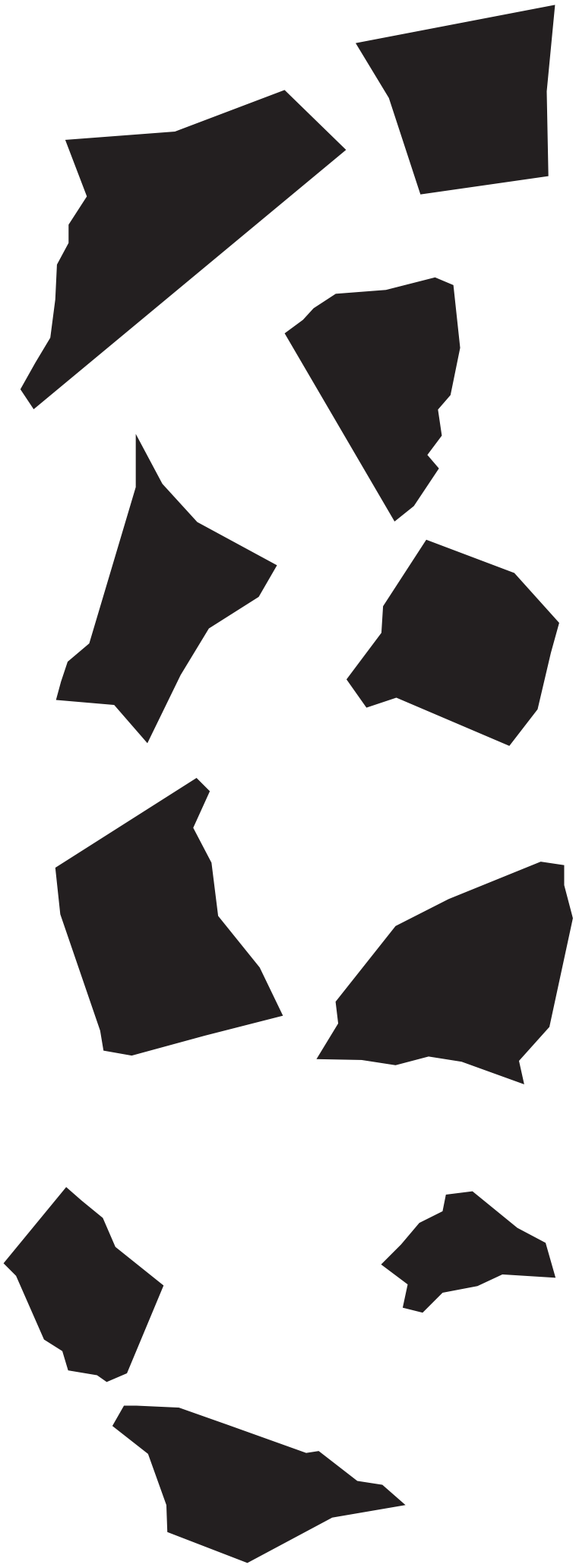


This conversation, discussing the work made for the exhibition An Incoherent Body, took place on April 4th, 2024, between Artist hana kostis and Curator Chiara Giovando.

hana kostis: An Incoherent Body
May 12–June 30,2024
ICA Santa Fe

Introduction

Chiara Giovando I'm going to start recording. I am Chiara Giovando, the Director of the ICA Santa Fe, and I'm here speaking with hana kostis about their exhibition titled, *An Incoherent Body*. The exhibition opens on May 11th, 2024 and is the inaugural exhibition for the ICA as well as our first exhibition of commissioned works. It has been such an honor to get to work with you hana.

hana kostis Hello.

CG Your new work deals with the body as an abstracted figure. But first, what did it mean previously to be more literal around your representation of the figure? Your earlier works are portraits, very beautiful and strong images of African-American or African-Diaspora figures. How has the idea of representation shifted for you?

hk Well, I've been dealing with the figure probably since I started drawing. It's how I taught myself how to draw; by looking at myself in the mirror. So I think there's a long-standing fascination with embodiment and the self or the figure or a version of me or someone else that's being reflected in this visually contained – physical way.

The particular body that I inhabit and experience, and the real effects of current systems upon my body, complicates representation. So there's been this peeling back of all these different layers that I'm associated with or told that I visually represent, and grappling with them and trying to make sense of it. And then, continually failing to make it make sense.

