

## Travelled, Shredded, Touched and Broken

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Walead Beshty at MAMCO, Genève, ph. Annik Wetter

In Beshty's artistic practice, everyday objects go through everyday processes. Photographs are put through airport security x-rays, copper blocks are carried by bare hands and coffee cups rested on them; glass boxes are shipped internationally in simple parcel boxes; a mirrored floor comes into intimate contact with shoe soles... As result, everything becomes somewhat damaged, and with that damage present they are made into artwork.

Beshty's works breathe, live and can be named by the travels they make, or by the physical changes they undergo. They are mostly created in a studio in Los Angeles and shown in museums and galleries; are seen, talked and written about, sold, bought, but not immune from the systems around us and the effects of time and space. Some of them seem vulnerable, relatable, and democratic. They are not preserved in the same way many other artworks conventionally are. This means that you will not see a perfectly shining, evenly pink copper work by Beshty. His works are forthcoming about how they ended up in front of you.

Born in London to a Libyan family, Beshty has lived and been educated in the US since he was a child. He teaches, writes and curates as well as being an artist. He says that he is not revealing the processes of how he makes art, but he is not concealing them either. "I

just don't want to produce a work that alienates by refusing to expose how it was made. In other words, to rely on mystery to make the artwork interesting is a political problem.”

His exhibition in MAMCO, Geneva's first museum dedicated to only modern and contemporary art, is like a retrospective. The director of the museum Lionel Bovier curated the show with over 10 years' research and close work with Beshty, bringing together a selection from throughout his career.

His internationally acclaimed early works, glass boxes (2007 - 2019), shipped from a point A to a point B in standard FedEx shipping material, show the memory of movement and the physical memory of objects. The travel of glass boxes is not completely destructive; they are made out of shatterproof glass to be cracked but still keep their shape. The name of every work is specifically given to accurately represent the journey they have been on, including the sensitivity on FedEx's box size copyright. An example is: *FedEx®Medium Framed Art Box ©2011 FEDEX 163095 REV 7/11, International Priority, Los Angeles–Geneva trk#775101486687, April 30–May 3, 2019, 2012.*

The artist's *Travel Pictures* (2006), are a series of photographs depicting the abandoned former Iraqi embassy in East Berlin – also currently shown at Tate Modern, London until December 2019. Beshty heard about this place and was intrigued by it as a sovereign territory with no country attached: “These are photographs of a non-place, in the middle of the conflict between material and law. I carried the photographs with me to observe their journey. They came out of a number of x-ray machines at airports damaged, with a big black round shadow in the middle of them. I cancelled the exhibition that I had planned, but later on I decided to show them as they were.” The large photographs are now more like abstract images, and the black holes in the middle of them are like signs of classified documents. They resemble images of war with blacked-out areas, like prison letters with redacted lines.

Beshty's large-scale photograms are abstract light drawings. They are produced by folding and rolling light sensitive sheets of paper, with no particular pattern, colour, or end look in mind, which manifest uncanny creases and beautiful colours as a result of the developing process. Not fixed, they change and darken over time. “A totally blind process”, says Beshty. The way they are hung and look, they are like modern wall tapestries.

A significant space in the gallery is dedicated to the large copper sculptures, which don't hide their makers, carriers or the temperature and light that they were exposed to. The audience is not allowed to touch them, but can easily see the fingerprints of other people on the production side. Some other works are sculptures made from found objects, broken or faulty ceramics glued together, drilled through flat TV screens, his own MacBook, collages from tabloid pieces and front cover images about drug kartel executions from Bologna, advertisements from Mexico and China... There is a sense of destruction, disturbance, maybe even vandalism, but also a sense of reunion, fun, and childish curiosity in these works.

In Beshty's *Selected Works (2009 - 2015)* the reunited rejected works hold onto each other in frames and proudly hang together on the walls. The artist considered this as a way to think about his art practice like an eco-system. "Even when you make affirmative choices they always produce side effects. One side effect of making artworks, is making artworks that you don't want to show. This was in a way to acknowledge the presence of all this material." These works are made out of ground and shredded unwanted photographs and sculptures; blended together and left to dry. They are all dated by the time they reflect, and they all look different because of the materials the artist was using at that time.

Beshty keeps a video-record in 'Network of Producers', taking several pictures of the members of this network such as art dealers, collectors, curators, artists, education departments, gallerists, art handlers... These images are shown as a mini movie, more like a stop motion. The artist says that it is an important part of the non-concealing of the process. "This is to acknowledge the dependence of the work to this larger system of people. In some way, I am just trying to make an account of it. Just to remind myself first" says Beshty, while taking my picture as an arts journalist to be added to the film.

The exhibition comes at a significant time for MAMCO. The museum is celebrating its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, which is also the beginning of a cultural area to be formed in this part of Geneva. You can see many small galleries near MAMCO, as well as newly opened international galleries like Pace and Gagosian. Bovier, the director, says that Geneva's audience is complex. Some parts of the city are very village-like, while it is also very international with 40% not being European. MAMCO keeps developing its collection and its role as a cultural venue with an interesting and inclusive programme. As part of this programme, Walead Beshty's exhibition at MAMCO, Geneva will be open until 8 September 2019.







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