

Amy Brener

## **Selected Publications and Press**

## AMY BRENER'S ANACHRONIC MATTER

BY OWEN J. DUFFY

I first met Amy Brener during a studio visit in the summer of 2015. I was greeted by her sculpture *Crest*, a chunky, jagged, and torso-sized amalgam of concrete and resin. Then hanging on a wall in Greenpoint, it was adorned with a transparent green ribbon of silicone, draping elegantly across its armor-like form. I grew up reading *Star Wars* novels, playing *Descent*, and watching reruns of the original *Battlestar Galactica*, so I felt an immanent connection to Brener's sculpture and how it suggested not only a built-in awareness of obsolescence, but a future in which materiality persists. Later that fall, I encountered Brener's work again at MoMA PS1's *Greater New York*, the quinquennial survey of art from the metropolitan area. Trimmed down and more precarious, Brener's *Recliners*, two multicolored resin monoliths that supported one another via A-frame, bodied forth. Remarkably architectural, *Recliners* functioned as a signpost, an admonition of what might one day become of Manhattan's gleaming towers.

Brener's work shares commonalities with William Gibson's 2014 science fiction novel *The Peripheral*. Simultaneously set in two different futures, one near and one not quite so, this book speculates what might happen to rural America, tyrannized by meth and monopolies, and post-cataclysm London if it were populated by kleptocratic elites in the twenty-second century. Gibson weaves a classic cybernetic view of information, casting it as a bodiless thing that moves effort-

lessly from substrate to substrate, and even across time. Quantum computing allows protagonist Flynn to travel to the further future and embody a peripheral, an ambulatory mimeo of a human form. Like Brener's art, Gibson complicates dreams of dematerialization by inventing distinctly material futures. For instance, Flynn's brother lives in a 'big grub,' a trailer coated with expansion foam, the inside lined with a Chinese polymer; a pliant, semi-transparent substance embedded with all sorts of ephemera. Flynn knows just where to find a jeweler's screwdriver, various coins, and burnt matches. With an aesthetic of science fiction, Amy Brener's otherworldly sculptures, like those in her recent show at Galerie pact in Paris, trap and preserve all sorts of debris. At their core, Brener's works formally and materially negotiate science fiction's prime antinomy—the social construction of future worlds always quarters and concedes signifiers of the here and now.

Brener categorizes much of her recent work into discrete taxonomies, each of which prescribes an imaginative use-value: *Omni-Kits*, *Invisiblers*, *Flexi-Shields*, and *Demi-Screens*. Brener's *Omni-Kits* come in shades of blue, green, and carbonite, standing precariously, thin vestiges of what they once were or will become. The carbonite version stands at about body height. Made of resin, this work's title suggests infinite possibility, as if this object could be a kit equipped to handle anything and everything. Zooming in, we recognize an assortment of curios









suspended within its checkered surface. Combs, flowers, a wrench, and odd bits of hardware all float in stasis beneath a thin veneer of undulating plastic, like insects in amber. Brener vitalizes the sculpture's surface with readymade textures. Our eyes follow the steely contours of cast keyboards, which suggest an all-too-familiar tactility. The sculpture is crowned with a magisterial graphite sunburst, a sleek diadem interrupted with the impression of a diminutive recycling symbol. Through the casting process, Brener upgrades the form of a plastic catering tray to an art-deco design element, becoming an unknown architectural ornament from a future long since passed.

The flatness that characterizes much of Brener's work is a consequence of process. Her mold patterns, pastiches of the prosaic (discarded bed frames, plastic packaging, and floor mats from cars), determine the sculpture's final, exoplanetary form. Flatness does not only reference Brener's process—it projects a sense of semi-permanence; of being there, but not entirely so. Bolted into the gallery wall, Brener's ruby-tinted *Demi-Screen* (2017) exudes entropy, another key aspect of her work. From one perspective, the artist's sculptures function as systems of containment, holding together an unstable mélange of objects, caught in an instant before they gradually descend into disorder. In the case of *Demi-Screen*, cascading, scallop-studded arcades bind carefully arranged drill bits, protractors, and leaves in a film of rose. These moments of order are held in tension by the work's plastic flashing, a crumbling and brittle material excess. The top and bottom arcade have been extracted or fallen off, keystoneing the sense of deterioration that pits the surface of Brener's work. Moreover, these formal qualities are underscored from a material standpoint. At a chemical level, the polyurethane resin of *Demi-Screen* strives to revert to back to a rigid (and original) state.

Whereas the *Omni-Kit* and *Demi-Screen*, craggy and dogged, posture like adamantine reliquaries, Brener's silicone *Invisiblers* beam lightness and flexibility. Suspended from the ceiling, the artist packs the *Invisiblers* with an ordered assortment of pills, flora, and the occasional casting of the face of her father, the late sculptor Roland Brener. These transparent objects suggest another seemingly impossible use-value: that they could cloak wearers with invisibility. Such an implication is not entirely far-fetched. In July 2016, the scientific journal *Nature* published a report about the 'surface wave cloak,' a device made of metamaterials, synthetic substances that possess properties not found in nature. To the optic regime, the surface-wave cloak compels curved surfaces to behave as if they are flat, and the scientists' findings mark a signal contribution toward the production of actual invisibility, which almost undoubtedly would be first applied to practical use by a nation's military-industrial complex. While Brener's *Invisiblers* do not yet permit this almost possible impossibility, these works are imbued with our cultural desire to disappear, to dematerialize into an invisible, effortless world. Not only forward-looking, the *Invisiblers* point toward vogues of the material design of our recent past, such as Apple's popularization of translucent plastics in the late '90s and early '00s, exemplified by the 'Bondi Blue' iMac G3 (1998).

Brener's sculptures, then, are anachronic. They are out of time, at once pointing toward a past, our present, and what may or may not become. And if Brener's work prescribes a synthetic future, it is not a quantitative one that eliminates matter. Rather, her art acknowledges the ongoing persistence of materiality, despite our very human desires for a frictionless existence.

Omni-Kit (reverse), 2016 (opposite page) Omni-Kit (reverse), 2017 Photo: Grégory Coppelet (p. 81) Omni-Kit, 2016 (detail) (pp. 82-83) All images Courtesy: the artist and Galerie part, Paris



**Video Documentation:**

Picture Show, by Guy Kozak, 2017

<https://vimeo.com/228487566>

Or full site:

<http://www.pictureshow.tv/>



## Amy Brener, *Invisibler (breeze)*, 2017

ON VIEW AT NADA NEW YORK:

315 Gallery, Booth 6.07



Amy Brener, *Invisibler (breeze)*, 2017. Courtesy of the artist and 315 Gallery.

Brener addresses the obsolescence of everyday objects with these elegant, otherworldly silicone sculptures. This work, priced at \$5,000, bears the impressions of discarded tools and technology, like keyboards and flanges, and contains a taxonomy of small found objects and dollar-store purchases in shades of blue (birthday candles, qtips, and rubber bands among them). Somewhat autobiographical, the dress-like form also incorporates the impression of the face of the artist's father (Roland Brener, who was also an artist), which she cast shortly after he passed away and has been using in her work ever since.

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Installation view of pact's booth at miart, 2017. Photo courtesy of pact.

Some of miart's most compelling booths can be found in the Emergent section, which is devoted to young galleries. Among them is pact, a Parisian gallery just shy of a year old, which is presenting a large work on paper by Italian-Venezuelan artist Manuel Scano Larrazàbal and several sculptures by Brooklyn-based artist Amy Brener. According to gallery co-founder Charlotte Trivini, the gallery discovered Brener's work in last year's "Greater New York" exhibition at MoMA PS1. Brener's pastel-colored resin and foam sculptures conjure up a mock-archaeological assemblage of objects from daily life—fossilised bed posts, flowers, and keyboards—that become almost alien in their new form.

[Laurie Rojas, The Best Booths at Miart, Artsy, March 30, 2017](#)

PORTFOLIO

HEISS AND DIESENHACH CAN SPOT A BURGEONING ART STAR FROM ACROSS THE GLOBE. HERE, FOUR OF THEIR PICKS FROM THE NEXT GENERATION OF VISUAL ARTISTS DESCRIBE WHAT THE FUTURE LOOKS LIKE

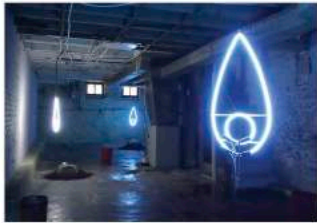


Cooper Holoweski, Still from the forthcoming Circular Universe

COOPER HOLOWESKI

"Circular Universe is a series of video loops I'm working on that are about our relationship with the infinite. It's a spiritual manifesto addressing reincarnation and the labyrinth of the cosmos, except it's made with materials like cardboard and aluminum foil—so while there are moments of transcendence where the viewer gets lost in the imagery, these scenes of construction are always present. Last summer I was awarded a residency with the Clocktower Gallery. When discussing my project with Alanna, I told her that more than a normal studio space, I needed a room with a view. There's a part in the piece where the camera pans back from a rock floating in space to reveal the rock sitting on a green screen in an extinction booth in a room overlooking the city, so there's this idea of the universe deciding itself within itself. Alanna offered me an office in the Clocktower space at Jones Day in Midtown, which was exactly what I needed."

COOPER HOLOWESKI WEARS SHIRT HE'S OWN



Ajay Kurian, Galle Hwaer (Hwaer 2016), Neon, 40", chromed stainless-steel, silver mirrored, yarns

AJAY KURIAN

"I was speaking to a curator once and he was recounting a myth to me. He couldn't remember the details or the names, but he was fervently speaking of this astronomer whose heart was set on the stars, who had no other hopes and dreams but to focus his every waking minute on what was above, to the detriment of what he was amidst. He had forsaken his polis, his city, as he believed his purpose to be higher. The curator suddenly stopped and looked at me and said, 'But you're different. You are the astronomer in the polis.' Of course it's a ridiculous thing to pronounce, but it's still what I hope the work can do: to peer into those places beyond what we know for certain, while committed to the common realities we must co-labor face. The art is in getting the viewer to follow me down that path."

AJAY KURIAN WEARS T-SHIRT LOANED WATSON

VIRKOWE 13



Galle Hwaer (Hwaer 2016), Neon, 40", chromed stainless-steel, silver mirrored, yarns  
 Photo: © Andy Battaglia  
 Cooper Holoweski, Still from the forthcoming Circular Universe  
 Photo: © Andy Battaglia  
 Kevin Beasley, Untitled (Last Melon), 2015, Neon, van-jacket, walls  
 Photo: © Andy Battaglia

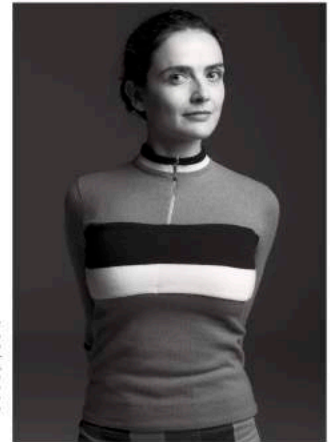


Amy Brenner, Untitled (Last Melon), 2015, Neon, van-jacket, walls

AMY BRENNER

"My sculptures are layered, complex, and confounding things, injected with the residue of daily studio life and labor. Multitudinous scraps and treasures are suspended between strata of polystyrene resin and foam, as though preserved for future discovery and potential use. Implied functionality is integral to the work, as emphasized by the recent inclusion of wearable items. Mismatched keyboard keys are enrobed into surfaces, composed of keyboard keys, beads, skin, dried flora, and technological bits-and-bobs. These minutiae invite close-range examination, while the overall forms demand distance. Light-sensitive materials provide shifting refractions and reflections as the viewer moves around the sculptures. I imagine these works as coming from a reality that is similar yet distinct from our own, where there is a different range of possibilities and new hope for things to come."

