

Sand in the Vaseline: on twenty-first-century process art

Introduction by Alice Channer

with Alisa Baremboym / Nicolas Deshayes /

K. R. M. Mooney / Tania Pérez Córdova / Alison Wilding

The machines didn't stop – there was no bright red alarm button.¹ In response, I've invited a group of five artists, Alisa Baremboym, Nicolas Deshayes, K. R. M. Mooney, Tania Pérez Córdova and Alison Wilding, whose work and relationship to sculpture I admire, to imagine, on their own terms, the theme of process.

Last August we shot my first video, *Birthing Pools*. The camera-eyes were suspended over four hypnotic, bubbling tanks in a chroming factory near where I live in south-east London. I have taken metal things there to be expertly skinned and armoured in glamorous chrome for over a decade now; often forms cast from clothing, as well as plant and animal bodies. What pulls me back isn't so much the 'finished' sculptures I'm ostensibly making, but rather the process itself, which is seductive and disturbing. Especially the electroplating tanks, their raging surfaces criss-crossed with metal bars from which jigs are hung, submerging parts beneath and within liquid surfaces for specific periods of time (fig. 1).

During lockdown I often thought of the churning, primordial pools in the factory, and the bodies that move fluidly around them. I couldn't imagine them stilled and my intuition was right – tanks and bodies never stopped simmering; production was continuous. We filmed the copper (blue), nickel (green), hexavalent chromium (black and orange) and rinse (clear) baths over several hours as they produced a pleated chrome skin on multiple, jigged, sand-cast and vapour-blasted aluminium parts for a sculpture, *Seahorse*.

What can such artistic strategies achieve if the production line never stops? What does it mean to author sculpture on these compromised terms? What agency do we have as artists in relation to industrial production and the late-stage global capitalism that drives it relentlessly and lethally? I think we can be honest, making, on our own terms, these deliberately obscured processes visible in our work. This is what I mean by twenty-first-century process art; we can punch holes and make ruptures in smooth, hard, continent, complete and totalizing surfaces. This is what happens when, for example, naked spider and brown crab shells, their bodies 'ill acknowledged by vertebrate production chains',² are loaded into a planetary system. A planetary system is a large, rotating, steel structure made to hold hundreds of identical plastic parts (for example, car headlamps) while they are being coated in a thin layer of aluminium in a vacuum metallizing chamber. *Planetary System* (Kolzer DGK63") is also the title of a sculpture I made in 2019 (fig. 2). The multiple crustacean bodies infest a machine ostensibly used to

suffocate them swiftly and efficiently in an aluminium skin. It's the same for my 'own' exoskeleton – the metallized nails on my fingers acknowledge complicity, entanglement, as well as a kind of armour. Yes, this is personal. Recording these kinds of movements, indicating where a porous boundary might be and how it is traversed by multiple bodies at different scales, goes some way towards a politics of materiality and a mapping of agency.

Geological processes and kinds of time also provide some strategic interruption, weight and ballast against disentangled ease and anti-gravity. Portland limestone, the stone of the British state, is used as a guarantor of whiteness and ascribed purity in monumental structures such as Buckingham Palace, the Houses of Parliament, St Paul's Cathedral, the Cenotaph, the Bank of England, the British Museum and more recently in luxury retail – for example Burberry stores. I visited the mine from which this stone is extracted. It was warm down there, with deep, wet walls. At various places in the vertical mine wall, fossilized reefs of shells revealed that this limestone too is made from bodies. These areas of the stone are just less ground down than the more 'pure' – read, obscured – material used as a building stone in British buildings that shore up/edify state power. Geologist Marcia Bjornerud imagines rocks as verbs rather than nouns, because they tell the story of their own production processes.³ Sliced open in these reef areas, the extracted stone reveals its production process as biogenic, made from living things, full of holes, gaps to breathe through; tiny sarcophagi. In these surfaces, hundreds of fossils can be seen, pleating the open face of the limestone. I trust complex, honest surfaces like these.

Elon Musk, CEO of Tesla and SpaceX, has named his rocket 'Starship'. Starship is a beautiful, terrifying phallic monolith skinned in smooth, impenetrable, indifferent stainless steel. Similarly attired, the surfaces of the rockets of the world's richest men launched them into zero gravity during a global pandemic. Their desire, I think, was to disentangle themselves from the Earth and demonstrate their unquestionable right to breathe freely even in a vacuum. I've titled a series of horizontal floor-based sculptures *Starship*, after the SpaceX rocket and its glamorous mirrored stainless steel. My starships are made from machined Portland limestone, lost-wax cast and mirror-polished aluminium, sand-cast, vapour-blasted, chrome-plated and machined aluminium, and laser-cut and mirror-polished stainless steel. In relation to the gravity and anti-gravity of stone, of sculpture, of the state, of techno-capitalism, here are these heavy, yet light, floor-hugging columns, made with seriousness and play, interrupted by the marks of the bodies they contain, and by the industrial processes of casting and chroming. Here in this lived complexity is my politics of materiality.

