



BRIE RUAIS

April 21 – May 26, 2018

A few things you need to know: each sculpture is her body weight in clay. Though occasionally it has been the combination of hers and a lover's.

As a start, her materials are stacked, often in a pile and then thrust from their center through a series of scripted actions—"shoving," "scraping," "twisting," "scratching"—performed by various limbs or parts—hands, feet, knuckles, knees—leaving the earthy material marked like a bruised body defiantly holding trauma on its surface. The strong yet malleable mass betrays the push and pull of a swift struggle; the material captures her nail scratches and prints like evidence, stilling time: "I am shaping it, as much as it is shaping me." It, she, they are pliable, compliant and resisting. Earlier in the process, pigment was infused in the clay; as a result, soft, surreal hues emerge from the violence. Next, she layers glaze: sometimes thick like a glossy armor over the vulnerable material, sometimes airbrushed, so that an ethereal, powdery color shades the sharp edges of the sculpture, creating the illusion of depth upon three dimensionality itself.

What else...most of the gestures—no matter how haphazard you may perceive the forms to be—are diagrammed and intentional. The shapes they create are hieroglyphic-like, recognizable; they read like symbol or code. Yet they are not language: the endeavor is more absurd than that; there is no syntax. Each one is a solitary work, untethered to an argument, arranged and accessorized with meaningful veneer. Each action betrays an intention. For example, in earlier works, she would rip out the center of a shape and lay it on the ground before it, making one work out of the mass of another.

"I didn't come out of your rib, you came out of my vagina"—protest banner, 2017

That said, this show is built in pairs¹, each shape is echoed in another, a doubling informed by Luce Irigaray's feminist theory in "The Sex Which is Not One"—which is a multifaceted understanding of the female sex as living in a masculine infrastructure (sexually, emotionally, professionally) and the splitting that ensues in the female-awareness of said state. Ruais's pondering through this double life is staged as an act of repetition: two moments of performing the same thing, and whose outcome is pairs of sculptures reflecting each other's labor. She is acting under the spell of her reading, performing a labor she scripted—thinking through her body.

A few biographical notes: Brie Ruais (b. 1982) graduated with an MFA in sculpture from Columbia University in 2011. She lives in Brooklyn but was born in Orange County, and this return to California is manifestly a homecoming, though she will not have you read it as such. If you ask her, she might admit belonging to the state's natural parks, to the large expanses of land, piles of sand and deep crevices but not to the tarred freeways, strip malls and chain



restaurants that line them. The psychic fault line between the monumentality of nature and the demoralizingly ill-considered urban sprawl is a rift inherent to most of this state's native children who've elected to live far away; they hold in their genes the trauma of place whose inception imparts a great willingness to take something that is not ours, to leave things (and people) behind, as well as a conveniently short memory for both.²

The range of the American landscape is a reference for Ruais. She is drawn to Nature's self-sufficiency and scale, its materials and palette. In each piece, like a sandcastle, she mirrors the macro in her micro—her lived experience—measuring her own height, weight, and volume in relationship to her context.

"This is where you end and others begin."— Kaja Silverman, echoed in Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts*³

Being confronted by Nature's scale and force is also being confronted by one's limits, bodily and otherwise. One of the ineluctable aftereffects of thinking through your body is also sensing time in your body; the cost of its exertion. Considering (still under the Irigarayan spell) the notion of female labor in society is predicated upon their function—sometimes as laborers and sometimes as trade commodities—the finite condition of Ruais' effort is significant. There is evidently a bargain between the cost of her exertion, and the trace it makes. It is therefore also significant that Ruais's work renders her efforts invisible; her actions exist only in the marks left behind, becoming rumor—relegated to language.

A few additional notes: The works in this show derive from a poem that just kept coming up. Oddly, serendipitously, it is a poem about circular time, by a poet interested in the recurrence of events, a poem shaped by well-articulated prophetic generalizations that have felt so relevant to so many that it has been unapologetically parroted by innumerable political think-pieces since its publication in 1920. This poem, *The Second Coming* by W.B. Yeats, has even lent its fragments to Joan Didion—proto-Californian child—in her renowned essay "Slouching Towards Bethlehem," (which narrates "atomization" on a social scale as "the proof things fall apart.") In addition to its catchy phrases⁴, the poem is structured to illustrate things falling apart in a spiral shape—spiraling out if you will, referencing Yeats's theory of time demonstrated by a diagram of gyres.