AMY BRENNER WEARS CLOTHING PRADA

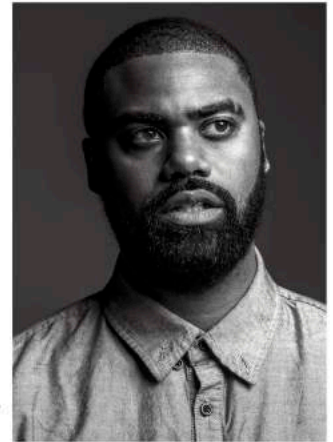


Kevin Beasley, Untitled (Last Melon), 2015, Neon, van-jacket, walls

KEVIN BEASLEY

"It is within repose—an OG classic form, as he walks, becomes a chamber—a reflection of sentiment, overbearing empty at 17."

KEVIN BEASLEY WEARS SHIRT HE'S OWN





# Art

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Edited by  
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## Great expectations

The latest edition of MoMA PS1's "Greater New York" looks back to NYC's free-spirited past to locate its artistic future.  
By **Howard Halle**

From its start in 1995, MoMA PS1's "Greater New York" show has served as the Museum of Modern Art's version of the Whitney Biennial, though the show transpires every five years instead of two. Now, 20 years on, the edgy New York of the exhibit's beginnings has transformed into the glittering seat of global capitalism, where skyrocketing rents have pushed artists to the edges of the five boroughs. Not surprisingly, there's been an increasing nostalgia for the creative ferment in a downtown Manhattan that had been virtually abandoned to artists in the '70s and early '80s—which may be why organizers of 2015's "GNY" have shifted their focus from finding the latest thing to critically unpacking this period and its undeniable pull on emerging artists. Here are some examples of what to expect and what to look for.



### ▲ AMY BRENER, *DRESSING ROOM* (2015)

Four years out of art school, Brener, a Canadian who calls New York home, creates sculptural totems that suggest the jagged outlines of post-apocalyptic ruins. She makes her work out of layers of resin, glass and Fresnel lenses, embedded with trashed hard drives, discarded keyboards, bits of old cell phones and other electronic detritus—along with the occasional seashell. Besides recalling the funky aesthetics of Arte Povera, they seem to speak to a future New York that has collapsed under the weight of its gilded-age excesses.



### ▲ ROBERT KUSHNER, *SAMBA CLASS* (1982)

Kushner is associated with so-called Pattern and Decoration artists of the mid- to late-1970s who reacted to the austerity of Minimal and Conceptual Art by refocusing on the visual pleasures of art. Kushner took inspiration from Islamic and European textiles, but also from Matisse and other early-20th-century masters. Often dismissed by critics of the time, it can be argued that Pattern and Decoration's exuberance reflected the creative energy of artist neighborhoods, like Soho.

### ▲ ROSALIND FOX SOLOMON, *LIBERTY SCAFFOLDED* (1976)

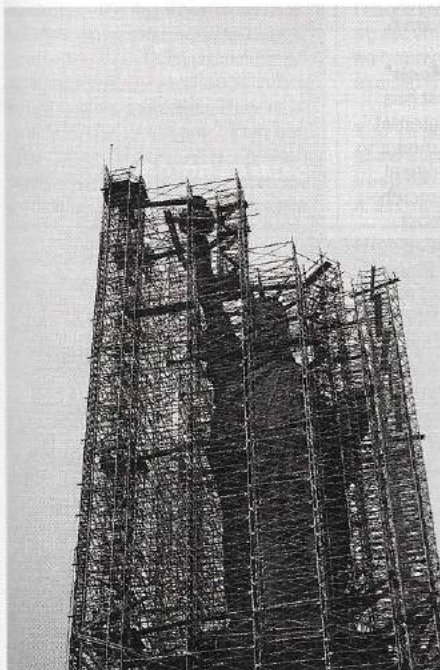
Now 85, Solomon captured the Statue of Liberty as it was being refurbished for the celebration of America's Bicentennial. This was the year after the famous *FORD TO CITY: DROP DEAD* headline in *The Daily News*, but the festivities raised hopes of a new New York—hopes quickly dashed by serial killer David Berkowitz and the 1977 blackout. It would be another 25 years before New York finally emerged from decades of crime and lawlessness, but in retrospect, this image seems like a harbinger of the citywide gentrification to come.



### ▲ LEBBEUS WOODS, *SOLOHOUSE - EXTERIOR VIEW 2*, (1989)

Woods (1940–2012) was a visionary whose work represented a literal thinking-outside-the-box approach to building. Consequently, he remained an architect on paper with few built projects to his name. His sketches depict sci-fi edifices that seem to be coming apart at the seams, echoing what he saw as a society greatly in need of radical rethinking.

**"Greater New York" is at MoMA PS1 through Mar 7.**





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GREATER **NEW YORK**

## Bodies and Cities in Greater New York

by Sarah Goffstein

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GREATER NEW YORK

MoMA PS1 | OCTOBER 11, 2015 – MARCH 7, 2016

In MoMA PS1's *Greater New York* this year, there is a complex and particularly bodily focus on how issues of socioeconomics, fashion, consumption, gender politics, and gentrification intersect with the city. Some parts of the exhibition are approached with more nuance than others. Very literal figuration goes wrong on the second floor, where one of the largest galleries becomes a ghetto of life-sized figurative sculpture. Although there are multiple excellent pieces in that space, such as those by Rina Banerjee and Tony Matelli, this curatorial decision makes it hard to appreciate the individual sculptures for what they are meant to convey. Instead, the gallery evokes a crowd, where superficial and brief encounters with the work happen in cacophony.

By contrast, the space shared by Amy Brener's sedimentary resin sculptures and Nick Relph's scans of architecture posters more optimally reflects the imprint of bodies in cities. Their work acutely focuses on residues of human habitation through aggregate material traces, such as the detritus of our consumer culture or images of architectural hubris. In terms of the latter, Relph's large digital prints of handheld scans of posters from high-rise construction sites are oddly glitchy. Otherwise pristine ideations of ambitious building projects skip and wobble in his digital images—projecting them into an uncertain future of anticipated obsolescence.

On a more micro scale, Brener's crystalline resin structures condense the detritus of everyday life into records of our particular era in the Anthropocene. Alluring translucent resin, like Sigmar Polke's stained glass, gives way to mucky toxic industrial ooze that seeps between the grids of Apple keyboards, electronic components, the occasional hair accessory, and sometimes a subtle imprint of a body part or face. Rigorously constructed into forms that flirt with architectural ruins, altars, and rock formations, Brener petrifies our current moment into an uneasy collective vanitas.

CONTRIBUTOR

Sarah Goffstein



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THE MIAMI RAIL

THE THIRD RAIL



### A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER

"From the Crooked Timber of Humanity, nothing ever came out straight"





Amy Brener  
***Recliners***

# Amy Brener *Recliners*

Evoking notions of temporality, consumerism and fragmentation, Amy Brener's sculptures embody the diverse and experimental nature of current sculptural practice. Her work combines various composite elements to build irregular, large-scale forms that confuse temporal logic, pointing simultaneously to an ancient history and a far-off future. Through her use of synthetic and vernacular materials, the artist negotiates the transitory nature of our contemporary condition, in which objects no longer endure and technologies slip quickly and quietly into obsolescence.

For the past three years, Brener has been casting synthetic resin with assorted embedded materials to create luminescent, totemic sculptures. While they resemble once-functional futuristic machines, they also bring to mind fossils and time capsules. The iridescent forms are indeed striking from afar, and contain labyrinths of incongruous surface minutiae—beads, mirrors, lenses, hardware, found objects and shards of past technologies—that glimmer upon closer inspection.

In their approximation of the effects of geological forces, such as sedimentation, fossilization and erosion, Brener's sculptures portray an arrested moment in an unknown organic continuum, providing edifying clues to an unknown past. Yet at the same time,

their machine-like materiality embodies a science fiction aesthetic that points to an imagined future. Conventional perceptions of future technology are sleek and minimal, but these works point to a clunky, awkward, eroded sort of future that confounds typical ideas of linear time and progress. The sculptures function as a material archive of time and space, both past and future, micro and macro. Amorphous and otherworldly, their beauty is unusual and enchanting.

The *Recliners*, on view in the MacLaren's sculpture courtyard, are Brener's first resin sculptures designed for outdoor display. Not only do they evolve with exposure to the elements, they also reflect natural shifts in light and atmospheric conditions. Taking this into account, Brener created these works to be more dense and architectural than her previous resin sculptures. The *Recliners* are fitted with their own wedge-like bases to counterbalance the weight of the tall, tilting structures. As viewers circulate, a generous spectrum of reflections and colours is activated, and various layers of depth within the sculpture are revealed. These are Brener's first works that contain what could be described as windows: clear middles that viewers can look through and see a composition of found objects. One sculpture's "window" also offers a view through to the other sculpture.





In the work's title, *Recliners*, Brener nods to the role of the reclining figure throughout art history. Indeed, recliners have a storied past, detectable at pivotal moments in Western art history from Renaissance Venuses to Neoclassical odalisques to Modernist bronzes. Although Brener's *Recliners* are not intended to represent the human body, they are figurative and can be read as a pair of reclining bodies, leaning against one another, abstracted to an extreme degree.

Resin is a naturally occurring material, a gluey, sap-like substance secreted by trees; however, Brener uses a synthetic polyurethane resin, a base material that harkens back to the experimental sculpture of the mid-1960s. Artists of that generation—Lynda Benglis, Louise Bourgeois and Eva Hesse, to name a few—revolutionized sculpture by exploring unconventional materials including latex, fibreglass, polyurethane and plastics. Working with untried materials is inherently risky. Hesse, for example, was lauded for her ability to allow chance to interrupt her artistic process. While she exerted skilful, physical control over the execution of her works, her synthetic materials were granted a certain amount of freedom to set, dry, warp, fissure and evolve as they willed.<sup>1</sup>

In a similar vein, Brener's work emerges from that liminal space between meticulous technical control and unpredictable whims of chance. Her process is highly physical, spontaneous and time-sensitive—once poured, the resin sets quickly and

she must act accordingly. Her first step is to construct rough frameworks of plywood, then line parts of them with plastic sheathing and other textured materials. Laying them horizontally on her studio floor, she then decants the resin in small batches to create separate layers. The layers are tinted with their own colours and are often embedded with small, carefully selected objects. The folds in the plastic film are inevitably reproduced on one side of the sculpture, highlighting the sticky, unstable artificiality of the resin. Once the sculpture is dry and removed from the plywood frame, Brener chisels some of the layers away to create a more complex encrusted surface.

Brener's work also finds antecedents in practices of assemblage and construction. Her composite forms echo Robert Rauschenberg's *Combines* and Louise Nevelson's *Sky Columns*, both of which ignored traditional artistic media in favour of everyday materials. Additionally, they both gathered various aggregate elements to create a single, freestanding form. Another parallel can be drawn between Brener's work and the early figurative compositions of Tony Cragg that combine fragments of found plastic, urban detritus and manmade objects, which Cragg considers to be "fossilized keys to a past time which is our present."<sup>2</sup> Like Brener, Cragg's work encapsulates shards from the past to challenge binaries of the Modernist paradigms: nature and culture, unity and fragmentation, permanence and temporality.