In the pages that follow, five invited artists each imagine the theme of process from their own unique sculptural perspective. Alisa Baremboym makes visible the mass-production processes of contemporary sculpture itself, and its intersection with the production and distribution of all consumer goods. Nicolas Deshayes similarly describes processes of circulation, specifically of heat within human and planetary sculptural bodies. Multiple processing bodies are also layered in K. R. M. Mooney's contribution, bearing

witness to cuttlebone as both internal animal shell and external industrial mould. Tania Pérez Córdova maps the complications of inserting artistic authorship into an industrialized, standardized process, and Alison Wilding describes the definitively 'loose, scattered and unpredictable' processes by which she arrives at singular forms.

1. In March 2020, in 'Where to land after the pandemic', published on his website, Bruno Latour reported on an 'incredible discovery: already in the world economic system there was, hidden from us all, a bright red alarm button with a nice big stainless-steel handle that the heads of state could pull ... to instantly stop the "train of progress"', http://www.bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/downloads/P-202-AOC-ENGLISH_1.pdf, accessed 24 January 2022.

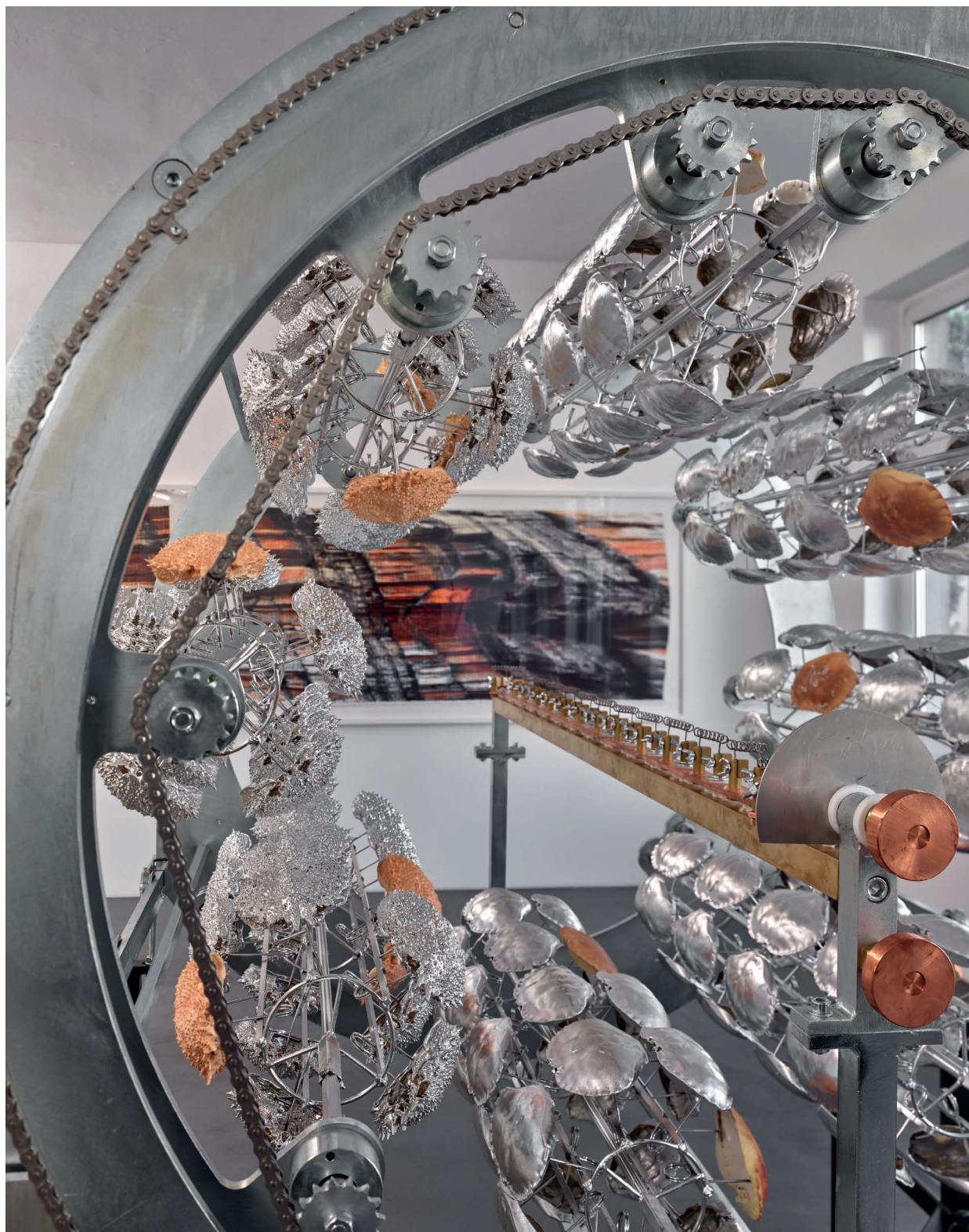
2. This phrase is from a text on material complicity by Kari Rittenbach, commissioned to accompany my solo show 'Synthetic Fibres' in 2014, https://alicechanner.com/files/AC_TEXT_140529_Rittenbach.pdf, accessed 24 January 2022.