I think recognizing that I was going to keep hitting that limit, both as an experience

in the world and also formally within the work, I felt conceptually and physically constrained by the two dimensional. Maybe more simply put, my ideas of representation have shifted. The literal or 'realist' representation doesn't feel applicable anymore.

Even when I was primarily a painter the images were always driven by a relationship to the material, and a want to tactilely involve myself. There's a consistent impulse to interact with material in a sculptural manner, so I think it was an organic leap from collecting surfaces to paint on to being like, {How do I manipulate these surfaces?} That's where I'm at now, somewhere between the dimensional and the flat. The formed and unformed, and the bodily and the abstract. Like, what is a body anyway?

Mans' First Metal

CG The work right now consists of these sort of thin skins of copper. They are metal and at the same time, so thin that you're sewing the sculptures as opposed to welding them. So there's a heaviness and a lightness at the same time within these forms. And they're hollow. They take up space through their surfaces, and actually for me the way the copper reflects light is also important in terms of the space they inhabit.

hk Yeah, the light is important for me as well. Copper is so special and elementally distinct. What I'm using is flashing which is super thin and mostly used in architectural applications. Historically, copper has been with human beings since the beginning, we even have it in our bodies. So it's been with us, and involved in every transition we consider an advancement of civilization; from the Incas to the Industrial Revolution, the Bronze Age, for example, bronze only exists because of copper. Copper is present during all of these critical historic markers, both in beauty objects and also structural or use objects.

CG And it's important to point out that copper is still essential for contemporary capitalist production of objects, and extracting copper is tied to violence. There are active protests going on all over the Apache

and scrape and push out crinkles but that only works when it's held in position. If I just hold it flat in my hand, that gesture doesn't have an effect or force. Each decision I make is informed by the decisions I made before which are in response to the material. So, yes, the back and forth between the material and I is crucial.

Animacy

CG The question of the subject-ness of objects is very present in this work, and for me, this points to a larger proposal; to remember the animacy of the world. Eurocentric museum making and exhibition making renders the art object static, it forms a narrative where the artist makes the object alone, through an alienated experience of an individual.

I think you're calling that into question by understanding that the object is also making itself, and is a conduit for creativity that is larger than either of you.

hk Yes, I think you're on to it. One little adjustment is that the sculptures are also making me. They are birthing me. I am coming out of them as much as they come out of me. The blood that's drawn when I'm making them is quite literal. The repetition involved in marking them, I embody in my arms and shoulders. All over really. I'm quite physically implicated in terms of how they're coming about and how I feel afterwards. And I'm sure that's happening on a molecular level too, considering whatever copper has going on. There's stuff there that I don't necessarily have language for, but I intuit to be happening. We are making each other.

field notes about the flowers. We are left with shadows of the plants and a residue of a stranger's process interwoven into your own.

There are just so many passes on these works. And you incorporate and actually privilege all of these little blemishes; a dirty fingerprint, a streak from one of the printing processes. You don't try to erase those. You actually fully embrace those as new parts of the image.

hk I love them. I think {privilege them} is a good way of putting it. And yeah, my processes are developed to cultivate those moments. Those little instances of entropy are the things that I can't predict or make happen, but instead try to facilitate happening on their own. I don't make good work when I get too constricted and tight about things.

I find the worn spots innately most beautiful. I'm just framing little weird collisions of textures and time and scars and the rough bits and the patches. That's really exciting to me.

They are Hollow

CG I got to be a part of witnessing these sculptures come into being over the last six months. It was quite amazing to see how when you sew the pieces of copper skins together, you're actually inside of the works, or the bodies, weather it's your arm or with the largest work, the *BWO (2024)*, your whole body was inside of it and you kind of birthed yourself out of it! I witnessed how these 'made' bodies are also dictating their own forms to you as much as you are dictating form to them. There's a relational encounter there.

hk Right, yeah. The way that I'm achieving these forms does work relationally. I'm taking my formational cues from the material, from the peculiarities of how the material behaves and how I can affect it within the limitations of my own physicality.