The use of accumulated found objects and industrial materials is common ground in contemporary sculpture. It is understood

by some as an artistic strategy for negotiating one's relationship to a society oversaturated with material culture. As curator Anne Ellegood remarks, contemporary sculptors "articulate their relationship to *all this stuff* through strategies of assemblage and accumulation by building installations that include an incredible range of objects."<sup>3</sup> Similarly, critic Alexander Forbes refers to this approach as "material conceptualism,"<sup>4</sup> in which artists are "engaging in a deconstruction of what we expect from material, whether by the choices that are made in the materials themselves or the way in which they are brought together." Indeed, through her deft approach to assemblage and her intellectual and expressive investigation of everyday materials, Brener negotiates the material abundance of the everyday, and inserts herself into the ever-expanding landscape of contemporary sculpture.

by RENÉE VAN DER AVOIRD

<sup>1</sup> Elisabeth Sussman and Fred Wasserman, Eds. *Eva Hesse: Sculpture*. The Jewish Museum. Yale University Press, New Haven, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Lisson Gallery. Tony Cragg: Artist Page. <http://www.lissongallery.com/artists/tony-cragg>. Accessed June 19, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Anne Ellegood. *Motley Efforts: Sculpture's Ever-Expanding Field*. In *Vitamin 3-D: New Perspectives in Sculpture and Installation*. Phaidon Press Ltd., London, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Alexander Forbes. *Thinking Materials*. In *Material Conceptualism: The Comfort of Things*. Aant & Zoo, Berlin, 2013.



**AMY BRENER** was born in Victoria, British Columbia in 1982. She received a BA in Studio Arts at the University of British Columbia (2006) followed by a MFA at Hunter College in New York City (2010). She recently participated in residencies at the prestigious Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Madison, Maine as well as the Bemis Centre for Contemporary Arts in Omaha, Nebraska. Brener's work has been exhibited internationally, in cities such as Toronto, Victoria, Berlin, Los Angeles and New York. Her work appears in numerous private collections, including the Francis J. Greenburger Collection, and she has a commissioned work permanently on display at the Dufferin Liberty Centre. Brener currently lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.







Publication to accompany the exhibition *Recliners*, curated by Renée van der Avoird, held July 10 to October 26, 2014, at the MacLaren Art Centre, Barrie.

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Amy Brener, *Recliners*, 2014, resin, pigment, plexiglass, found objects, 293 x 51 x 46 and 188 x 25 x 36 cm.

Photographs:


Cover, page 4: Amy Brener. Page 2, 5: André Beneteau.

Design: Shannon Linde

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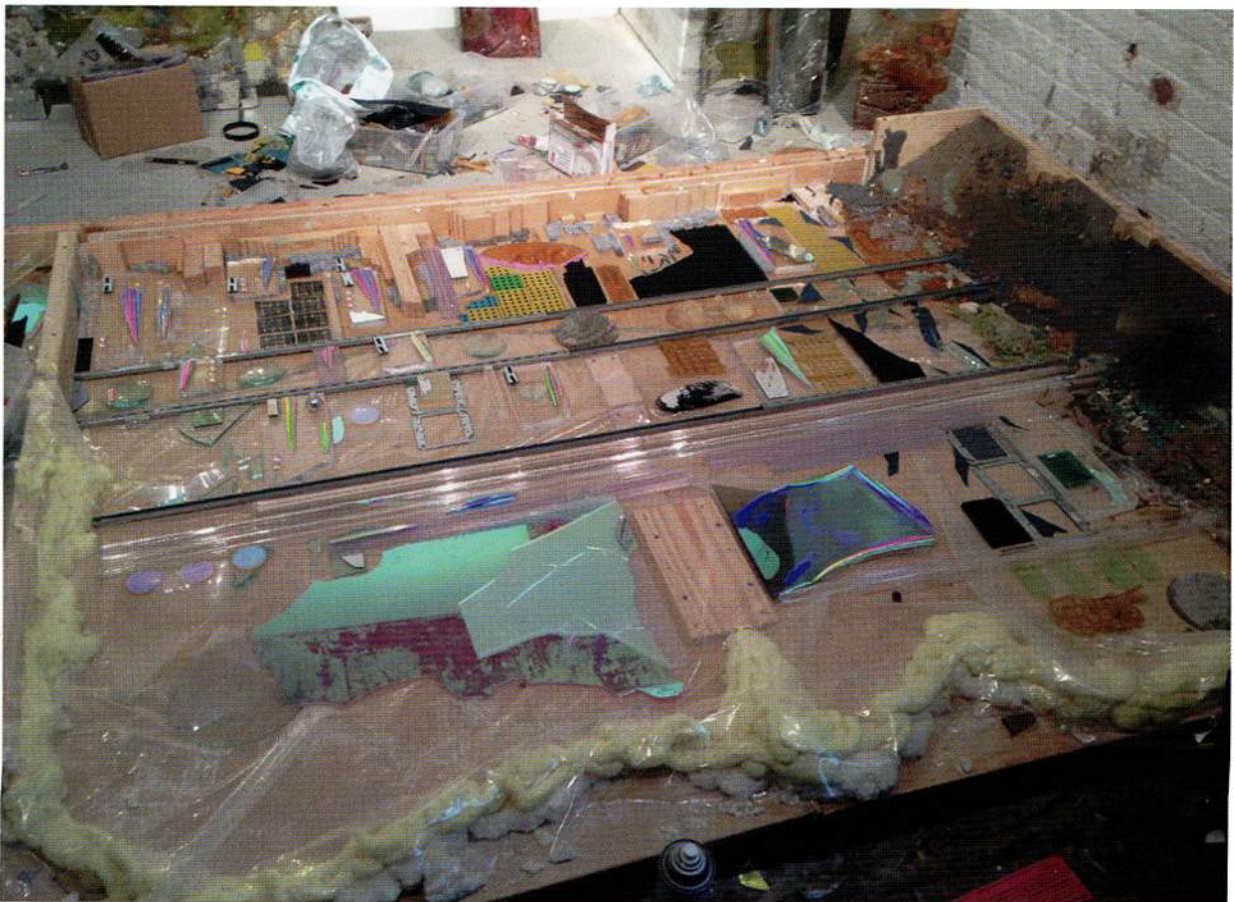


MATERIALS

resin  
pigments  
concrete  
glass  
found objects  
various

# AMY BRENER

Crafting sculptures out of resin and layers of found objects, Brener creates multifaceted forms with hidden depths.



Interior of the artist's studio. Photo courtesy of Amy Brener.

BRENER CREATES HER SCULPTURES BY LAYERING FOUND OBJECTS, PIGMENTS AND REDUNDANT TECHNOLOGY IN MOULDS, BEFORE POURING IN RESIN

Jonathan Openshaw, *Postdigital Artisans*. Amsterdam: Frame Publishers, 2015. 116-119





LIGHT PLAYS AN  
IMPORTANT PART IN  
BRENER'S SCULPTURES  
ILLUMINATING THE RESIN  
AND REVEALING HIDDEN  
OBJECTS ENCASED WITHIN

*'To make sculpture is to work with real space,  
and experience your body in it'*

Building a plywood and timber frame, Amy Brener lines the structure with a tough plastic drop cloth, which leaves its own wrinkles and ridges in the final sculpture. Layers of resin and objects are then added; with up to 20 layers per sculpture, each encasing objects from Fresnel lenses to beads and buttons. The result is a multifaceted, crystalline form that constantly adapts to changing light and perspectives. The sculptures challenge the viewer, presenting surface as depth and depth as surface, forcing the eye to explore their layers and decode their secrets.

'I'm interested in temporal ambiguity and making objects that point forward and backward at once', says Brener. 'There seems to be a force with which the past and future collide in the sculptures, resulting in cracks and fissures'. Leaving the various layers of materials and resin to dry and warp under different conditions, the final pieces have unpredictable forms that are born from the process as much as the artist's intention. Inspired by the anachronistic time machines of films such as *2001 A Space Odyssey* (1968), the

sculptures seem to hint at meanings and uses that aren't immediately obvious to the viewer – concealing forgotten switches and mysterious dials.

'Technology is becoming increasingly invisible, intangible and fused into us. My sculptures point in the opposite direction, where technology can be bulky and calciferous, and have a conversation with the body rather than invading it', Brener explains. 'To make sculpture is to work with real space, and experience your body in it. This awareness of the physical self seems fleeting in day-to-day life, in which we are stuck digesting the constant feed of digital information. With the surge of touch-screen technology, we are losing some of our tactility, and I want my sculptures to subvert this reality by presenting rich textures for the eye to traverse'.

Brener's sculptures are hybrid forms that hover somewhere between monument, machine and geological formation. They hint at a future where we are surrounded by a technological sediment left behind by half-remembered devices.



Canadian Amy Brener lives  
and works in New York City.



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**'I like the  
idea of art  
works as  
cultural  
artefacts'**

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# Monolith Maker

**AMY BRENER SHAPES OTHERWORLDLY FORMS BY TRAPPING FOUND OBJECTS IN LAYERS OF RESIN.**

WORDS *Jane Szita*

PORTRAIT *Andrew Boyle (photo) Simay Onaz (illustration)*

**BORN** in Canada, Amy Brener studied art at the University of British Columbia before completing her master's degree at Hunter College in New York City in 2010. Since then, she has made a name for herself as a sculptor of intriguing freestanding monoliths, created by capturing objects she's collected in layers of poured resin. Brener lives and works in New York City.

**How did you arrive at the idea of using resin in this way?** AMY BRENER: The initial spark was the desire to create an object that could seem bigger than its physical size and could occupy space in a more complex way. In graduate school, I made a large sculpture out of glass tabletops, and I was interested in the way that it seemed to transcend its materiality when properly lit. This led me towards translucent materials. I also became intrigued by the idea of building a sculpture from scratch. Casting is the ultimate making-from-scratch practice, since you are taking liquid and transforming it into a solid mass. Apart from glass, resin is pretty much the only translucent casting material, so it became the obvious choice.

**What else is appealing about resin as a material?** Since my earliest attempts at sculpture, I've felt compelled to combine highly synthetic materials with earthy, organic ones. Resin can resemble geological forms yet remain recognizable as plastic. It is also acts as a miracle glue, and can encapsulate almost any object. Like natural resin, synthetic resin acts as a protective membrane that can potentially preserve things for the future.

**What inspires the forms that the sculptures take?** Before the resin works, I had been making sculptures that loosely resembled vehicles or machines. I wanted to imply utility, without defining it. My earliest resin sculpture is titled *Switchboard* (2011) and looks like a surfboard leaning against the wall. On the underside is a



Since completing her first resin work, *Switchboard* (2011), Brener has increased the level of complexity in her sculptures. *Mini 8* (2014) is part of a series she began in 2012.





*Shanty* (2014), which is over 2 m tall and 1.6 m wide, is one of Brener's largest resin sculptures to date.

---

**'I'm  
constantly  
collecting;  
it's a bit of a  
problem'**

---

composition of knobs and buttons – the elaborate control panels featured in science-fiction movies fascinate me.