3. Marcia Bjornerud, *Timefulness*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2018.

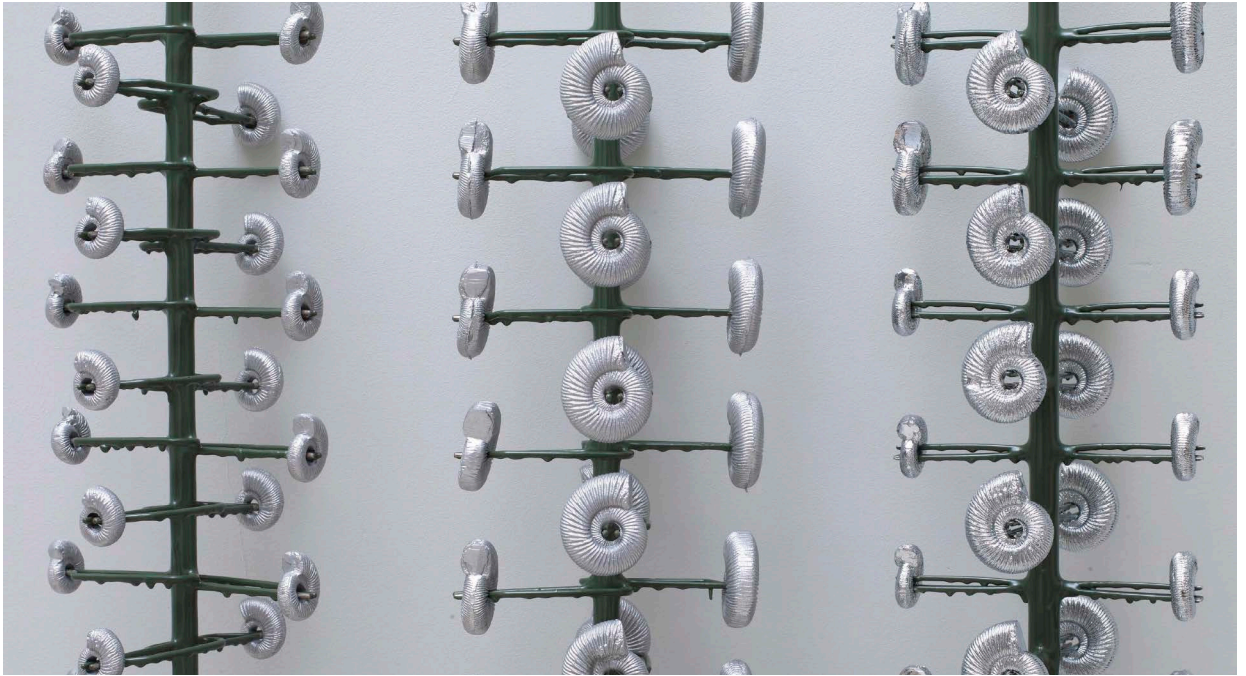
There is a politics to what gets recognized as sculpture. For artists who insist on the vulnerability of their forms, who show us objects still entangled with their production processes, the stakes are high. I want to sink down into the deep surfaces that processes leave on, and in, objects. These incidents leave objects scarred and vulnerable; this is the point at which it is no longer possible to separate a form from the systems that produced it. This is where sculpture is both de- and re-anthropomorphized. The sandy texture left on cast whelk shells pushed through an industrial beach, the fingerprints written by a 3D printer in the skin of a stretched digit, the pleats in the surface of a smooth chrome armour (fig. 3). Speed them up and slow them down. Sand in the Vaseline. An infestation of crabs in the vacuum metallizing chambers. Hundreds of fingers dipping their hot, desiring tips into the churning surface of a pool of glistening red thermoplastic (fig. 4). Your thyroid gland sheltered by concrete canvas, intestines in our plumbing, molten metal poured into cephalopod bones, coins melting in my hand, animal hide sliced from neoprene. STOP.