There's a push-pull between my will or my inflection, what's actually possible and what the material wants to do. We're pushing against each other, and also pushing against ourselves. I'll make a fold and then stretch

lands of Arizona, around the copper mines there. The mines are open pit mines leaving scars on the Earth's body which can be seen from space.

hk Yes, absolutely. The way we extract it now is not necessarily the way it was done in the past. There are pipes in China that have been around since the ancient world, we've been utilizing it for over 10,000 years. One of copper's properties is that it's not corrosive. It's long lasting, highly recyclable, and antimicrobial. All of those unique properties would suggest most of the copper already extracted is still circulating. There isn't really a reason for us to keep pulling it out of the ground, especially in the way we are doing so now. And there also isn't necessarily an implication that we shouldn't use it, period.

There's a relationship that we've had with the material for a long, long time. So wherever we're at now is pretty much since the industrial revolution. That's a pretty brief period in the history of this molecule or even humans.

CG I love what you said; copper is in our body. I didn't know that.

hk It's specifically in the liver, muscle and I think bones too. And then there are copper blooded creatures. Octopuses have blue blood because they're copper based instead of iron based. Which is cool to think about in relation to how conductive the material is inherently. It seems like there are probably a lot of bodies that are linked together, networks of frequency and connection that are happening all over the planet just through copper's particular resonance or whatever.

CG That's beautiful. And now you are making more bodies with it. Abstracted and {incoherent} bodies.

The Body Without Organs

hk I'm thinking about the body on many different levels. The figure is one, but I'm also thinking about organisms, processes, and systems. And how the subject itself happens, both on a structural and personal level. I'm

thinking with many other people, with texts like {The Body Without Organs} which originated with Artaud and was then further expanded and explored through multiple texts by Deleuze and Gutarri. The one I'm working with most closely is, {How to Make a Body Without Organs}, which is a plateau in *A Thousand Plateaus Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

In this text, D&G consider the potential of what a body can do. They conceptualize the cancerous body which I think is about being fixed or over stratified or over identified with. Then there is the emptied body, or a body that's become completely de-stratified or disorganized and thus torn apart. And then the full body, a body without organs, a between space, where the potential for new connections, different organization and new concepts of what a body is and can be. And for me this is most important because it suggests that maybe on some level all organisms are uncomfortable living in their own skin and might want to be organized differently, or not organized at all.

CG The impulse to organize and also the experience of being overly-organized, or over-identified as you say, is painful I think. In many instances it could be traced back to the root of oppression.

hk Yeah, absolutely. The question of {what causes the suffering?} is key for me inside all of this. And I think our current concepts of the body are causing more harm than not. And again, all organisms, all bodies, processes, systems, societies tend toward some form of organization. I'm more interested in that than I am in...

CG ...total obliteration.

hk Yeah, {laugh} which I've definitely done. I've completely de-stratified in a non-productive way. And I've also over-identified with pieces of my-supposed-self that were harmful and limiting.

One of the empty bodies D&G talk about is the masochistic body. I think BDSM is a good example of a space where you can access bodily possibilities. And then also a space where one can destratify too quickly in a non-productive way as well. The potential for both is an interesting tension for me.

CG In certain ways fetish becomes a space where we get to transform temporarily. Or cast off organization momentarily. Arguably the dungeon could be seen as a kind of contemporary ceremonial space in that we are allowed to step out of the mundane and become another body for a period of time.

The prints in this show are from images you have found in old fetish magazines from the 1970s and 80s, specifically *The Rubberist*, which was a UK based fetish magazine that pioneered fetish wear and embraced homemade BDSM/rubber and latex costumes. The bodies in these images have second skins that constrain and fully encapsulate or you could say 'organize and disorganize' the body.

You have taken these images and then made several interventions, both digital distortions as well as analog – you have painted on them.

hk The prints come from a series of works on paper born out of a residency and what was available to me there. I had access to sublimation printing, which was a new process for me, that involved utilizing heat to convert a certain kind of ink into a gas and through the machinery pressing that vaporized ink into a different surface, primarily fabric. So I was thinking about images appropriate for clothing and cloth, and printing on paper as part of the sublimation process. which led to this inkjet printer exploration and series of images.

Each image is a compilation of manually scanned layers; bits of my sketchbook pages of anatomy textbooks, and digitally manipulated fetish images. I'd draw on them then scan another layer, going back and forth until I'm satisfied or overdo it.

CG Those pieces are really interesting to me in terms of the way you are layering different processes; the photograph, the reprint, the distortion, and your hand – and really time through all of those processes. You also printed the images onto found paper, from the journal or field book of an unknown person who pressed flowers into the paper and made