My subsequent sculptures are more abstract in silhouette. I search for forms that seem vaguely familiar yet can't be identified as specific things. I like to contrast rough, broken edges with intricately cut-out ones. Hints of technology and function remain as patterns of keys, buttons and other textures.

**Tell us about your technique.** I build a framework out of plywood and two-by-fours and pour pigmented resin into it in many layers. Each layer is slightly different, as is evident in the striation of colours running along the side of



*Untitled (disk)*, a work from 2013, incorporates a Fresnel lens.

the finished sculpture. Once the pouring is done, I remove the sculpture from its mould – often a rather violent procedure – and chisel its surface until it pleases me.

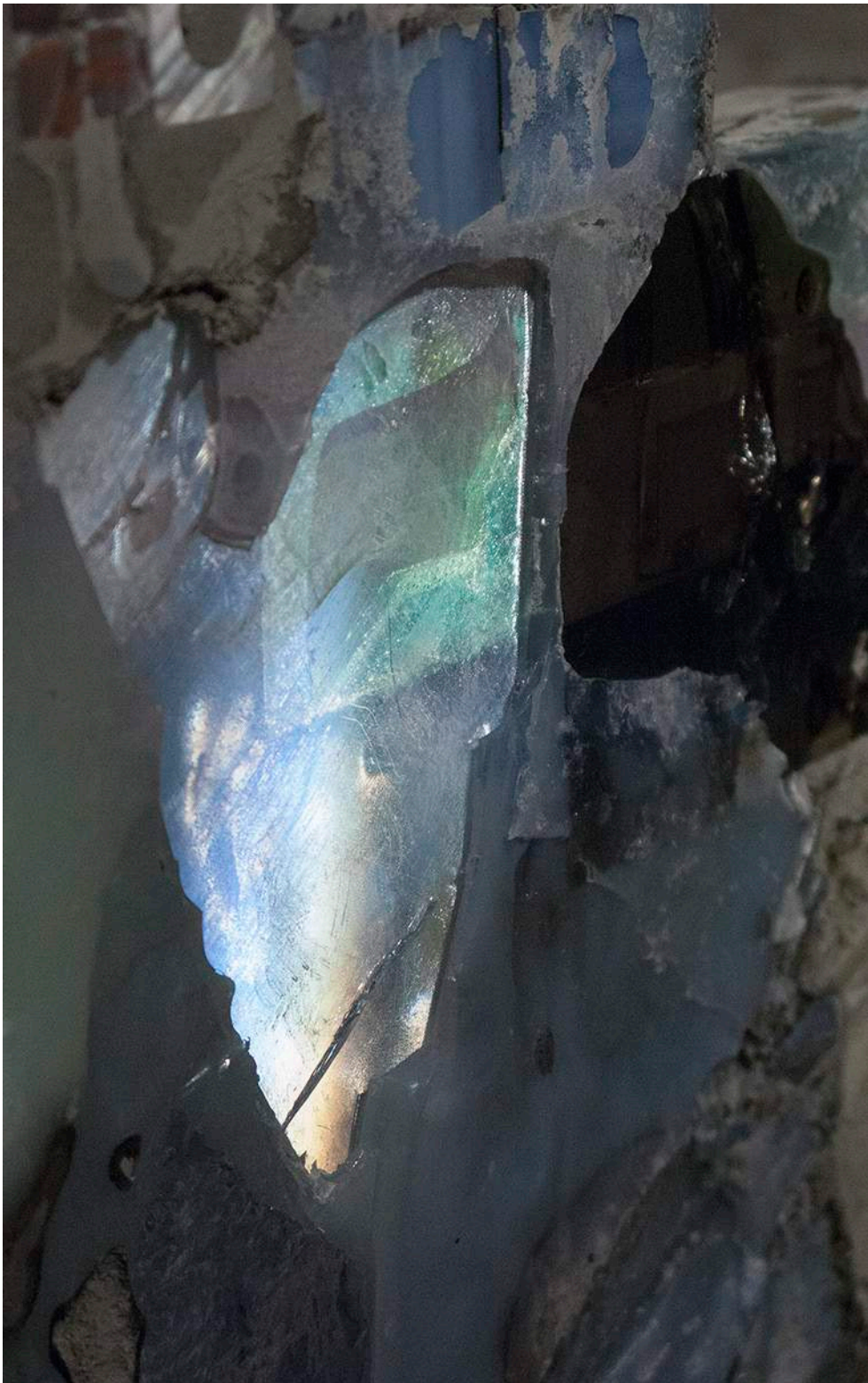
**How do you choose the found objects that you incorporate into your sculptures?** My studio contains an arsenal of objects and materials: bounty from the street, the beach, thrift stores, dollar stores and eBay. I'm constantly collecting; it's a bit of a problem. The process of selecting objects and arranging them in the sculptures is a matter of composition and of studying how forms interact.

**How would you like your current sculptures to be regarded in the future?** I like the idea of art works as cultural artefacts. If my sculptures stick around, I hope they will embody something specific to this time that can't quite be put into words.

**Your father, Roland Brener, was also a sculptor. Was it easy following in his footsteps?** I knew I was suited to the creative arts, but I was first drawn to poetry and music. After making my way through a few different departments in college, I eventually wound up in visual arts. As I was working on my first sculpture assignment, something clicked. This was only a year or so before my father died, but I'm thankful that we managed to have some great conversations about making art.

**Do you think you can keep developing this technique?** It's healthy for artists to go through phases of exploration and development. I'm in an explorative period right now, and the sculptures I'm making are quite different from my previous work. I'm excited to see how they will progress. ✕  
amybrener.com





MOIRE 2

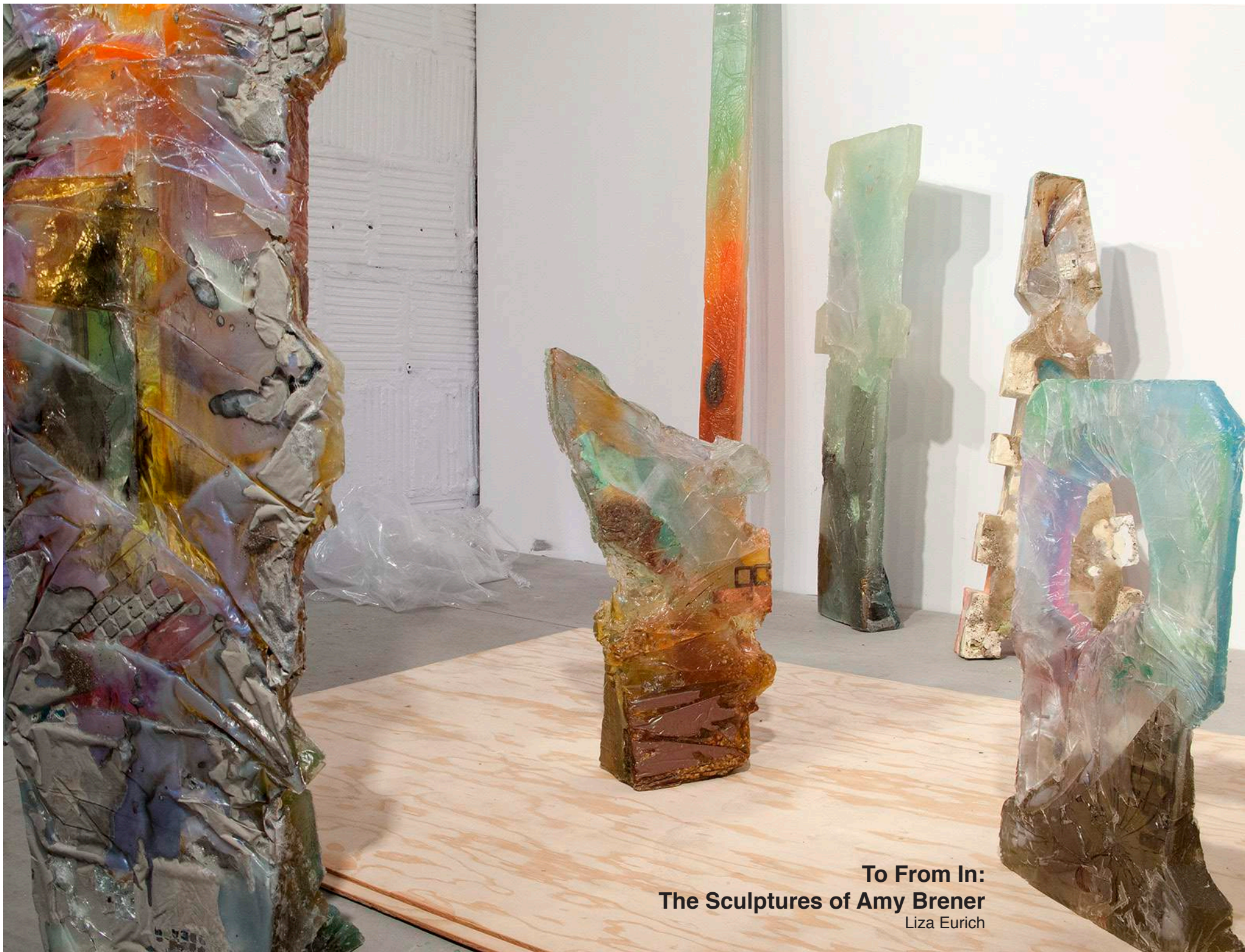
CRUSTY CRUNCHY ROUNDY SMOOTHY

## Amy Brener

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**To From In:**  
**The Sculptures of Amy Brener**  
Liza Eurich





The recent sculptures of Amy Brener are marked by an intriguing set of dichotomies. From a distance, and often in photographic documentation, one is immediately struck by the crystal-like appearance of her structures. Their solidity and weightiness is further enhanced by their stature, as several of her freestanding pieces are upwards of 7 feet tall. In line with this, titles such as *Kiosk* (2013) and *Pillar* (2012) affix these lengthy forms within an architectural framework, which suggests notions of stability and strength. Rather than being defined by these qualities though, her sculptures appear much more vulnerable upon closer inspection – their density dissolves and their synthetic materiality becomes apparent. At their edges the multitude of layers used to create them are perceptible, as is their surprising weightlessness. The viewer is now confronted with slight leans, thin widths, holes and fissures, where a solid mass once seemed to stand.

These nuanced characteristics are indicative of Brener's material choices, choices that are marked by the inclusion of found objects within a constructed matrix. While she has used an array of objects such as coral and beads, her incorporation of Fresnel lenses, mirrors and glass lend themselves particularly well to enhancing the precarious qualities of her sculptures, as does the graded pigmentation and semitransparent layers of resin that these objects find themselves embedded within. This combination of materials also causes the work to possess subtle optical effects, which in turn affords them with a sense of movement. Triggered by the reflected and refracted lighting within the gallery, their direction seems to mirror that of those in the space. Proceeding around and past a piece illuminates this, where a sideways glimpse elicits the sensation that the sculpture is appearing to shift or flicker. In many instances this enhances the precarity of these works, as they already appear to narrowly impede the pull of gravity.