1 Alice Channer, *Birthing Pools*, 2022, still from HD video. Camera: Rose Goddard. Courtesy the artist



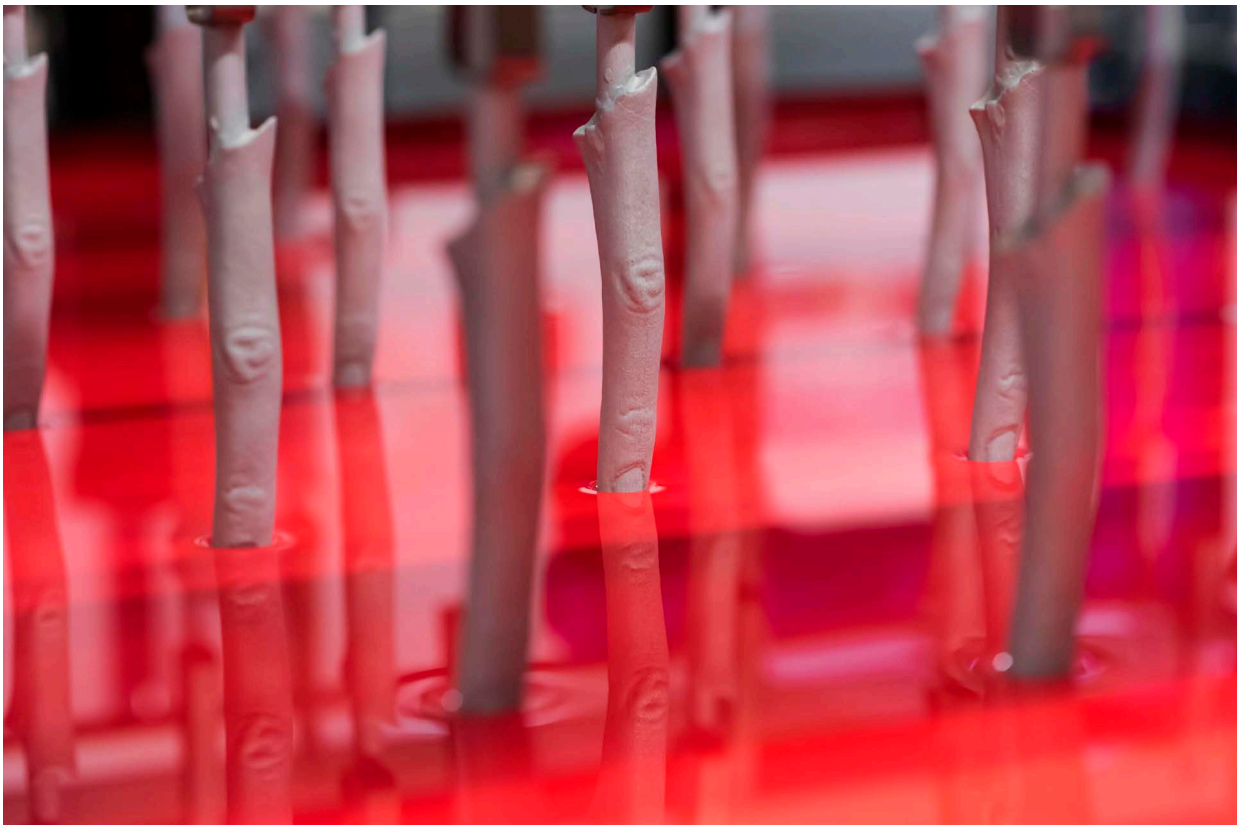


2 Alice Channer, *Planetary System (Kolzer DGK63)* (detail), 2019, Kolzer DGK63" horizontal system vacuum metallizing carousel, vacuum metallized spider crab (*Maja brachydactyla*) and brown crab (*Cancer pagurus*), shells on stainless steel jigs, 160 × 150 × 210 cm. Courtesy the artist and Konrad Fischer Galerie, Berlin and Düsseldorf (photo: Achim Kukieles)



3 Alice Channer, *Nautilus* (detail), 2021, three chroming jigs (brass, thermoplastic and stainless steel), sand-cast and vapour-blasted aluminum, sand-cast and chromed aluminium, 100 × 100 × 35 cm, shown installed as part of *Megaflora* (solo), Large Glass, London, 2021. Courtesy the artist and Large Glass, London
(photo: Stephen White and Co.)

4 Alice Channer, *Mechanoreceptor, Icicles (red, red) (triple spring, triple strip)*, in production at Plastic Coatings, Kingswinford, West Midlands, UK, 16 February 2018. Courtesy the artist
(photo: Thierry Bal)



On process and production

Alisa Baremboym

Scarcity has become a reality in modern neo-capitalist nations during a time of Covid supply chain disruptions. Having spent my formative years in the Soviet Union and carrying the baggage of the days of 'deficit' in my ancestral story makes this a familiar moment in history. When it comes to scarcity, I'm not subject to the panic that sends one to the store to buy a pallet-load of toilet paper at the onset of a pandemic. It is as if the modern, comfort-conditioned brain cannot fathom looking at shelves that are empty for days without a terrifying sense of impending doom, and a lack that can only be filled with these coveted objects for bodily comfort.

There was no abundance of objects in the Soviet Union, and therefore no comfort to be found therein. There was a comfort in knowing you could survive using your cunning to create or contort the tool you needed out of what was around you, or, if you could, miraculously scavenge or barter. The scarcity became a scavenger hunt, during which you would have adventures upon adventures, stories to tell of how you went on a voyage for that roll of toilet paper that somehow lasted you all winter. Maybe this sense of adventure channelled the normal anxiety about survival into a stoic outlook, backed by a more primordial sense of time and space, not attached to a consumerist object-making mindset.

