

issue IX

RICHARD PHILLIPS

Vol.2

For the second volume of our Richard Phillips issue, we asked one of his closest collaborators, artist and musician Jordan Robin, to visit Alisa Baremboym's latest show at 47 Canal Gallery in New York, for an intimate conversation about the inspiration behind her work. What's more, we invited Brooklyn-based artist Kelsey Henderson to interview some of Phillips' favorite musicians — Brandon Welchez of Crocodiles, Elias Bender Rønnenfelt of Marching Church and Margaret Chardiet, Walker Behl and Keegan Dakkar of Cheena —, and share with our readers the powerful portraits of her interviewees, as well her latest series of paintings. Last, but not least, photographers Hunter & Gatti sneaked into Phillips' studio in New York, offering a rare glimpse of his creative process.

IN CANAL 47 GALLERY

**A L I S A
B A R E M B O Y M**

INTERVIEWED BY JORDAN ROBIN





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Ideally, when I walk into the show, how should I feel?

I don't know if I have an ideal feeling. The installation is like simple and straightforward in some ways. I want you to feel a conflict process.

There is this feeling of confrontation immediately when you walk into the space. My first impression at your opening was that there was a kind of soft threat coming from your work. It feels as though it simultaneously does and does not want you to come have a closer look. It's as though there is a hand up a little bit. With that in mind, could you explain the title and the different conflicts that you're setting up?

I think that, initially, when you come in, you don't know what these structures are.

What are they?

They are forms modeled after Grapeshots - condensed cannonball structures that were loaded into a cannon and shot, they are considered early forms of shrapnel. They weren't meant to fly far like bullets, but they are the basis for the modern shotgun shrapnel shell. There are a lot of smaller balls in the structure that disperse when shot. You don't necessarily get the feeling of an 18th century motif, but if you read the press release you are going to get a feeling of what these are modeled after. You don't necessarily have to read the press release, but I think it helps with the overall understanding and yet is vague enough to form your own impression.

Maybe it's the fact that you are modeling the structure after shrapnel that gives the work this innate tense feeling. .

The pieces all have innate force as structures. The force pushes out, but there is also lightness in the resin bases, to oppose that force. +



PHOTOS BY RICHARD PHILLIPS

Can you talk about the materials inside of the resin?

The resin has embeds of silk, and parts of these rings that hold the grapes together. I think of these remnants as fossils dissented from prior explosions. Then there is the interior of the resin base, which has gel in it. The gel is a hydro-carbon petroleum product that is basically made from mineral oil and emollient. It creates a soft center to the fossilized resin. In prior works, I had the gel interact with ceramic. The ceramic stays porous when it is fired without glaze. It is not vitrified. So this interaction is able to take place where the ceramic soaks in the mineral oil from the gel. In these sculptures, there is a reference to the idea of these materials contaminating one another, and the potential of them exploding.

Is this the explosion of a new phase for you?

It's more like a continuum; the materials are not that far off from my last body of work. It's more of a transformation of form. I think that the incompatibility of these structures is slightly bizarre, because the spheres almost look like toys or pinballs. People make all kinds of connections because of the feminine quality of this piece on the floor (pointing to her sculpture Process which employs a uterus motif), but in a way to me it resembles a sink, and therefore, the ramp implies the potential gravitational flow. It is also made of ceramic, with the same porous quality, but it's blackened, so it looks scorched. I think there is a material conflict here, because one thinks of it being this dry and black object, but it biologically not that way.

And what's the conflict between this piece and the other pieces in the installation?

That is up to the viewer to feel, it is not a direct conflict. But to me, it functions like a key to the room.

That's how it's laid out.