As the experience of viewing Brener's work is one that requires a constant renegotiation of expectations; likewise, her process can be defined in a similar manner. At the center of her methodology is a balancing act between artistic intentions and chance actions. Her process does not employ chance blindly; rather, it sets potentialities into motion through a series of strategies, which to some extent allows for a predictable outcome, but also permits the possibility of unexpected occurrences. This is something that becomes evident through a more thorough explanation of how she constructs these works. The initial stage



entails developing a preliminary structure made from plywood, this framework does not “directly refer to a preexisting object or speak to a particular style” Brener contends, but rather originates from discoveries or thoughts that come about during the creation of previous pieces, a tactic hinted at in the title of her sculpture *Harbinger*.<sup>1</sup> Once the framework is decided upon, it is coated with a plastic drop cloth, successive layers of resin are then poured into the structure, while found objects (as listed above) are positioned within selected areas. The use of resin requires a time-sensitive reaction, which limits the period in which revision or modification is possible. Accordingly, much of the pouring process and its outcome are dependent on unforeseen variables.

In discussing the implications of process driven work, Lucy Lippard states that “the risk, or the gesture, rather than being made by the artist from the inside out, as a direct expression of himself, is an ‘act’ of the sculpture, almost independent of the creator, its scale in meaning deriving from materials, context and situation rather than psychological necessity.”<sup>2</sup> Specifically in the case of Brener’s work, the formation of her sculptures is directly related to their materiality, whereby gravity shifts and pools resin into the pits and crevices of the plastic covered frame, enveloping the objects in its path. This allows for chance encounters and unexpected reactions, but does so in a manner that still adheres to a series of set parameters. When the last layer is poured and dry, she proceeds by de-molding the piece. It is only at this stage, near completion, that the ‘front’ of her sculpture becomes visible for the first time.<sup>3</sup> It is also the point at which the integration of intention and chance is evident.

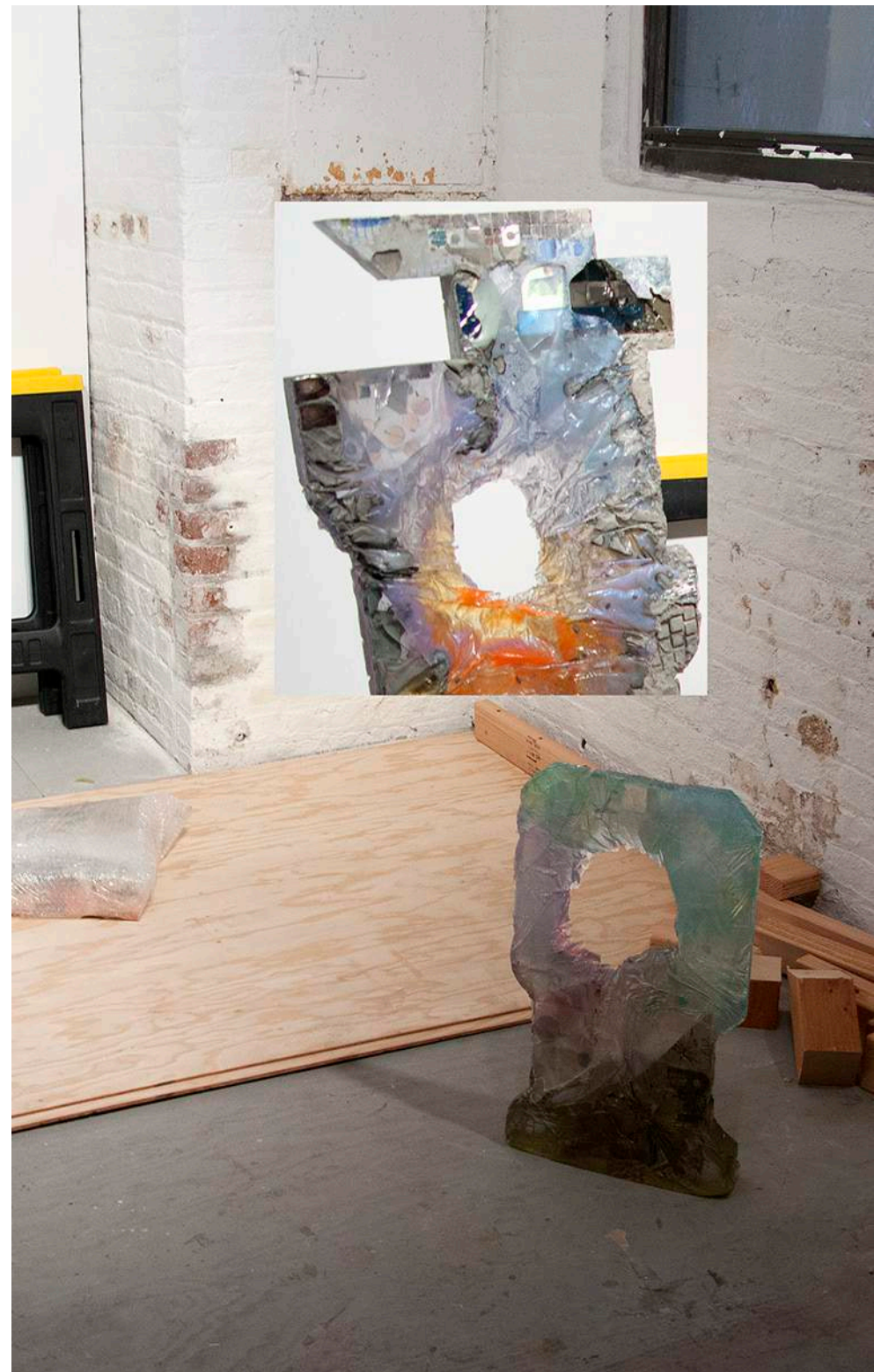
Brener’s work opens up a series of seemingly oppositional characteristics and approaches – those that exist between solidity and precarity, stasis and movement, intention and chance. The ability to oscillate between these poles lies in the works capacity to ‘act’ both in its own making, but also within the exhibition space. Personified as such, the work has an ethereal quality the pulls the viewer in and consistently gives them pause.

#### NOTES

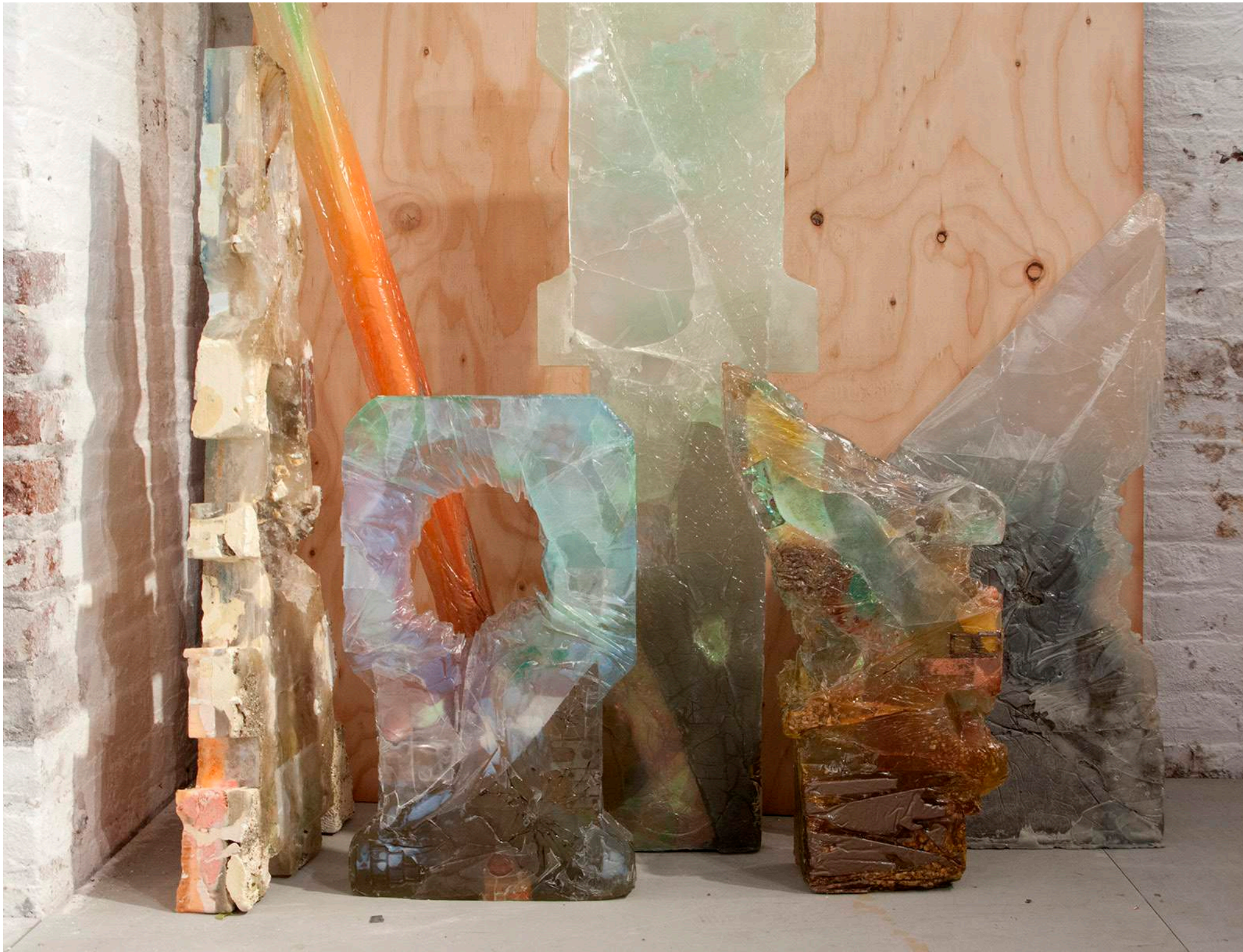
1. Brener, Amy. Email to Liza Eurich, August 29, 2013.

2. Lippard, Lucy R. *From The Center: Feminist Essays On Women's Art*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1976.

3. Brener, Amy. Email to Liza Eurich, August 29, 2013.











## Conglomerate Moment

In the summer of 2013 artist Kelly Jazvac met with Amy Brener in her Brooklyn studio, they decided to continue their conversation via email. Below is an edited version of the interview that ensued.

**KJ:** When I visited your studio in July, you mentioned an interest in tools that show the effects of their use. I thought that this was interesting because it's akin to, but distinct from, a patina or weathering of a material over time. The former is an active thing, the latter a passive one. How do you see these two states operating in your own work (both in the making, as well as through the implied action of your machine-like forms )?

**AB:** During our visit I remember bringing up David Cronenberg's film *Existenz* (1999), and that horrible gristle-gun that Jude Law's character assembles out of his Chinese food. The gun is used to kill, but is also vulnerable to injury and oozes blood when damaged. I'm drawn to art objects that seem to be worn down by their making, and exhausted from all the meaning that has been injected into them. For instance, Claes Oldenburg's sculptures have a defeated look to them, as though they are slumping after years of hard work, trying to be the objects they were meant to

represent. The artist's struggle is visible, but there's also a desperation inherent in the sculptures themselves and this is something that I strive for in my own work.

I conceive of my current sculptures as machines, but I don't go further into defining what functions they might serve. I allow the process of their making to build a narrative within them and the final results are unpredictable. I attempt to make work that remains mysterious to me, and I want this desire to show. The spontaneous variations that occur in texture, translucency and color help to spark the end surprise. I've always taken an alchemic, or even frankensteinian, approach to art making and continue to pursue the metaphor of the artist as inventor. I weather down my sculptures in order to imbue them with an unknown history, and I build switchboards on their surfaces to point to a vague future technology. If the works are successful, they'll teach me something about themselves.

