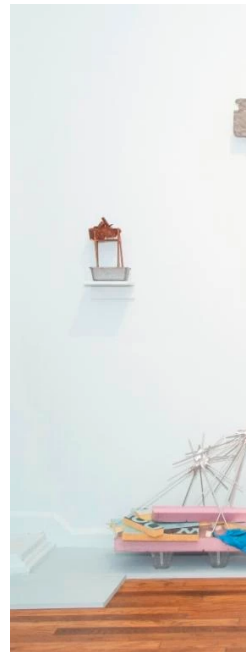


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Fragile Anxiety

The following conversation between the artists **Yasi Alipour**, **Cy Morgan** and **Phong Bui** took place at Geary Contemporary Gallery on Wednesday Evening, August 18 on the occasion of Alipour and Morgan's two-person show, curated by Bui, entitled ***Mutual Convergence***, on view from July 22 through August 20th at Geary Gallery, 208 Bowery



Phong: I just recalled something Picasso once said about Cezanne; it's not just enough to look at his painting, or drawing, or whatnot; it's really about feeling the anxiety. When Cezanne paints an apple, it's not just simply an apple, it's a titanic anxiety being kept within the apple that's about to burst out and become so monumental because of your own response to it. So there's a formal quality to the surface, to the appearance, but underneath there's a lot of emotion, there's a lot of uncertainty. The idea of anxiety that becomes fragile. Yasi, you fold [paper] incessantly. The folding is a form of drawing: can you elaborate more on that?

Yasi: I do think it's related to abstract geometry in the Middle East. I'm thinking a lot about mathematics, I'm thinking at the same time about architecture; a lot of my inspirations are from these people who are scientists, poets, architects, and designers—it's all happening at the same time. It's mark-making, and it started for me as that. One of the first things I ever folded was, in our middle school we had these geometric drawings, and they would give you an algorithm, "connect point zero to point one," and if you did it, you had this curve, and as a kid this blew my mind. But I was also terrible with a pencil or a ruler, so learned to do it with my hands. If I'm somewhere and there's a piece of paper, then the drawing can just happen with time. It's a lot about mathematics and it's a lot about the surface of the paper as this definition of what is 2D, and in that way it's about drawing—what it means to move within the surface.

Phong: In your case Cy, let me try to psychoanalyze you now, In remember when you included some of your works in the Surviving

Sandy show (2013) you wanted to counterbalance the idea of made and found object together.

Cy: I think those come from different things that I'm following in the work; the growth and potential for something new to arise, and the constant degradation of those things that have arisen over time. The actions and tensions of those around you. The character of found objects is something that I'm drawn to because I feel like I can't make it myself. I wouldn't want to make it: while I'm interested in found objects generally, the right one has to be present in order to work. And then as far as the building goes, I like those materials [wood, hot glue, copper piping, cement/plaster] because they have a character to them—in my mind I build up a bit of mythology around them. Copper is the method of transmission—communication, water, shit, everything you need comes through copper.

Phong: Do you share an affinity with Arte Povera?

Cy: I feel like I do, because of the scale of the work. It's very diminutive sometimes, in part because I can work with that kind of speed: one idea, and another, and another, and see how those ideas interact. So the relationship to Arte Povera may be on an aesthetic level, rather than the social strivings of that time.

Phong: What about Richard Tuttle? Who similarly deploys very casual, oftentimes non-art related objects which can be very playful, at times very humorous, and at times very profound and mystical and poetic

CY: I think what Richard Tuttle can do with an object: imbue it with everything art can be is the magic. He finds a way to take your perception and instead of turning it one way or another, he turns it on an axis which you previously weren't aware of. He has that facility of confronting you with the commonplace in a completely unimaginable way. Other artists I think about, since you've mentioned the monumental, are the American Land Artists; like Michael Heiser especially.

Phong: You both went to Columbia University graduate school, I've taught there here and there. Yasi, how did it benefit you studying with certain specific artists and professors—how did that amplify your own growth as an artist? Or not?

Yasi: This is something I think about a lot, because when does that education happen? I think a lot of things that are important to me happened since [graduate school]. My conversations with Cy are complicated and weird—we were very different artists when we were together in the classroom. There's definitely been mentors: I think Thomas Vu is someone who's been important, because of the way he shows up, because of the way he remains a teacher and pushes you. Mark Dion has been a true mentor; Ralph Lemon blew my mind, and those are people I continually think about.

Phong: You share this oh-so-similar fragility. To paraphrase Ruskin in "Stones of Venice": All admit irregularity as they imply change—to banish imperfection is to destroy expression. So fragility, and that relationship of things that come and go; disappear and appear; growth and decay. It's so much of what I see in both of your work.

Yasi, how do you begin to do your folding and what's the process of thinking, drawing, and also how the mind keeps up with the hand

Yasi: For me, one fold starts posing questions that then become other folds. Sometimes that's literally one form, like a set of movements shifting to another set of movements rather than finishing the six points, let's finish five points and see what happens. Then I start folding that in different scales: what is it like if it's a printer sized paper? What is it like if it's more detailed? And it shifts and I never know, the proposition is there and I will not know what will happen to it until I fold it. But I know my moves, I'll be like, I need a circle for this, this is the algorithm I have to make circles, and then I start with measuring that, which is interesting because a lot of the lines are the process of measuring itself. So then the moves follow each other. Then after a while of continuously working with one fold, with one set of moves, suddenly something is unfinished, and I'm like "whoa this is its own thing," and then you start exploring that. The triangle happened like that, which was a big moment for me, around a year and a half ago. At the same time I was thinking about the different tones of grays that I get with the process of folding—the exhaustion of paper.

Phong: You're addicted!

Yasi: I'm fairly addicted.

Phong: Cy, all of your works in "Mutual Convergence" share the same name "Model for an Exhibition"—tell us more about that, the differences, the aspirations, what compels you, to choose one thing and do the opposite?

CY: I don't necessarily do the easy thing, I like to do the complicated thing, and I think each one of those [sculptures] is an example of "the complicated thing" and "the easy thing." The lampshades: the easy thing, definitely the easy thing. I found these five lampshades... you know what no, none of its easy, it's always complicated, none of it's the easy thing. So they sit around the studio: I've probably tried them in about 300 different configurations, and there's some that I've like almost as much as this configuration [in this show]. When you came to the studio, that's how it was, and so that's how it is right now. In another concrete piece I was really interested in casting these shapes, previously it was triangles. I was casting in one section, turning, cast in another section, turn, cast in another section, turn, cast in another section, and the premise was until it stands. That piece [in this show] I didn't feel like it had to stand. It came out of the mold, it surprised me, and it changed its own context—I was glad to recognize that it didn't have to stand, it could be something else than what I had intended for it. And I think in those moments I can recognize my own work more clearly than when I execute something that I had planned ahead of time.

Phong: Your deployment of geometry is not quite planned or in a routine-ized way, like the way Yasi thinks of geometry, you think of geometry in a very intuitive and spontaneous way...

Cy: It's that pull between perfect imaginary geometry and the realities of the physical world are guiding lines for me. I will come up with rules for a particular sculpture—I'm going to make a tower out of triangles and it starts to go straight up, but then it starts to list a little bit, just because of the way that I'm making it. And so I follow the list, I follow the ever more acute triangles until they diminish into single lines. It's the geometry of the growing world: why do bees make hexagons? They don't—they make circles, and the circles next to other circles get mushed into hexagons. I'm not trying to make geometry—I make things that are supposed to stand up, which requires a certain level of geometry, and then they mush.

-Images and text courtesy of William Corwin