In diametric opposition to this scarcity is the schematic of contemporary art-world production, and how its process of serialized, slick object-making became a lucrative mechanism of hoarding wealth. In Europe's entrenched system, artists get grants to make social commentary as a mirror to 'teach' the world; in the US you can get money thrown at you if you can consistently prove to be a prolific object/product maker and ahead of the curve, or a maker of easily consumable luxury/beauty. This latter idea has seeped into most global markets at this point, not just the US – a free art market with little oversight for its amassed wealth, and tax havens in storage freeports around the globe.

The idea of a limitless 'prolific' production keeps up the status quo under the guise of democratizing art. The machine works in service of the conveyor belt that moves it along. This production is inextricably linked to destruction of thought and buying into neo-capitalist thinking about what art should be. It is a Target centre for 'all', with more objects to fill the world with.

The flip side of that coin is a rarefied art object produced uniquely and often by hand for an elite audience. Its lack of visibility to the general public leads to its status as an expensive curiosity, at worst, and a rare art object

meant for museums at best. This mode of production is tied to the mythic artist's hand that produces it. While I am more inclined not to sustain a production factory to create my objects, there is more of a questioning of the actual making that informs my process of making objects, which, despite all, I am compelled to continue. In establishing what you're against, you establish what you are for. Are we a mirror to our society if we're gleefully participating in the practices that underscore its demise?

These production tactics may be remnants of a Warholian logic on 'roids', with a sprinkle of unfathomable wealth, and it reeks of the 'if we can't beat them then join them' rhetoric of aspirational wealth that we as humans and artists fall into the trap of. Being producers and consumers of insatiable wealth, can we think through a more interesting method of production to create objects that are imbued with meaning, meaning that doesn't exist merely as a vehicle for the accumulation of wealth in storage freeports? If artists resist feeding into the supply and demand game of the purveyors of the art market, we can amass a greater autonomy of thought and greater care for a planet littered with objects of mass production.



1 Alisa Baremboym, *Labor Trickle Down*
Flow II, 2021, watercolour on arches paper,
40.5 × 30.5 cm. Courtesy the artist



2 Alisa Baremboym, *UNIT 2: Thyroid: Growth & Development*, 2018, concrete canvas, ceramic, mineral oil gel, cotton wick, vinyl, glass, perspex, 173 × 104 × 104 cm. Courtesy the artist and 47 Canal, Konrad Fischer Galerie (photo: Roman März)



3 Alisa Baremboym, *Amphicense Systems* (detail), 2014, mangled steel, ceramic, tinted vinyl, tubing, webbing, hardware, 223.52 × 78.74 × 40.64 cm. Image courtesy of the artist and 47 Canal, New York and Taipei Fine Arts Museum (photo: Wan-jen Chen)

On temperature

Nicolas Deshayes

One of my most formative learning experiences came from the casting technician on my BA who taught me that making sculpture was like cooking: sifting, chopping, melting, mixing, baking: intuitive, precise, chemical. I have spent the last twenty years concocting recipes to create forms that explore the materiality of human or planetary bodies: their inner workings, circulatory tracts, epidermal reactions, cellular structure and liquidity. The results have looked at once edible or regurgitated, tantalizing or repulsive, cold and warm.

The materials I use are corporeal in that they are mined, quarried, exhumed, grown or digested from the earth's body before being refined industrially with varying degrees of sensuality. As I work to exhibition deadlines, metamorphosing materials, my own body weight fluctuates, going through its own processing. The compulsion to make can be uncomfortable.

Process often takes me far and wide to the factories and artisans that have strengths in the specialisms I'm interested in. The context and manufacturing history of a specific industry influences the work I end up producing there, and the themes in my work evolve according to the processes I encounter.

I have made works in the iron foundries of the Black Country where Abraham Darby developed the process of smelting iron ore with coke to produce fine castings, paving the way for the Industrial Revolution (fig. 1). I have collaborated closely with the artisanal ceramicists of the Veneto, who supplied the palazzos of Venice with their opulent wares (fig. 2). I have worked with anodizers in Lancashire, who protect the anodic film of aluminium against the corrosive threats of deep ocean floors, aeronautical space and high street pizza ovens; as well as with London vacuum-formers, purveyors of moulded bus seats and supermarket beacons; or vitreous enamellers on the Isle of Wight whose hard metal forms are coated in liquid sand.¹

The works I create have often been cold to the touch, but they imply organic movement, fleeting moments frozen in stasis, a classical sculptural trope. Over time, however, I've realized that the processes and materials I am interested in rely heavily on temperature, or extreme heat, to take them out of dormancy. The materiality of the works remains corporeal, always, thanks to the momentary pulse that they were given in a kiln, crucible, oven or hot bath.