**KJ:** That *Existenz* gun is an interesting object. The gun itself



**(made from the bones of Law's meal, plus his own dental bridge) is a machine, but one that is entirely organic. The gun is powerful enough to kill, but can also evade detection through metal detectors. I'm intrigued by these kinds of portrayals of the future. Here the future doesn't look like an Apple showroom, it looks messy, abject and bodily; it's a place where you have to negotiate the carcass on your plate in relation to your own body (any good apocalypse movie will tell you the same thing).**

**AB:** Yeah, there's something romantic in there, at least when compared to the slick future vision in which our animal selves have been conquered by computers. A gritty and organic future is getting further from our reach as technology becomes increasingly seamless, invisible and integrated into us. My sculptures point in the opposite direction, where technology can be bulky and calciferous, and have a conversation with the body rather than invading it.

**KJ:** Oldenburg's *Ray Guns* have a similar quality for me. The ray gun is obviously something of the technofuture, but many of Oldenburg's *Ray Guns* look (or are) organic.

**AB:** Yes, they have the look of guns

from the future (circa 1950s sci-fi) that have been left for millennia to decompose and become petrified or fossilized. Which is funny, because a lot of the *Ray Guns* are actually just weirdly shaped pieces of wood or rock.

**KJ:** I also like the idea that something could be exhausted from all the meaning that has been injected into it. Any idea of who is doing the injecting?

**AB:** I guess there are different layers of injecting: first the artist injects and later the viewer/critic/art historian. This isn't necessarily intentional; it is often a result of familiarity and the work resembling something that already exists.

**KJ:** This baked potato must be the antidote to exhaustion though. It is erupting... <http://collections.lacma.org/node/207457>

**I visited you on the heels of a research trip to Hawaii, where I accompanied a scientist who was looking for examples of synthetic materials melting into the geologic record of the earth (aka the rock record). The rock record is a layered accumulation of sediment, fossils, rock, etc., that is studied to understand the earth's geologic history. The layered accumulations of your sculptures**

**seemed particularly poignant after seeing rock forms made through a similar type of process of layering and accumulation. My experience in your studio left me visually in awe, not just because of the gem-like qualities of the work and the visual connection to what I had just seen in nature, but also because I felt like I was seeing speculative evidence of the Anthropocene. What you're making, of course, materially has very little connection to the natural world (or at least as much as a Ho Ho has a connection to a raw vegetable), given your predominant use of synthetic materials. Could you describe what you find compelling about synthetic materials, and how you see them plugging into the world?**

**AB:** That sounds like an amazing trip you went on and I'm glad it inspired such a fascinating question. I've had people ask me if my sculptures are made out of crystal and I find this notion humorous, yet beautiful in its impossibility. Though the sculptures have a crystalline appearance, I'm more interested in their synthetic nature. When seen in person, the texture of plastic becomes more evident and they take on a somewhat noxious appearance. The works embody approximations of natural forces such as sedimentation, erosion

and fossilization, but these are clearly fabricated elements. I'm not interested in replicating nature, but rather in the desire to replicate nature, and the inevitable failure that comes along with such a goal.

**KJ:** I am also very interested in both that drive and failure, and I hear the test tube hamburger didn't get great reviews....

**AB:** Yeah, it had the right "mouthfeel" but lacked soul.

**KJ:** I also hear you have a background in video. Do you see any crossover there in terms of how you employ light in your sculptures?

**AB:** I did make several videos in grad school, but I also built sculptures in which electric light was a key component. I was always frustrated that the light still seemed to be an external feature, no matter how integral I tried to make it to each piece. It always felt gimmicky, and the electrical cord was a problem I went to extreme measures to try and solve. In my current work I've finally found a seamless way to incorporate light, without the bulbs and wires. I think my interest in light comes from a desire for my sculptures to transcend themselves, and exist beyond their forms by activating the space around them.



**KJ: That is a great answer. And it is hard to reconcile the cord. What kind of non-art objects are you interested in?**

**AB:** I like looking at random assemblages of things in puddles or at the beach – shiny garbage that's all sludged together by nature.

An important influence is my family's sailboat named *Reality*. It's a beautiful wooden boat that was custom built for my parents before I was born and I grew up traveling on it. When you're at sea, you spend a lot of time looking at things, and I remember staring up and memorizing every nut and bolt in the ceiling of the cabin. When I was little, I would crawl inside of every nook and cranny and it felt like roaming through the innards of some great animal.

**KJ: This is interesting. I often wonder what makes artists able to look so closely at things. Was boredom an important factor to this close looking? Or more that the boat was already so evocative for you?**

**AB:** The continuous motion on a boat causes you to slow down and observe. I was also an only-child so I had to entertain myself when my parents were busy on deck. I guess I was pretty easily entertained! I think artists tend

to notice things that other people find boring... maybe that's part of the job.

**KJ: What kind of art objects are you interested in?**

**AB:** I've always been drawn to a particular kind of assemblage work in which a variety of materials and objects combine into a seamless fusion, yet are still possible to decipher and pick apart upon closer viewing. Examples of this would be the works of Louise Nevelson, Nari Ward, El Anatsui, and Jedediah Caesar, to name a few.

I've also been thinking about my dad's kinetic works that he made through the eighties and up until his death. A few favorite pieces are *Tahiti* (1984), *Orient Express* (1985), *Other Forces at Work* (2005) and *Slow Turn* (2005). He engineered these works by himself and his hand is so evident in them. Their construction is crude yet delicate and I see so much determination in their making. He spoke about these works as introducing a less passive encounter for the viewer, but I also see the artist's need for a more active experience with his own work after completion. Though they are automated pieces, there still seems to be something unpredictable about them and an opportunity is presented for the artist, as well as the viewer, to notice something new upon each viewing.



**KJ: I'm so glad you brought up your dad, Roland Brener. I once had an impressive studio visit with him (impressive not because of me, because of him), and his last exhibition at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria was remarkable. Talk about the artist as inventor! Every work felt like a new techno-alchemical experiment.**

**AB:** That exhibition included some of the computer generated sculptures from 1999-2004, as well as the works he made in the last two years of his life when he returned to a studio-oriented practice. I was very happy to see him puttering around in the studio again, after a long period of designing work on the computer. His decision to make work by hand again was concurrent

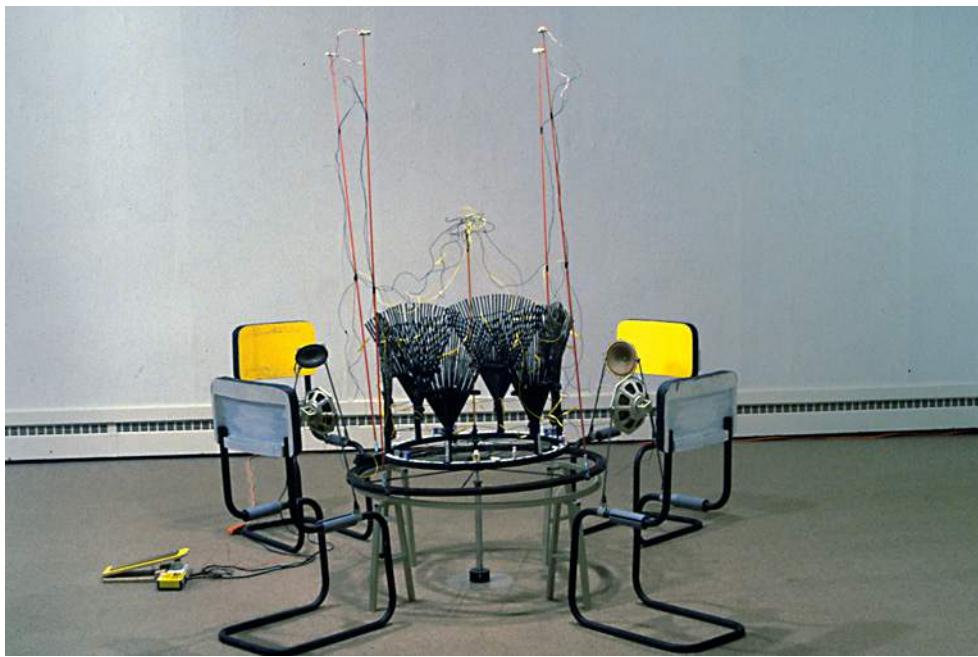


with my decision to study sculpture at UBC. By watching him, I noticed that we shared a similar physicality when slowly moving through the studio and contemplating objects.

**KJ: Have you ever considered your work in relation to your dad's mid-career and later work, including the resin *Genies* and *Swingers*? It just occurred to me now from this conversation, but I am thinking about the potential for a conglomerate moment in between his later computer generated figures and his earlier DIY robotics that also include altered commercial objects (like rakes, shipping tubes, lightbulbs, etc.).**

**AB:** I see some shared formal





interests between my work and his figurative pieces because they are singular, stand-alone sculptures, in contrast to his earlier installations that contain complex parts. Though it's an important factor in all of his work, the relationship to the floor is emphasized in these singular sculptures and is of particular interest to me. When it comes to materials, I relate much more to the 1980s work and the last sculptures he made, which incorporate a range of materials that were culled freely from around the house, thrift stores, the beach, etc.

**KJ:** In closing, I have one more question about the artist's hand, as it has come up in this conversation in a couple of different ways, and I'm interested in how you see it operating

**in your work, which, depending on your viewing angle and distance, can read in many different ways. There's a part of your work that looks as though it has been made/petrified by nature; a part that looks industrially produced; and another aspect that looks like the future-tinkerer at work. How important is the role of the hand, for you, in your own work?**

**AB:** It's very important to me. I used to want to be a writer and part of that interest has carried through into my art practice. I like the relationship between the author's voice and the artist's hand. I see my work coming from a source that is outside of my day-to-day self, almost as though it's being conveyed through a narrator. I've always been



interested in reflexive artwork that builds its own context over time. As a writer I was enthralled by the task of developing a sense of place. Even now, I imagine my sculptures as being from a particular place and I hope that by accumulation they will flesh out that place, wherever it may be.





**Crusty Crunchy  
Roundy Smoothy**  
Ella Dawn McGeough





“A ROUND FOUR BLOCKS of print I shall postulate four ultramundane margins that shall contain indeterminate information as well as reproduced reproductions.”<sup>1</sup> This is the first sentence of Robert Smithson’s *Quasi Infinities and the Waning of Space*. Amy Brener’s sculpture *untitled (disk)*, 2013 suggests a similar circumnavigation of space, process, and material. Like Smithson’s exploration of a universe expanding and contracting through the art objects of his contemporaries and others, my discussion of this object will have obstacles and be around-about and about roundness.

The first obstacle is to trust the ancient Greeks when they say that seeing is touching at a distance. This concept is so intimate it makes me feel dizzy with power.

However, in an inversion of this obstacle, the general shape of the object itself grabs hold of my eyes before they can handle the work’s specifics. In other words, before I can touch it – it touches me. *disk*’s geometry, at odds with the architectural linearity of Brener’s growing portfolio from the last few years, is round. Or at least I feel that it aspires to be round. I suffer compassion for this object and for its struggle to be something perhaps more ideal than it is. Perfect or not, its shape is sympathetic to the eye; mine enjoy feeling its near roundness cup against them. In fact, as I begin to decipher inner and outer rings, I wonder, if – like J.W Goethe’s proclamation that, ‘If the eye were not sun-like, the sun’s light it would not see’ – I see *disk* because my eyes are *disk*-like?<sup>2</sup>



The outer ring, the iris, at first glance appears as a thick grey matter and yet, in no time at all, begins to crumble apart and arrange into concrete, technological bits, pigment, resin, Fresnel lens, plexi, and some other stuff. My eyes sift through all this in order to sort and categorize. I focus upon concentrations of specific colours: the colours of things – the blue of delphinium dots the upper left corner, the vermillion of poppy patches across the lower round, green moss spreads itself throughout, while light reflects off fragments of lens in a polychromatic array.

