

Seeing Things

*Text by Abhaya Mistry
Accompanying workshop by Violeta Paez Armando*



Close-up photograph of sculpture
Crespo, June. Am I an Object, Part III. 2021, sculpture. P////akt, Amsterdam

see it, It's there
or was there more
taken in the place of
plaster and gathered
grips fastening
somewhere else

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*our perception
creates a context
for what we see*

I read this on a tote bag attached to the person sitting in front of me. I am struck by the order: perception preceding context, the becoming of what we see. In anatomical terms, perception is something that physically moves through the body, via the nervous system, after the sensory system has been stimulated. Perception can be thought of as a kind of organisation, it dwells from within a network being made by individual and collective processes of identifying and signifying. When perception is represented as uniformly directional or as an isolated event it can overlook its rhizomatic nature and reduce the ability to recognise the potential of how we might go on perceiving. Later, while still weighing this tote up, trying it on and thinking of the ways it might slip off, I go looking for its linguistic origins. I find its root from the Latin word—*perceptio*, which can be translated as gathering or receiving. Something made from the non-singular, so I reach to loop from its tail—

*what we see
creates a context for
our perception*

*our perception
creates a context
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The opening of *Am I an Object, Part III* and the accompanying writing deadline occur during a moment of prolonged intensity. An intensity that is difficult to place in time because it is ongoing. An intensity that brings into sharper focus our collective vulnerabilities and our collective reliances. An intensity that is renegotiating the duties and desires of the self and its entanglement with others. This intensity, the weight and scale of it, is multiply mediated and pulses through our context(s), perception(s) and ability to see. We feel it, the same, we feel it, differently. To ask, as P/////AKT does through the program of 2021: *Am I an Object?* Is a question of relations, of how we are and how we might move through.

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In a dotted line—one, two, three—a series of bulbous objects are posited on one side of the gallery floor. They are reproductive in shape, like an egg but unwhole, multi-chambered, large and bone white. What could be kept inside? What would remain in the cavity? On the first of these calcified shells, there were layers of belting wrapped loosely around the outside. Fixed to this makeshift harness was part of a found garment partially covering the side. The last one contained a bundle of fabric which was observed at ground level through a hole in the shell. I walked in circles around them finding myself kneeling at the middle one to observe the bouquet of flowering gladiolus stems that resided there. The red flowers left brown markings on the interior base of the object. Had the flowers been brushed against the base before coming to rest there? I think of the motion the hand might have made in this intimate gesture. The stems are yellowing slightly and poke half in and half out in a thick diagonal line through the opening.

The orifice is an opening. It is an expressive location where things might enter, resist, be remembered or discharged. At the opening of the exhibition, I moved around the sculptures with the strange sensation that I was passing through the body of something. I felt little resistance to such an invitation. There were hard and soft chambers that built material tension in the pieces. Sheets of resin, hard plaster shells, styrofoam with slack and more vulnerable materials hanging or otherwise placed inside. Exterior surfaces had been cut out from or appeared in various states of opacity that contributed to the feeling that something was being obscured and something was being revealed and it was in this ambiguous space between layered surfaces, gaps, holes and hollowed out forms that the objects invited you to sense. A workshop organised by Violeta Paez Armando in conversation with June Crespo was held on the

morning of the closing day of the exhibition. During the workshop, we were encouraged in spatial sensitivity to touch and hear the sculptures using our bodies. It was with an intimacy of this scale that we captured sound and images of these interactions.

One of the standing sculptures made with the gritty texture of layered fiberglass and resin was semi-transparent, yellow in colour and a bit oily. It was shaped like a double-barreled drum and its exterior felt like a barrier. There was a lolling mass unevenly distributed inside. It became more and less formed as it was carried by the available light entering the gallery from somewhere behind. Watching the unfocussed edges encouraged the experience of trying to penetrate the outer layer in order to sense or see-through. Another of the fiberglass sculptures stood in a vertical state of unfolding. I could not see over it and was instead led on a process of discovery that moved me around its form. Waiting on the edge, I followed along as it curved inward until the point where it became possible to properly see inside. But there, suddenly exposed in the cocooned shape was a large-scale photograph displaying, with surgical clarity, a set of closed eyes. Having been led so closely in, the scale was now unsettling.

While thinking about exposure I became interested in formations that we share the word *body* with. For example a body of water, a body of work or a body of evidence. These bodies become constituted by material consistency, scale, by describing mass or some other developmental aspect. I remembered a large rock formation that I visited as a child. The limestone coastline was and still is, in a very slow state of erosion. Erosion is a word we often use to mean something closer to erasure. Erasure of something considered valuable that was once there. For example, an erosion of a standard or physical erosion that displaces property. This usage of erasure as erosion places loss but loses some of the transformational quality inherent to erosion, which is a process defined by the breaking down and redistribution of materials. Limestone deposits, like the eroding coastline, are abundantly found. They are exhaustively mined to produce common concrete which, after water, is the most widely used substance on the planet¹. June Crespo's sculptures in *Am I an Object, Part III* thinks about the corporeal condition with tensions arising in states of fixation and movement of the body and its representations. By asking how to resist the body of concrete we also ask how we might continue to be moved.

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¹ Watts, Jonathan. "Concrete: The Most Destructive Material on Earth." The Guardian, Guardian News and Media, 25 Feb. 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2019/feb/25/concrete-the-most-destructive-material-on-earth>.