-hygrograph records the presence of bodies within the gallery space suggests a hyperconsciousness of the viewer, or a role reversal of sorts: if we usually ask how the art object affects us, how do we affect the exhibition space?

Although his preoccupation with materiality and production processes is less evident on a formal level, Ben Schumacher may be affiliated with this group of artists because of the relationship between a material presence and a corporate

aesthetic that his work proposes. A trained architect, Schumacher frequently utilizes freestanding, industrially fabricated tempered glass plates overlaid with semi-distracting vinyl privacy film like those commonly found on the windows of mass transit vehicles. The artist likens these sculptures to windows, themselves objects imbued with the architectural function to protect and to foster view—a charge not entirely divorced from that of the art object. His recent exhibition "DS + R and the bar at the Orangerie" at Bortolami considers the orangery, a "20th century architectural space for cultivation and storage" for which this plate glass was originally invented, as a metaphor for the gallery, itself a "cloud," or site for communication and data storage. Taking the medium and content of the internet as fodder, Schumacher considers the secondary experience of an artwork's online documentation to be an equally important site for our contemporary experience of viewing it. He Photoshops the documentation of his work, overlaying it with text and other contextual clues that hint at his work's referents, thus collapsing the object into his documentation.

Just as the anti-form aesthetic of Postminimalism can be read as a response to the chilly remove of Minimalist work, and an attempt to re-assert a haptic or sexual material presence, it could be argued that the artists considered here attempt a similar operation by introducing the concept of emotional and bodily alienation within the discourse dominated by the ready-made, corporate art pursued by many of their contemporaries. Perhaps best representative of this, especially through her diverse use of materials as discussed in the following article, is Alice Channer's practice producing states of material awkwardness or binary, continually referencing the absent body. She deflates clothes, stretches body parts, casts the flimsy in steel and renders liquid as solid. She describes her work as "figurative sculpture without a body," and herself as only one of her objects' many authors. These other authors are oftentimes machines, or the somewhat anonymous bodies—at least anonymous in the exhibition space—that literally create her work for her in the factory setting.

When I asked Channer what draws her to these states of awkwardness, she stammered and said, "It's just how I exist in the world, I guess." This sentiment rings true in general: while it's cumbersome to make constant allusion to "our increasingly networked world" and "our wired body," there's something to be said for existing in a state of awkwardness, tentativeness or recession. Perhaps this collection of work responds not to a delayed understanding of how to resolve the networked with flesh, but how to navigate an increasingly impersonal world as a sentient being. The production processes of these reskilled works and the keen attention they pay to the body also bear their maker's affect in general: there's an honesty, sensitivity, and overt pleasure component that comes not only from heightened materiality and practical know-how, but also from sentiment. These artists encourage us to revel in the materiality of our own anatomy, regardless of how far we've traveled from it.