This outside holds on tight to an inside – an interior circle of gauzy semi-transparent resin, more cornea than pupil.

Again, an obstacle: I have a hard time believing this inside is hard. It takes a leap of understanding to accept that it is a solid instead of a briefly suspended viscous, yolky, gelatin. So real is this daydream that it exists in my mouth. I can feel the chewiness of the milky yellow stuff between my teeth. I flip-flop back and forth between this apparent hallucination and a nearly unacceptable reality.

Carl Jung, who was also a sculptor, described getting to know a dream as analogous to understanding a stone.<sup>3</sup> Learning the inside begins with feeling, by touching the outside not looking for what you want to see. In collusion, Charles Ray tells us that, “[what] is essential in a work of art is found in the method of its construction.”<sup>4</sup>

What method of construction pushed these materials together and gave them a category?





The extreme heat of igneous, the tremendous pressure and time of metaphoric, or the mish-mash of sedimentary?



Sedimentary: human hands mixed, poured, and placed these materials, quickly. It became a stone, a rock, a boulder, a sedimentary plasticonglomerate from the Anthropocene epoch. Conglomerates rely on quickness; it is their medium. Often, they form near a river's head around the heaviest jagged materials. At other times, they form from the human-refuse collected in oceans. They are obstinate and irregular and this is the secret to the speed of their creation. In comparison to other sedimentary rocks, which slowly compact and coalesce, conglomerates are like a wild geologic party, where a variety of substances of all sorts and sizes get hastily stuck and pressed up against each other to form something new. Then they break up, move around and like us, are "in the act of act of perpetual becoming."<sup>5</sup>

As with Jung's dreams, my understanding and judgment of this object shifts shape as I simultaneously take it apart and put it back together. In order to do this my eyes must give way to obstructive hands and with full palm outstretched I begin to paw *disk's* surface.



I feel its brittleness. The outer-ring's crunchiness breaks up the surface into cracks and crevices that help my fingers begin to make sense of the thing, forcing them to recognize details over pure mass. Ridges come and go; rough areas slow me down as I inspect their gravelly, sandy quality while smooth patches seduce. Reliefs of



computer parts – circuit boards and keypads are pressed against and into the upper and right sections. These provide straight lines to run along and symmetrical indents to feel assured by, but then they end and there is some new texture to contend with. I am in danger of being cut when I slide around the crusty razor-sharp left edge. At the bottom of the outer circle a rupture suggests a direct hit and a crack radiates outwards. Who or what hit it and where are they now?

The little wrinkles, where inside pool of resin meets outer ring, creates a palpable threshold between the changes in substance. The inside circle is lovely to touch: smooth little waves in the resin resist the press of my full two hands, like warm ice. After the previous irregularity, the near singular material of this inside gives me pause. I rest.



And with this rest, suddenly the intensity of my feeling has reached extension. It drops.

All these details that were forcing me to recognize them and turn them into metaphor overwhelm. I am tired. I want to forget and return to the thing as complete and obstinate. With this wish, this thing that touch animated into subject turns back into an object that is slightly too heavy and awkward to pick up. I understand that while it faces me, it also faces the wall. It has two sides and I can only see one.

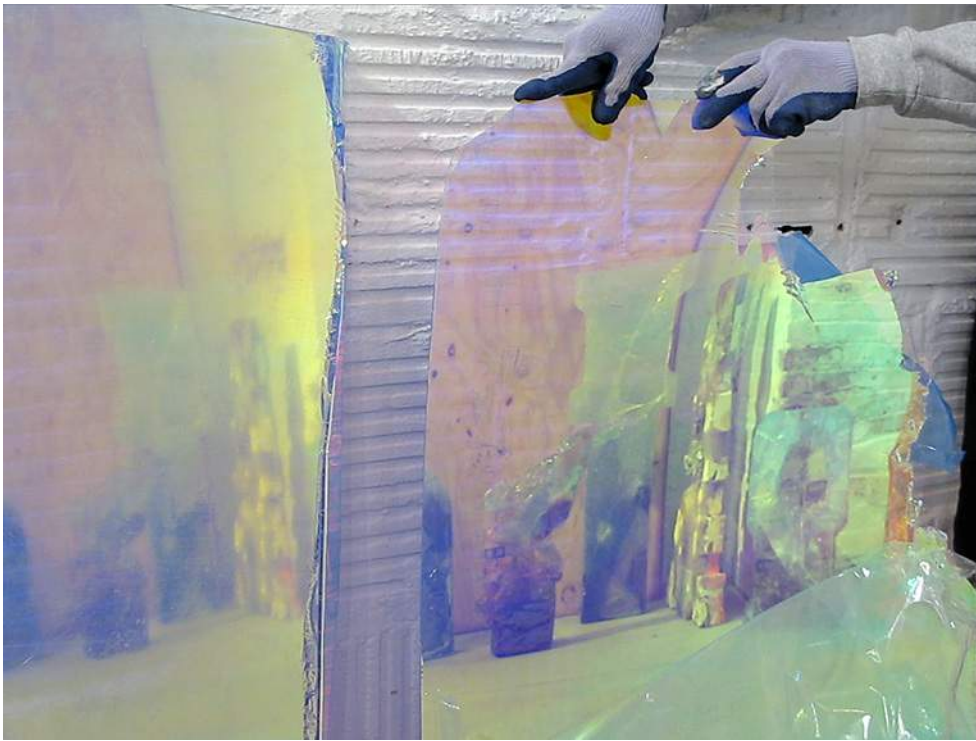
*Disk* belongs where it is –neither cradled nor handled– leaning up against the wall and touching the floor.



NOTES 1. Smithson, Robert, and Jack D. Flam. «Quasi-Infinities and the Waning of Space.» *Robert Smithson, the Collected Writings*. Berkeley: University of California, 1996. 34-37. Print. 2. Goethe, Johann Wolfgang Von, and Douglas Miller. Preface. *Scientific Studies*. New York, NY: Suhrkamp, 1988. Print. 3. Jung, C. G. *The Undiscovered Self: With Symbols and the Interpretation of Dreams*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1990. Print. 4. Ray, Charles. "A Four Dimensional Being Writes Poetry on a Field of Sculpture." *Matthew Marks Gallery* (2006): 3+. Web. 5. Ibid., 10.







*Mirrored Tilt* (2014). HD colour video, silent, 1:09 min.

[\[VIEW\]](#)

## Afterword

Colin Miner

There is a temporal curiosity within the space of Amy Brener's sculptures in which surface layers are melded and at times barely discernable underneath. This is the matter of palimpsests, of material layered both transparently and opaquely to catch the light or hold the darkness. This space fascinates our eye with the time to comprehend the qualities of a discontinuous and fractured experience.

It is difficult to materialize this curious movement and duration of the passage of time and our place in it. These sculptures grasp at doing so in their transformation through illumination. They exhibit the unsteady position between past and future, as an ungraspable nowness in which light has substance as material. Enthrilled, our eyes are illuminated in the tenuous act of seeing and knowing, of comprehending this transcendence of space in time. Struggling to discern depth from surface partially obscured Fresnel screens shaded in petrified folds of material, cause the eyes' focus to waver in and out. Light glimmers, pooling under layers, shimmering on edges, and ebbing within resin. The boundary of surface is sought out by the light and with this comes contrast. Surface becomes depth and depth becomes surface through the play of lightness and darkness within and without.

It takes time to work with these sculptures, to adjust *with* them. Each finds a place in space with light falling on, then in and off. In this movement a number of them tilt, coaxed by their off-center weight. In order to get the right angle it is necessary to adjust the lighting; in the darkened intervals something competes to take hold. Sculpturally, a material density of light is now absent in the presence of darkness. Pushed from my eyes the lightness (the illumination) is in complete disproportion to their weighty substance.

*Mirrored Tilt* (2014) was made in collaboration with Amy Brener at her studio in Brooklyn, NY. It is a reflection as conversation of surface and depth in the space between material and light.



## List of Works

Amy Brener, for detailed information see [www.amybrener.com](http://www.amybrener.com)

*Harbinger*, 2013, Resin, pigment, concrete, fresnel lens, glass, plexiglass found objects, 54" x 17.5" x 7" / *untitled (disk)*, 2013, Resin, pigment, hydrocal, concrete, fresnel lens, glass, found objects, 44" x 41" x 1" / *Bit*, 2012, Resin, pigment, Hydrocal, found objects, 37.5" x 15" x 3" / *Key*, 2012, Resin, pigment, fresnel lens, glass, plexiglass, found objects, 43 x 14 x 5" / *Glowstick*, 2012, Resin, pigment, plexiglass, 61.25" x 3.75" x 3.25" / *Wing*, 2012, Resin, pigment, concrete, glass, fresnel lens, plexiglass, found objects, 33" x 15.5" x 3.5" / *mini 4*, 2013, Resin, pigment, concrete, glass, fresnel lens, plexiglass, found objects, 24" x 12" x 5" / *mini 7*, 2013, Resin, pigment, fresnel lens, glass, plexiglass, found objects , 22.5" x 13" x 3"

### Roland Brener

p19. *Slow Turn*, 2005, rubber, motors

Collection: Olga Korper Gallery, Toronto.

Artist's note: "Rotating length of rubber at 1 rpm. Floor to ceiling."

p19. *Other Forces at Work*, 2005, various materials

Collection: Olga Korper Gallery, Toronto.

