

David Benarroch
Between Two Breaths

“Sometimes I feel I spend my whole life rewriting the same page.”
—Anne Carson

One of the questions regarding sculpture which has been on my mind the most for the past few years pertains to the relationship between an artist and their materials, and especially a sculptor and their material. The relationship is described in a famous *piyyut* as a “one-way street”: “Like clay in the hands of the potter, if he wills, he can expand it, if he wills, he can contract it.”¹ This description often troubles me. As an artist I feel it is outdated, if it was ever true at all. The history of art, and especially of sculpture, is also – and maybe most of all – the history of the artist facing their material. And more so, in light of notions that have been circulating in recent decades regarding the relationships between human beings and the world, its materials, the long-term exploitation and the inattentive attitudes towards materiality, the constant focus on humanity and human desires and wills, and the seemingly controlling position of the figure of the artist, it is important for me to state – this is not what I want to do. More precisely, that is what I wish not to do.

Theoretician Anne-Lise François offers the notion of “Recessive Action”², which aims to evade the dichotomy, binarity, and didactics inherent in the notion of “Action”, and to enable an alternative – an act that does not change the order of things. This act is not forced upon, but is suggested as optional. My interpretation of François’ suggestion is directed toward my own relationship with the materials I work with, and aims to offer actions that leave a trace, while serving as an open secret, preoccupied first and foremost with attempting to enable the material to express itself and not only subjugating it to my wills and wants.

These kinds of thoughts, which relate to current trends in culture and in art in particular, offer an alternative to a capitalist culture, to the production and the labor that serve as the cornerstones of modern capitalism – a system that exploits the earth’s resources and claims ownership over whatever it can (and, really, what does “resource” mean?), a system that commodifies human needs and desires, while simultaneously demanding of us personal development, self-realization etc. François’s suggestion was described by Israeli academic Shaul Setter as “an ethos of an action that is not based on progress and change – not a labor leading productivity, not a hard work aiming to profit – but an ethos of an action as benevolence, as a free gift, as freedom of working.”³ Hence, these actions can be thought of as a re-examination of priorities and their meanings in life. According to François, the creation of a counter-tradition of an action that is not carried out with the aim of making its mark in the world is not performed with the aim of changing the world or being changed by it or obtaining things from it, but alternatively, raises the possibility of existing in the world, acting within it, and at the same time leaving the world with “empty hands.”

Sculpture, of course, by its very nature does “do” something in the world, but, as I suggested, it too can be seen as an open secret (François’s main concept): a secret that can be experienced but is not compelled to forcefully announce itself. The revealed secret could be the secret of the material and its consequences upon the artist, and not the other way around. In a literary essay about the mythological figure of Cassandra,

1 Ki Hinne Ka-Homer, to be found in Yom Kippur prayer.

2 Anne-Lise François, “Open Secrets: The Literature of Uncounted Experience”, Stanford University Press, 2007.

3 Shaul Setter, “‘Take it Easy’: On the Action of Anne-Lise François”, *Ot: A Journal of Literature and Theory*, 3, Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv Uni. and HaKibutz HaMeuhad, 2013, pp 203-204.

the priestess who was fated to prophesy the truth and never be believed by its hearers, Canadian poet and essayist Anne Carson describes how the viewer's captivated gaze into the light emanating from Cassandra brings forth a foul smell that later becomes clear to the viewer to be "the gelatin of your own eyeball. A smell at once small and gigantic [...] To me it is the smell of matter experiencing its own future. Scientifically, the smell of a rip in spacetime."⁴ This smell of the eye of the viewer, and of the artist as a viewer as well, and the revelation of the future arising from the gaze, from a position of observation, embodies two sources of interest to me: the material's knowledge of its future revealed in the transitions between states of accumulation, as well as the mutual experience and the thought of us as materials that reveal (or not) their own future in the face of a refused or rejected prophecy.

The title of the exhibition, *Between Two Breaths*, alludes to the time of in between actions, when seemingly nothing is changing but this is what allows the next breath, the limited time I have while working with the materials while they are not yet hardened, and the process of simultaneously "breath" with the material, understanding that the actions I perform together with the material, bind us together in the deepest sense of the word. The exhibition deals with the dynamics of the process of art creation and the challenging of the processes of manipulation and intentions on materials out of a desire to listen to the material, linger in front of it, place the "negotiation" with the material as the essence of the work and as a way to understand the "Recessive Action."

The intuitive process of creation, what unknowingly leads the process of creation, fractures in the continuum of consciousness, and raises new thinking about control and desire. The works in this show are made from a variety of materials, such as epoxy resin, metalwork, drawings and other work on paper.

Each work's scale is in relation to the body, exposing its direct physical impact on material, and reflect an interest in the subjective experience of process, gesture, time, matter, and movement. This process aims to explore how a material affects us, how we affect a material, and how this dynamic becomes a sculpture. This is a way to share with the audience moments of freedom, of lack of control, and of a physical and intimate relation between material and the body.

The works included in this show were created in three different continents, and hold four years of transitions and passages. These movements and changes of both the material and of myself, were poured into the different passages, acclimation, and changes in shades of landscapes and flavours of air, so that every repetition is also a gap and a skip, and every gap and change is also a kind of repetition, a kind of return.

David Benarroch (b.1982) is an Israeli-Spanish artist who works in sculpture, drawing, and mixed media. He lives and works between Durham NC, Madrid, and Tel Aviv.

Benarroch received his Bachelor's and Master of Fine Arts degrees from the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design in Jerusalem, alongside his studies at l'École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Paris. He has received international awards and grants, including the Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant for 2022, and participated in various solo and group exhibitions, alongside artistic residencies in Spain, Germany, Switzerland, Israel, France, Argentina, and the United States.

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4 Anne Carson, "Cassandra Float Can", in: "Float", New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016.