Yes. How I came up with the title of the show is related to that. When I looked up in Wikipedia the word conflict, it came with an emphasis around process; that was the only basic definition of conflict. It had to do with the structure of how to identify conflict and break it down into parts and dissolve it. They point towards a 5-part process of conflict. I was taken with that concept. Originally, I was thinking about the idea of war for this show, and when I investigated the root of the word war in English, I came up with a surprising connection. +





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The Franco-Germanic root of war is “to confuse,” which I think is really challenging given the fact that you wouldn’t necessarily come to that conclusion on your own. So I came to think of the show as an exploration of confusion and the potential of the body; the idea of the body as a possible weapon and how the outside world affects our minds and in turn our bodies. This is the reason is why I put the windows in. They filter the outside world through these vinyl membranes. They are pushing out, but the world is pushing in.

Why are you interested in creating this tension?

I think it reflects on the world we live in. I’m most interested in the way the materials I use reflect our bodies - the natural, the synthetic and the organic. For example, the clay is organic, the resin is synthetic, and the petroleum is synthetic. This hybridity is something that is normalized in our everyday lives, but when you go back to the end of the chain everything is organic, everything comes from the planet. The interesting thing about that to me is how our bodies soak up all of these things..

Where are you from?

We came from the former Soviet Union to the U.S. in 1989. My family lived in Philly, Iowa and Chicago, and then I moved to New York when I was 18.

To do what?

To be an artist.

When did you realize you were an artist?

When I was 7.

What happened?

I drew a copy of Caravaggio’s Medusa of Gorgon and my parents thought that they had better let me do this thing for a little while.

What did they want you to do?

Something more financially viable, originally, but when they noticed that I had persevered through, they finally embraced my choice and have been very supportive, which is great.+



What's going on in your studio? Where do you go from here?

I'm going to go there today and reorganize everything, and do more tests of things that I wanted to fit into the show but didn't make sense with this installation.

Because that would be the natural next thing.

Yes, and think about all the feedback I've gotten from the show.

How do you feel that you got from your last show in Canal 47 in 2012 to this show?

There are a lot of connections, especially in the sense that I started using ceramics then.

True, but there wasn't as firm of a commitment to sculpture in that show.

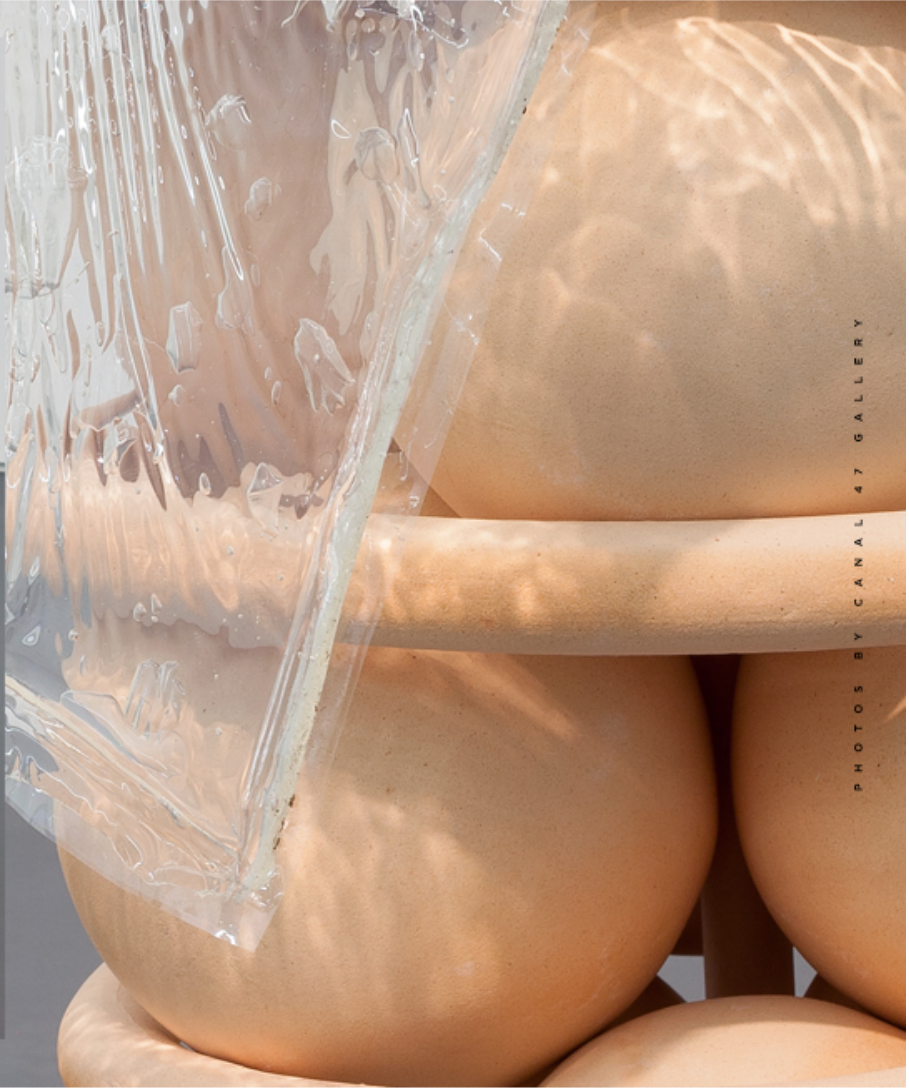
There was a lot of sculpture to the show, but it was less specifically ceramic. There were other parts, the suitcases, the Breadestal, this table with a bunch of smaller ceramic parts, the wall prints on silk and cotton. There has always been the idea of the body, it's tubular nature and what is internal and external to it.