Artist's note: "Live talk radio alternating between two units as a result of continuous pendulum movement and mercury switch."

p20. *Orient Express*, 1985, various materials, electric train and recorded sound, 80' x 60' x 15'

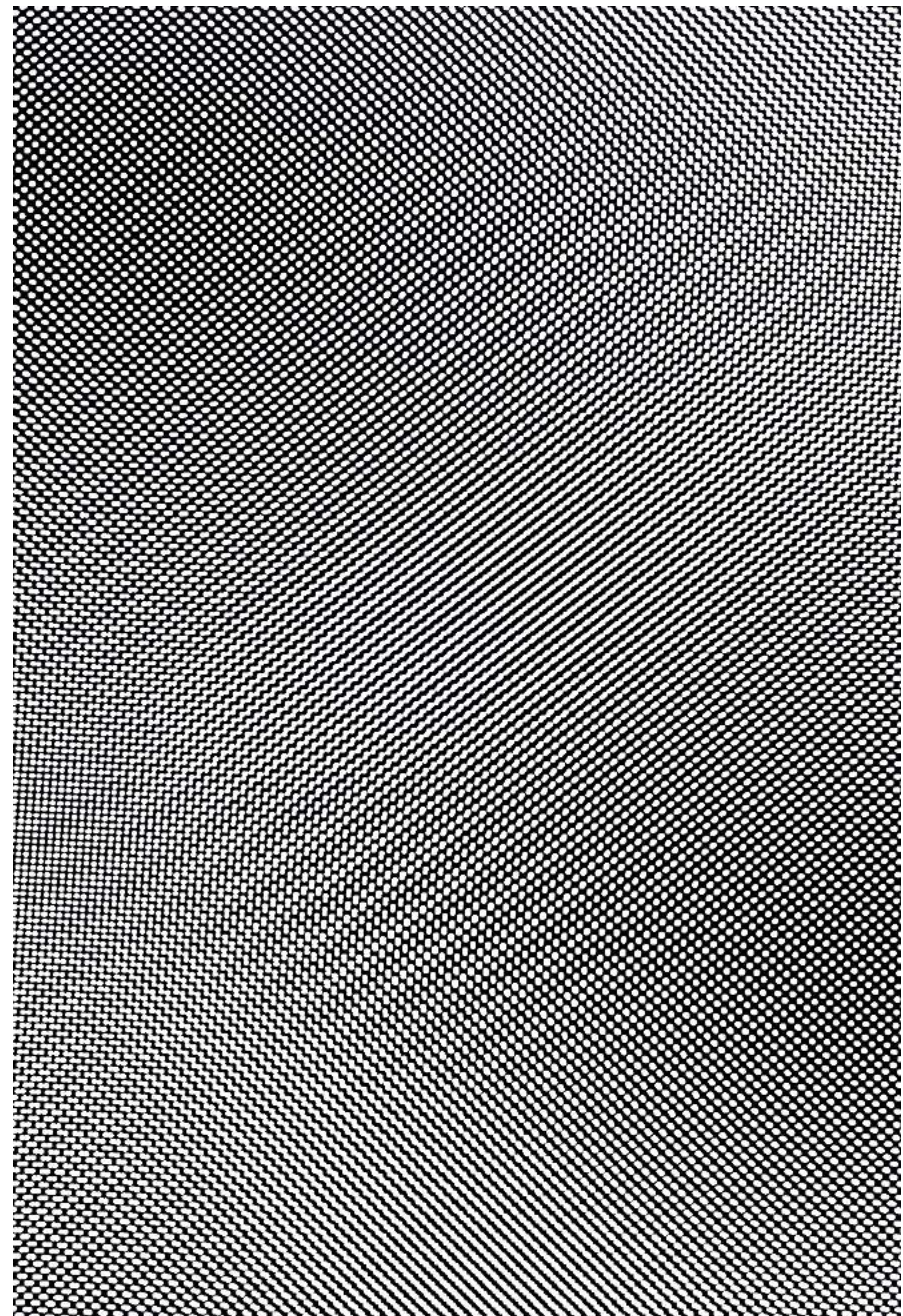
Collection: Vancouver Art Gallery, Canada.

Artist's note: "Viewer activates work by standing on peddle. An electric train circles the elevated track, activating recorded conversation from each speaker on the four chairs. Conversation disintegrates gradually once peddle is released."

p21. *Tahiti*, 1984, various materials, bicycle generator, batteries, radio and sound, 8' x 3' x 5'

Collection: Lethbridge University, Canada.

Artist's note: "A radio player activated by the viewer hand peddling the bicycle generator fades shortly after input. The work was somewhat inspired by an impression of technology apparent in Tahiti."



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# TIMES COLONIST

## Robert Amos: Sculptor Amy Brener's translucent columns are alluring vertical gems

[Robert Amos](#) / Times Colonist

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Amy Brener's work is on display at Deluge Contemporary Art at 636 Yates St. Photograph By Handout

Deluge is a white room on the second floor above Yates Street, a show space for thoughtful contemporary art. A new show featuring Michael Doerksen and Amy Brener has just been installed.

Doerksen creates spheres by layering pigmented gypsum into spherical moulds. He sands them down and intricate patterns appear. These spheres, a bit like oversized bowling balls, sit like wandering planets upon the gallery's floor.

The vertical dimensions of the room are activated by three translucent columns of poured acrylic, the work of Amy Brener. Like irregular icicles or rock crystal stalactites, they catch the light pouring in through the gallery windows in spectral shades of lavender and orange. Each is about the height of a person. Two lean against the wall, and one stands on a little buttressed foot.

Maybe they don't have any stories to tell, but these attractive, gem-like objects intrigued me and lured me closer.

Up close, they are more complex. Brener has poured her polyester resin into rough frameworks about the size of a couple of planks. Though the sculptures are eventually vertical, to create them she lays the framework flat and lines it with plastic film. The resins, which she tints with liquid colour, are repeatedly poured from 12-ounce cups, resulting in a layered effect. These moulds hold an assemblage of found and purchased objects, many chosen for their transparency, including lenses, beads, cubes, circuit boards and one-way mirrors. She has described the results as "artifacts from an imagined future."

The top of the columns hold the most light, and films of cellophane sometimes interrupt the play of light in unexpected ways. As my investigation moved lower, I discovered iridescent bits of peacock feather meeting a lacy filigree of seaweed and the mother-of-pearl gleam of seashells. The shells react with the resin, creating frothy bubbles held forever.

Lower still, bits of tile and grit take us into a geological realm, even back in time.

While she admits to being a pack-rat in her past, Brener has become more discriminating in what she gathers. Now the random nature of her process is somewhat streamlined, tempered by the subtle formalism of the shapes she creates. The edges are carefully considered, and the free-standing column has a fretted top, the hint of an old-fashioned key or prow of a gondola.

The casting process has its own imperatives. The material sets up quickly, and is admittedly toxic. Brener is always eager to free the object from the mould, so she gets on with it. Later she chisels away layers that seem too opaque or crazed, to create a more complex surface. The result is hand-made, but it doesn't look fussed over.



And what is it? A very attractive, even precious, object. The columns are big enough to create a presence, but are not overwhelming. The various inclusions are intriguing but not overly determined. You feel that the blend of chance and intention in the form is just right. I like these sculptures.

Brener is a Victorian, who spent five years at university in Montreal and Vancouver before she found her path as an artist. She moved to New York which, along with her vibrant fellow students at Hunter College, gave her more than enough inspiration. Since graduating from Hunter in 2011 with a master's degree in fine art, she has had two "residencies." The most prestigious was at Skowhegan in Maine where, for two months, she mixed in with 60 other artists for some serious development. The other, in Omaha, Neb., was less intense, but the spacious studio gave her the chance to evolve her poured plastic medium.

This confident young artist knows the life of a sculptor is uncertain. Her father, the late Roland Brener, was himself a sculptor of an advanced and adventurous sort. While proud that his daughter took up the life of the artist, he was anxious, as any parent would be. But with decision and skill, she is taking her first bold steps into the international art world, well-connected and now exhibiting internationally.

It's our good fortune that on her annual summer break from New York, she has come home to Victoria to share the results of her work.

Cloud Quarry — Amy Brener, Michael Doerksen, to Sept. 28. Deluge Contemporary Art, 636 Yates St. Exhibition hours: Wednesday to Saturday, noon to 5 p.m.

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On Amy Brener's recent sculptures

Words by Lucas Blalock

I

The title here comes from Robert Smithson's writings about suburban New Jersey. Smithson himself was fascinated by an "archeological" vantage on the present and its imagined space as a distant past. As he looks out over the landscape of his home state in the text of "Monuments of the Passaic", he sees a disoriented and ill conceived environment that he interrogates through its position as the ancient past to a future present. Amy Brener's recent sculptural works imagine a similar projection of accumulated time and displaced rationality or occluded exposition. It is difficult to look at these works without a sense of the present past, their mineralogical strata cast in resin seem to propose the fossilization of an advanced technological society. Like the mangled husk of the Statue of Liberty on Zuma Beach at the end of Planet of the Apes, Brener's forms remind us of a here that was there-then, in a now that will, in the future, be when.

II

The beach is a telling place to re-approach these works outside of the time signature of science fiction. Brener grew up sailing with her parents on their custom built wooden sailboat named Reality. She has crossed the Pacific five times: from California to Tahiti, Tahiti to Hawaii, Mexico to Hawaii, and twice from Hawaii to her hometown of Victoria, BC.

Oceanic time is not the macro time of geological transformation, nor the time of withered civilizations, but it is also not the micro time of modern life. Brener herself says, "People keep saying that my sculptures look like water. I think watching the light hitting the waves and the expanse of sky for days on end, must have had some influence on the work I'm making now".

III

This is a question of water, but more one of light. As much as these works do feel sedimentary and striated, they also feel crystalline. I am thinking again of Smithson, as well as Josiah McElheny's group show at Andrea Rosen in the summer of 2010; but also of the California of Smithson's time, and his Light and Space counterparts. Brener's choice of materials speak to this, with resin, glass, and fresnel lens all being primary to her repertoire. These surfaces amplify and refract, shifting the read of the object into the phenomenological.

IV

It is important to take this phenomenological experience as central to the sculptures: the living, breathing experience of dealing with them in a room. I first came upon these works just after Brener had started making them. It was this past summer in Maine at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. Brener's studio was a bay in a building that could have functioned as a large, if rather bare bones, stable. It was afternoon and one of these sculptures leaned against the wall while a second stood a bit precariously in its concrete footing. The top of the studio was screened in and let a shaft of light fall across the room leaving the corners dark. I recall thinking of scale immediately. The freestanding sculpture was the size of a small person but it had a sense of monumentality. Kubrick's *2001* came to mind, but also the humanoid, the microchip and the sedimentary rock; the crystalline and the technological.

As you move around Brener's sculptures, they change. They are transparent to varying degrees, and you are aware of light penetrating their forms. You are also aware of encumbrances upon light's easy passage. This happens both in color and by momentary opacities or intensities, as light strikes a fresnel, an embedded object, or a dark pool of pigment in the resin. This also happens in their concrete lowers (when they have them) which feel like the bottom part of a core sample dating to an even more faraway time. In this way, the pieces themselves can be read as vertical timelines reaching skyward toward transparency (and toward the future), out of the concretized matter of a more earthen era of our history.

We are left again with this oscillation between the presence of the physical object with its aqueous beauty and material roughness, and the muteness of the "historical" object. As much as the sculpture is there, light filled and iconic in the room with you, it also makes you work to make sense of what feels like a container of information; an artifact inherently containing the key to its own history. Though of course, in this latter sense, it is a history the viewer finds legible only in the imaginary.

V

I myself am a photographer, and I once wrote that the photograph has been (since its invention) seen to be a magical object; a container that holds both time and space. Even in its catalytic service to the rationalization of

the 'universe' (in the 19th and 20th centuries), the material stuff of photography receded into invisibility, rarely approached unless we came upon its limits. I want to make the argument here that these sculptures don't so much act like photographs as like cameras, or better yet like cameras as mirrors. The kinds of devices we make to look at the world, to collect its debris, say a lot about the cultural moment we inhabit. In the era of the camera's ascendancy there was a great feeling that technology heroically promised a cure for the ills of the world.

Now on the other side of the brutal 20th century, we are looking for new machines and new vessels. Brener herself says that "creating ahistorical artifacts is a form of hope. If an object is from a time that we know nothing of, then the object has endless possibilities."



Previous spread: *Cipher*, 2011, 34"x14"x 3.25"; resin, pigment, fresnel lens, plexiglass.  
This page: *Switchboard*, 2011, 76"x18"x 2"; resin, pigment, fresnel lens, acrylic rod, beads, found objects.  
Next spread: *Pillar*, 2012, 57"x 8"x4"; resin, concrete, pigment.  
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