



Process and production

Jacob Carter and Francesca Bruno

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Interview

Francesca Bruno: How do your sculptural works employ and investigate the concept of materiality?

Jacob Carter: Well, within my work I do enjoy a play with materials. It is very process driven. Works might be inspired by a found object I have come across on a walk to the studio. A discarded piece of concrete for example. I find myself taking these materials and putting them through different processes as a way to enact their material. Such as through collecting and archiving, placing different objects together and drawing connections to their materiality. They might be photographed, cast, painted onto, wrapped in other materials, or the shape of an object that might be laser cut onto acrylic, being transformed into a flat 2D object. I think this is what drew me to more sculptural works, as I have more freedom to explore the texture of a surface, or the fragmented outline of a form. These are all ways in which I try and draw out a particular material.

FB: One of your sculptural works, *Insert* (2022) comprises mortar and silicone. The contrasting materials compel a tactile engagement from its audience, suggesting the work exists to be touched. How important is it that your work focuses on tactile experience as an aspect of materiality?

JC: There is something just simply touchable with some materials. Touch is just a way of understanding a material, understanding its texture, its strength, its elasticity. It is also a breath of fresh air for an artwork to be available to be touched, it brings the audience in more as an active participant. The sculpture only truly works as soon as it is interacted with. I enjoy how it can go from difference states. It starts as this very painterly, geometric cube, with a flat but contrasting textural surface. But as soon as it is touched, such as a finger pressing through the silicone, it is immediately transformed. It is no longer flat, but a fluid and springy surface.

FB: Themes of solar punk and post humanism have made a permanent mark on how the future of humanity is envisioned in contemporary art and popular culture more broadly. How have these movements inspired your work conceptually and aesthetically?

JC: I think that art can give people a talking point that can be used to explore these ideas or challenge subjects and build conversations around particular issues.

In terms of Reworlding, these themes were developed through continuous conversation with Hayley Salter, who created the series of hanging photographic prints for show. We were looking at our own interests and identified a common connection between my own interest in urban spaces with Hayley's interest in photographing activists and outdoor spaces. Solar Punk became an early inspiration, and this encouraged us to explore our connection to spaces. Solar

Punk is a movement that imagines a possible future which is characterised by a perfect connection between nature and urban spaces, with an emphasis on sustainability. This theme then fed into how my work made reference to types of architecture, and also with some sculptural pieces layering natural imagery, forming that connection between raw, utilitarian materials and more sustainable and natural ones.

FB: You employ utilitarian materials like concrete and aim to question the functionality of your sculptures. Could you say a little more about this? Are the sculptures themselves meant to be functional, or just the materials from which they are constructed?

JC: With these types of materials, it comes back to an interest in the use of concrete as a Roman invention for construction and how this was later adopted within Modernist and Brutalist architecture as this perceived unbreakable futuristic material. There





is something to the fact that it was initially seen as an answer to utopian living but in reality this was not the case and can even be seen as a failure, as an ugly and environmentally damaging material.

I enjoy this idea of functionality through sculptures like *Oscillate* (2022) which incorporate a motorised component. This movement suggest to some kind of function but at closer inspection it appears pointless and achieving no understandable result. In a similar way *'Smear'* (2022) in collaboration with Mau Samayoa also offers a kind of function, a constantly dripping oil that slowly stains a surface. There is not so much of an actual function as there is simply a thing happening to a material, one substance affecting another. There is more of an interest in how materials can be put through a change, so how a perfectly crisp piece of white paper can be slowly damaged and stained, putting a strain onto the fibres of the paper, affecting its translucency.

FB: Can you tell me more about your employment of ancient construction processes and how they influence your practice?

JC: I take a lot of inspiration from ancient artefacts such as Egyptian and ancient Roman slab stones as well as neolithic stone circles, due to both the raw materials but also the aged and fragmented qualities of them.

A lot of these sculptural slab stones make use of terrazzo which links back to the architectural. This material was commonly used as a decorative flooring developed in 18th century Venice, where pieces of aggregate such as marble, stone or glass are held together within cement and then ground down and polished to reveal the variation of pattern, colour and texture. I am fascinated by how this at one time was considered the height of luxury, but it is now more commonly associated with the yellowed resin flooring of 80's shopping malls and train stations.

However, by using this process and reducing its scale I am aiming to reclaim the beauty in this process. I see these sculptures more as paintings, following the process of foreground, background, colour theory and composition, as these are encapsulated within a flat sculptural surface.

FB: How do you decide which mediums to choose for projects, do the projects inspire the medium or vice versa?

JC: I think it is a little bit of both. When I come into making a project I already come into it with my own interests in specific materials. However, in other situations sometimes the concept is more important and becomes a leading point and the materials becomes secondary, something more to aid in portraying the concept. In terms of the way I make work, there is a long process of collecting and archiving, finding different objects of various materials, from throwaway plastic waste or pieces of stone either natural or industrial.

These can become an inspiration for the material or may just be used to inform the shape of a sculpture. In my work I do enjoy a process of transformation where I can take one object, material or idea and put it through different processes. So, I may start with one idea, such as a found piece of concrete and I may end up in a completely different outcome, such as textiles or printmaking.

FB: Do you believe that contemporary art should have a strong social function, and is this something you are trying to achieve with your work, for example in Reworlding?

JC: I think that many artists practices do serve a social function, some more so than others. In terms of Reworlding, as a collaboration it was definitely a new approach to making and working alongside Hayley Salter which definitely led to discussing concepts I wouldn't normally pursue.

For that exhibition we did hope that it could create a conversation about our connection with the environment. The process also helped to make ourselves more knowledgeable about the materials we use in our own work and how we might work more sustainably. I do find that I have a drive to reuse materials or give unwanted objects a new life. Such as in 'Platforms' (2022) the large pieces of green fabric were sourced from Scrap Store Birmingham, which sell scrap materials donated by companies and individuals which would otherwise have been destined for landfill. This way of working more sustainably is definitely something that will be in the back of my mind when approaching new work.

FB: Much of your work comprises raw and industrial materials such as concrete and steel. You also integrate machinery and technology into your work, like in your piece *Oscillate* (2022). Has growing up around Birmingham, a city with a richly diverse cultural and

industrial heritage, motivated these aspects of your work?

JC: Definitely. I think it's hard not to be inspired by all the Brutalist and Post-Modernist Architecture. I think especially in some of my most recent work the relationship between architecture is more noticeable. There are obviously the formal similarities with use of raw and industrial materials but also the actual processes of casting and the mechanised movements in some of the sculptures like the incessant scraping in *Oscillate* which could almost be a small machine trying to sculpt out the surface itself. I do like the juxtaposition between processes like terrazzo which has so much history but combining that with electronics, creating quite an unusual pairing which brings the work forwards more into the contemporary. I think the process of scavenging for objects or taking images and videos on my phone from walks around the city can serve as a lot of inspiration. It might just be a

quick video or image of a demolished building, or a fragmented piece of paving tile, but they all form references for when I come to creating new work. Even within the titles of the artworks themselves I aim to make references to architecture through terminology, spaces or processes, names such as Arch, Stella and Dais come to mind.