Yeats's gyres inspired Ruais's drawings and movements in making the show before you, and knowing this illuminates that what we are actually talking about here, through labor, is time: not *holding* (i.e., fixing) time, but rather *riding* the unraveling of time, which is recurrent and doesn't exactly respond to our pause buttons anyway. The question at hand, is at least in part about the manner in which a woman's body holds time, circularly. I venture alongside French theorist (and Bulgarian spy?) Julia Kristeva's "Women's Time" that, similar to patriarchal institutions and language, there may be a surprisingly irreconcilable difference in how the two human genders experience time in their bodies. A cis female body's proximity to making life is also its proximity to death—it is a body containing a monthly marker of potential, unfulfilled, of



life chosen or not chosen, of expirations, loss and grieving. But in that sense, it is an ending that is also part of a larger continuation: “This is where you end and others begin.” It is change: constant, palpable. It is making space. It is a relationship to labor and pain, which comes in waves, peaking and receding, in cycles, with purpose. It is a relationship with power, which is fundamentally temporary.

And that is all I can think to say about that, at least for now.

Lauren Mackler

¹ Which surprisingly is not a contradiction to the earlier premise that each one is an individual piece, as Ruais would tell you they are individual ideas, doubled.

² A complicated sense of time is intrinsic to being in and from California.

³ Since I read it feverishly in one long airport layover and then once or twice again with a cooler head, I have been referring to *The Argonauts* in regard to its aggregation of voices: in how it would be a new feminist writing because of how it quotes diligently, collecting references and dispersing authorship; a mode of working seen also in Claudia Rankine’s *Citizen*, which is comprised of collected anecdotes — an updated feminist style for 21st century teens. This is also, of course, inherited from Luce Irigaray’s endeavor: decolonizing language, identifying the architectures (institutions, people, words) that enclose us in an outdated patriarchal model of the world. It seeks, like Audre Lorde, a new vocabulary since “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house,” and the very busy work of attempting to dismantle an ill-fitting system is the energy expenditure that occupies the weak, exhausting them: “This is an old and primary tool of all oppressors to keep the oppressed occupied with the master’s concerns.” (Lorde again) Thus, a model that needs to be reconsidered down to its very own theory of time.

Nelson’s book deconstructs time; it unfurls its story non-linearly. And in doing so, it does a great job of illustrating how experience is actually lived: over time, repeatedly. Her book is an accumulation of instances and ideas that don’t all make sense at once but rather over time, in a disorganized jumble. This sense of time, in an arc, longer, circular, and recurring, proposes time as bigger than the self.

⁴ Turning and turning in the widening gyre/ The falcon cannot hear the falconer; / Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world, / The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere / The ceremony of innocence is drowned; / The best lack all conviction, while the worst / Are full of passionate intensity. [...]

—Excerpt from *The Second Coming*, W.B. Yeats

Brie Ruais (b. 1982, Southern California) received her BFA from New York University, and her MFA from Columbia University in 2011. Her work has been exhibited at institutions including the Katzen Center at American University, Washington, DC; Arsenal, Montreal; Museum of Fine Arts Boston; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. Solo exhibitions include Cooper Cole, Toronto; Nicole Klagsbrun, NY; Halsey McKay Gallery, East Hampton, NY; Mesler/Feuer, NY; Lefebvre & Fils, Paris. Group exhibitions include Maccarone, Sperone Westwater and Rachel Uffner in NY; Marc Selwyn Fine Arts in Los Angeles, September gallery in Hudson, NY, Romer Young Gallery, San Francisco, and Xavier Hufkens, Brussels among others. Ruais is the recipient of the Sharpe Walentas Studio Program, the Dieu Donne Fellowship, Montello Foundation Residency, Socrates Sculpture Park Fellowship, The Shandaken Project Residency among others. Her work is featured in *Vitamin C: New Perspectives in Contemporary Art, Clay and Ceramics*, by Phaidon (Fall 2017). Ruais currently lives and works in Brooklyn, NY.