I have tried to clasp on to this moment (figs. 3 and 4), by plumbing hot water into sculptures so that the experience of viewing could be extended to touch and atmosphere, pipes revitalizing cold castings intravenously. But there is no clearer awareness of life and death than the experience of driving vulnerable waxes to a foundry in the height of summer and then watching their oily green flesh be buried in chest freezers ahead of their appointment with the furnace (fig. 5).

1. In an attempt to work more locally I have started a database of artisans and fabricators that can be used by artists working in the south-east of England, where I am based: <https://dadonline.uk/legacy/kent-fabrication-directory/>.



1 Nicolas Deshayes, *Gargouilles* at Le Creux de l'enfer, Thiers, France, installation view, 2021. Courtesy Modern Art, London (photo: Vincent Blesbois)



2 Nicolas Deshayes, *Dolomiti*, 2020, glazed earthenware, 32 × 49 × 8 cm. Courtesy Modern Art, London (photo: Robert Glowacki)

3 Nicolas Deshayes, *Thames Water*, 2016, cast iron, hot water, 104 × 210 × 8 cm. Courtesy Modern Art, London (photo: Robert Glowacki)





4 Nicolas Deshayes, *Thames Water*, 2016, cast iron, hot water, 54 × 48 × 8 cm. Courtesy Modern Art, London (photo: Robert Glowacki)



5 Nicolas Deshayes, *Gargoyle*, 2021, bronze, 30 × 32 × 22 cm. Courtesy Modern Art, London (photo: Vincent Blesbois)

One-to-one

K. R. M. Mooney

Cuttlebone as a tool, a carrier and a substance offers a multiplicity of uses. It has been my teacher in its immediacy and the significance of its surface. I use this material in a process of metal casting and feel attuned to its directness. It provides an intimacy in my methods and requires an approach that has situated me in my field. This is a mode of working I've also come to value in other people, asking how, and with whom, do I extend myself and am I able to negotiate the realms of art production? Much like architecture, sculpture is commonly associated with solid forms and a building up. I often arrive at meaning through forms that pursue a return to the horizontal. In past works I've expressed this by duplicating the floorplan of an apartment gallery in vinyl, removing all of the vertical supports of an overhead enclosure (fig. 1), or taking a bell striker that one associates with living up high, and placing it directly on the ground (fig. 2).

In my studio, I make room for secondary uses and dynamics that emerge only through an object coming undone, like the iterative potential of applying heat to metal, asking it to become liquid and take new form. With this, there's a desire to pursue ideological shifts in art that are fragile, always shifting and incomplete achievements. Yet what remains a rare constant is that form and content, as well as material and process, are bound up in one another. Having recently moved from one coast to another, and following a shift in how I use my body, this has remained with me over the last ten years of my career as an artist working in sculpture, and it continues to offer itself as a parallel to my thinking (fig. 3).

The internal shell of cuttlefish works as a buoyancy system, bringing water in and filtering it out to move between ocean depths. The bone, when separated from the organism, is a highly porous, air-rich material, primarily composed of aragonite or calcium carbonate and other trace elements accumulated over the course of a mollusc's life. Each bone is singular; written into its surface and size are the varying conditions of the seawater, such as temperature, salinity and its chemical composition, which combine to determine the elemental ratios that are found within its substance. Its uses and distributive properties are understudied, but we know cuttlebone as a debris material, washed up and gathered on various coastal shorelines. This contributes to the accumulation of lime, from which whole economies, towns and cities have been built. Jewellers use cuttlebone as a mould by preparing it, cutting it in half and rubbing the two sides together until they are flush against one another. After that, casting can be done by carving a pattern into

the cuttlebone, adding the necessary sprue, melting the metal in a separate crucible and pouring the molten metal into the cuttlebone mould.

Cuttlebone casting has a multitude of associative potentials. When I have incorporated the shell as a material in my work, it has been mistaken for a 3D printed form, while it is actually one of the oldest casting methods in history. It produces an object with a textured, landscape-like surface consisting of scaffolds, striations and ridges. It is significantly adaptable in terms of where production can take place – in a garage, shed, backyard or at the shoreline. It needs gravel or sand to provide protection from cast-off molten metal and a space for a focused flame; any slight flash of heat from the torch on the shell produces golden amber to dark brown colorations and finally creates ash (figs. 4 and 5).

The process of metal casting varies according to the needs of each alloy, and each requires specific tools and facilities. Orienting myself as an artist to metal because it inhabits a series of flows, the process involved encompasses both substances and acute actions. Heat, electricity and gases are equal participants and collaborators for casting to occur, along with knowledge sets, such as wax working, plaster mould making, sophisticated tools, a source of high heat such as a torch, crucible or kiln, and gear to protect the body. The simplicity of cuttlebone casting allows for the very few materials to be intimately bound by their interdependent and specific properties when put in touch with one another. I ask myself if such a process is not more than just a means of production, but also aligns itself with a set of values, as one is using what is found and nearby in the most direct and one-to-one ways, through an application that is only limited by the thickness and overall dimensions of a shell.

