

Black Relief/Ruminations on bas-relief/that depict a story/even humor/or an adversity/or even an accomplishment/valued as history/typically traumatic/as someone faces hardship on the other side of progress/a created image within a sculptural gesture/of making oneself visible through their belongings/form pushing against abstraction simultaneously against representation/it just is/a pair of shorts/folded/as folded it is/sopping wet/sometimes dull subjects/but never useless/rather like a blunt object/its further use is predicated on how creative one can be/can we collectively mark the specifics of our time and what does it mean to be heavily occupied- mediated, or just conquered. Old/and tired.

On 2017-05-25 13:52:20 I took a photo at the Pergamon Museum in Berlin, Germany that cannot be printed here but was marked by a stream of consciousness- a note to myself punched into my phone for future work; for the studio, copy, pasted and edited here:

Embedded slabs. Remnants of life and marks of passing ingrained within the fields. As if archaeologically dug up. The digging up. The excavation of developing meaning is attached to personal history. What does it sound like? What does it feel like to the touch.

Resin is ~~both~~ a bond but also a contemporary material in need of context. The context is a collapse of both old and what has yet to come.

If I could, I would embed stone and metal artifacts that describe a time and culture within plastic substrates and structures. These are technological remnants toward a particular humanity- or at least describing it. [An idea in need of structure and resolution.]

A carved and marked surface - a narrative that describes the location and place of each object/artifact. These are then casted and made into a large panel. The molds would be rubber because they are foundational for the process. They are then casted into Hydrocal plaster for rigidity/and or many layers of resin. Thin (1 1/2" at most). Reliefs. When the reliefs are cast, objects' surfaces and textures are embedded to create multiple layers and add depth to the narrative. How fully it is described. What would be included to describe the fields of the Valentines [Virginia] house, or 47th street in Astoria [New York]. Maybe the beginning is to create an architectural description of these locations and locate how my body, I, a black man moves through them. The storefront needs to be a destination. It needs to be a focal point.¹

The goal is to create large panels that are still light weight comparatively. Maybe they are 3/4" and consist of shallow carvings. [This is no longer true.]

Rubber and fiberglass resin for the mother mold. Assyrian Nimrud. Embedded (sic)

Takht-e-Jamshid, also known as Persepolis, was the capital of the Achaemenid Empire (550-330 BC) and although established centuries later than the Assyrian reliefs on view at the Pergamon - their formal continuity, technique, subject matter and architectural integration continued. Kings conquering kings, ceremonious activities and daily

¹ At the time this text was re-edited, a storefront in Harlem was being negotiated to occupy. It is a storefront where varying styles of housedresses are sold operated by Granada, a family owned business.

life, and the worship of their gods and goddesses. The examples of these reliefs proliferate throughout encyclopedic museums across the world as they are some of the most definitive artifacts depicting cuneiform inscriptions, the Neo-Assyrian Empire, and the Persian Empire, giving an enriched understanding to Mesopotamia. They track the transition of hands and rule, rituals and cultural customs throughout ancient Mesopotamia that was later conquered by Alexander the Great, the first major Western takeover of this region. But these reliefs, to me, sit in contrast to molded high relief, as can be seen with the Burney relief also known as *Queen of the Night* dated 19thC BC-18thC BC belonging to the early Babylonian period. Almost all reliefs that occupy Persepolis, Nimrud, and Ancient Egypt are carved from gypsum alabaster. A soft sometimes-translucent stone. This relief, as described by the curators of the British Museum, which holds the plaque in its collection, was molded from clay into its relief panel, its surfaces built up and shaped, atypically large for the technique used to make it. This, among other details such as its material finish and its wood firing technique suggests it was worshipped in a high-end brothel shrine²:

*Rectangular, fired clay relief panel; modelled in relief on the front depicting a nude female figure with tapering feathered wings and talons, standing with her legs together; shown full frontal, wearing a headdress consisting of four pairs of horns topped by a disc; wearing an elaborate necklace and bracelets on each wrist; holding her hands to the level of her shoulders with a rod and ring in each; figure supported by a pair of addorsed lions above a scale-pattern representing mountains or hilly ground, and flanked by a pair of standing owls; fired clay, heavily tempered with chaff or other organic matter; highlighted with red and black pigment and possibly white gypsum; flat back; repaired.*³

Queen of the Night/a Mozart Aria/sung by Whitney Houston/a night blooming ceroid Cacti/ *Selenicereus Grandiflorus* blooms only once a year, for only one night⁴/and Sydney Burney/a British antiques collector from London. All associations fostered by those who sought to self-affirm. Even if only briefly.

Black Relief can be more than just a sculptural term to describe technique, form and material. It can be a site of actualizing the extent of one's existence. An affirmation drawn from one's own blood yet often associated with many external customs. The self-proclamation that the marks we make, the things we touch - have value beyond their immediate declaration. This is an accrual system that prioritizes narratives and their importance as links to depicting a more complete story of society and its various parts. It is the self-evaluation, reflection and eventual elevation of said forms in order to more clearly see what kind of marks *are* being made, and more importantly what kind of marks *should* be made. A moving forward. The air under our black feet. Relief as rest. It can also be seen through accomplishments that are in response to hardship. For every artifact removed, there is a hole left behind. The marks I hope to make are resultant of the lives I encounter and the events I experience, enshrine them, mold them as relief, and fill the void that is being dug out/archaeologically excavated for extraction with such dark precision. Albeit an artifact or a life.

-Composed July 21, 2018 - Gilan Province

² Mark, Joshua J. "The Queen of the Night." Ancient History Encyclopedia. Ancient History Encyclopedia, 19 Feb 2014. Web. 21 Jul 2018.

³ "Burney Relief / Queen of the Night" Collection Online. British Museum. Web. 21 Jul 2018.

⁴ Hecht, Hans (1997). *Cacti & Succulents*. Sterling Pub. Co. p. 76. ISBN 978-0-8069-0549-5