Is that why you were doing a lot of food subjects before?

Yes, there is a relationship to the body and how it communicates with the outside world. There are also palettes, suitcases, which were dealing with this idea of import and export, the outside and the inside. There were these dualities in that show that had to do a lot with food and the body and things related to those topics.

The self and the world.

In essence, yes. This is the most basic and simple question. But it gets complicated when one starts to pursue the details. In that show I used metal, and especially steel, because it was one of the most recycled things on the planet, in relation to plastic, which is one of the least recycled things. Both are man-made, in the sense that steel doesn't come out of the earth in sheets. The further you get away from the organic through processing, the less it is able to be absorbed into the earth.+



PHOTOS BY CANAL 47 GALLERY

I'm interested in how we interact with the things we inflict on the world or we make from the earth, like petroleum products, steel, ceramic. Ceramic, especially in this state, without being vitrified, acts very closely to the way our skin absorbs things, because of its porousness. That was always interesting to me about ceramic that wasn't glazed, so I felt that this could be something to work with for a while, something I could explore in a lot of ways. But it is also a difficult material to work with because, as you know, until it's fired is very fragile.

That's true. And what about the pipes in this show?

The pipes are a continuum from my other works – essentially the tables turned into convertible systems, but the tables always had these black pipes as legs. The idea of conduits and leakage was appealing to me, and how we essentially are these leaking machines. The extension to the ceiling is something related to the architecture in my prior pieces, where I had these suspension pieces with webbing straps. These types of elements involved the works with the architecture in a parasitic way. In this installation, there is the sense that the pipes are extending beyond the gallery space. There is the hint of movement that exists, and it's the same with the windows, they filter in this information from the outside world, without details. It's almost like the way we watch TV and read the news – these are filtered versions of the actual events. Especially when you read news about war or conflict, you are reading a filtered down version of it. The corporeal or visceral feeling is at times lost.

Well in the case of this show there is what is out there and what is in here. Between, are these filters that have ideas consistently passing through in both directions, and the result is the work.

I like this reading of it.

These ceramic and resin constructions look very fragile, but you give the illusion through the pipes coming out of them that they are holding up the whole building.

They are like columns - speaking to the architecture of the space. The structural columns that are originally there are now seen differently when you have these other vertical elements in the space.

What's printed on the silk that is inside the resin? It looks like sewn. It's not sewn. It's a print of shrink-wrap.

Is that a drain there?

Yes, something like a drain, or colander, it speaks about the leakiness...

The sink idea of this.

Yes, all of these elements draw from ongoing themes in my works, but in a new form.

The body as a sink.

Yes, the body as a sort of sink, and all of the confusions that can unfold from that idea. ■





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