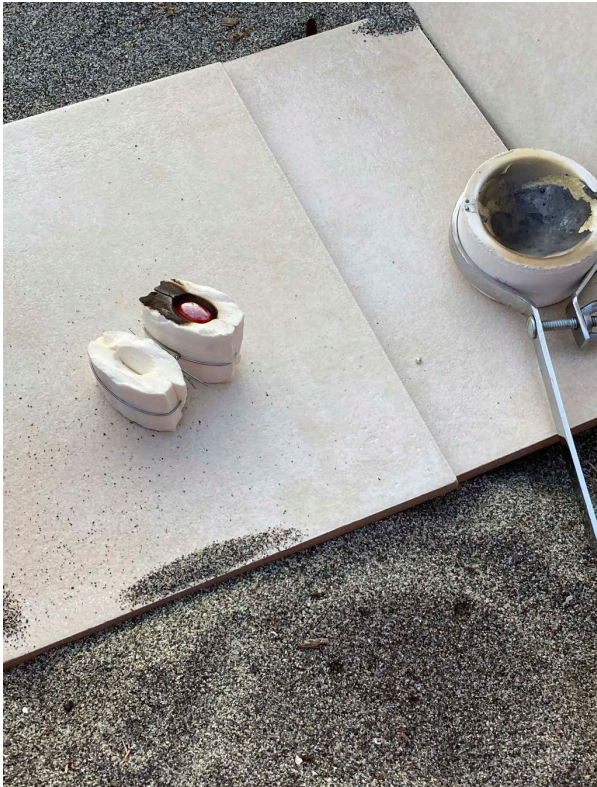
1 K. R. M. Mooney, *Accretion I*, 2018, aluminium, polycarbonate vinyl, steel, polyurethane, 6.7 × 3 × 0.75 m (22 × 10 × 2.5 ft). Altman Siegel, San Francisco.
(photo: Robert D. Herrick)

2 K. R. M. Mooney, *Strike i-iii*, 2020, cast bronze, olivine sand, 76.2 × 30.5 × 25.4 cm (30 × 12 × 10 in.). Sculpture Center, Long Island City, NY
(photo: Kyle Knodell)





3 K.R.M. Mooney, *Deposition c. (I)*, 2021, electroplated steel, silver, cuttlebone, aluminum, 26 × 5 × 7.6 cm (10 5/8 × 2 × 3 in.). Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York (photo: Chris Grunder)



4 K. R. M. Mooney, process image:
cuttlebone casting on Salish coastal land,
2020, Freeland, Washington
(photo: courtesy of the artist)



5 K. R. M. Mooney, process image: cuttlebone
casting on Salish coastal land, 2020, Freeland,
Washington
(photo: courtesy of the artist)

A bell into a bell into a bell

Tania Pérez Córdova

Some years ago I started working at a foundry on the outskirts of Mexico City. The place looked like a large garage, mostly open air, with piles of sand, sculptures and fragmented moulds scattered everywhere. There was a persistent smell of gas, and cumbia music playing in the background. At the time the foundry's main work was the production of a series of statuettes for a well-known local film prize. I went for a few meetings, and hence, parallel to my own work, I was able to witness the development of these trophies. On the day they were melting the metal to be poured into the moulds, I noticed that the workers kept bringing large sacks of smashed soda and beer cans which they were adding into the mix. After a lot of questioning, they finally confessed that they were basically saving money by adding residual tin into the bronze mix. They explained that the colour of the final object would not change considerably; the only difference would be its weight, a difference the winning filmmakers would not register when holding their trophies.

I kept thinking of their secret metal alloy and its implications. Finally I asked them to help me make some replicas of Mexican ten peso coins using a mix of bronze and beer cans. They decided they also had to drink the beers they would use. The day I tried to Fedex a coin I remembered that my crime, money forging, was actually much bigger than theirs. At least theoretically.

Recently I decided to work on a series of objects that I call to this day objects into themselves. I had an image in my mind: an ice cube melting in the sun that would then be re-frozen, melted again, then re-frozen, every time getting smaller, every time losing a bit of itself in the process of being remade. I chose to work with a series of objects that would be pure in composition, all made of a single metal: a brass trumpet that I bought from a man playing music for money in my street; the only fancy iron pot we had at home; a large bronze bell that was probably produced to be sold to a church.

By the time I started working on this bell, I had had to change foundry. The location of the first workshop had become too dangerous for me to go to. Explaining to the workers what I wanted to do was very hard: to produce a mould of this bell, then cut the bell into pieces, then melt it and put it back into its own mould. They would argue that the object would lose its capacity to sound, the material would probably not be enough to fill the mould and the bell would lose its shape. I insisted that every result would be OK, and yet most people were not willing to do it. It would be wasted work, even if I paid. It created a sense of anger, appeared a stubborn idea that I myself started feeling guilty about. Still, the more I went on, the clearer the undertaking



became that of an object that I could recast again and again, every time more deformed, every time less of itself; the whole process leading towards a disappearance, undoing while doing.

During these years I persistently felt how between an intention and a final object there stands the story of what leads something to exist.

1 Tania Pérez Córdova, *Éste país, ésta gente, éste gobierno*, 2014 (replica of a Mexican ten peso coin), mix of bronze and beer cans, 2.5 x 0.4 cm (photo: courtesy of the artist)

2 Tania Pérez Córdova, *A bell into a bell*, 2021, bronze and rope, 66 x 58 cm (photo: courtesy of the artist and Galerie Martin Janda)



Loose, scattered and unpredictable

Alison Wilding

Part 1

A friend asked me to her house to observe her diamond dealers at work. It was a mesmerizing sleight of hand display, with watchful dealers shuffling diamonds and other gems around the table. I have no interest in diamonds but I was drawn in and bought a quantity of brilliantly cut small stones. I told myself I could justify this by using them in a sculpture – although I had seen quite enough of glittering diamonds in other artists' works. That was in 2010.

Much time then passes...

I had an idea to embed some diamonds in a glass beaker, almost as a way of getting rid of them, and went to a historic glass-blowing factory in Stourbridge. They tried, but diamonds are obdurate – and cool at a different rate to lead crystal. A few diamonds were lost. But the hand-blown glass beakers were simply beautiful and I ordered 25. I thought I could make a work with the beakers – an edition. It hasn't happened.

More time passes... Other works are made but the diamonds are still in a tiny box reproaching me.

We have a silver cocktail shaker and I find a metal spinner to make nine copper facsimiles which are subsequently silver-plated in a dubious, cash-only workshop. The idea of an *edition* is clearly still alive. From here on, the silvery containers become the focus of a work. But I don't like them. I hate being beaten, I have to find a way through this.

I only like the interior of these cocktail shakers and want to bury them or rather to embed each one in a small block of plaster which would reveal a cocktail-shaker-shaped cavity. This presents an opportunity for a lid to complete the 'box'. Lids are something I like. And if each box had an oversized bronze lid... At the time I was entering negotiations with a bronze foundry to cast the body of a drinking fountain (*Herm 2017*) and the bronze lids became an add-on to that project. Here the diamonds re-entered the work: within a circular groove machined into the underside of each bronze lid, seven diamonds were glued into tiny cavities. So, five years on, I finally understood what I was doing.

In 2018 one of this small edition was finally completed when I added some of my late husband's ashes.

I tend not to rhapsodize about industrial processes. I notice that I've glossed over four of them in the course of making this work – I use them as jumping-off points to progress the loose, scattered and unpredictable process of making work (fig. 1).

Part 2

New work can seamlessly feed from a previous work, or an impulse to do or see something – anything, although it's what happens next that counts. But recently the climate crisis has stopped me in my tracks – now the imperative is sustainability, and most of the materials I have ever used together with industrial processes are tarnished by their carbon footprint.

Restrictions, though, can be liberating.

In 2021 I slowly made three works, all from materials already in the studio. First I asked my assistant to join some lengths of kiln-dried ash to make a leaning, dismountable and upright frame with a cross-piece on which was placed a grey paper boat. Second, I bent thin, round, steel rods to stand (precariously) with a length of laminated and twisted ply threaded through them. I put this work together in less than an hour. The third work was a structure of thin brass tubes into which I bent and inserted brass rods, interlocked and self-supporting, standing next to a large acrylic sphere covered in sections of black muslin cut from a Vivienne Westwood skirt.

These three works have a tentative and impermanent fragility, like sketches, but are also totally realized. They were in my studio for months before I realized that placed together they were really one work provisionally titled *Three ways of ...* – of movement perhaps: the stationary boat, the sphere about to, or having just been... and the dancing line (fig. 2).

This was a self-contained and solitary process with long periods of time between each work. I allowed Ollie (my assistant) a certain leeway both with the structure he made and with a series of paper boats which I myself could have made – sometimes a response to another fingerprint is what I want.

Can I really carry on working in this rigorous, pared-down way? Well, obviously not, as a work that has preoccupied me for over two years is about to be fabricated at enormous cost. The desire to pursue a sculpture to its conclusion, whatever that entails, is more powerful.

Overleaf

1 Alison Wilding, *Ashes and Diamonds* (edition of 7 + 2 artist's proofs), 2010–15, crystal/wood ash, silver-plated copper, bronze, diamonds, 15.5 × 17.5 × 13 cm
(photo: Noah Da Costa)

2 Alison Wilding, *Three ways of ...*, 2021, wood, paper, steel, high-density foam, brass, acrylic, fabric (variable installation), 156 × 276 × 172 cm
(photo: the artist)

