

# WALEAD BESHTY: SCIENCE CONCRETE

CHINA ART OBJECTS GALLERIES /  
REDLING FINE ART, LOS ANGELES  
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The title for Walead Beshty's current exhibitions refers to an idea developed by Lévi-Strauss to understand a different kind of science that predates our own. 'Science of the concrete', or 'mythical thought', as Lévi-Strauss also refers to it in his book *The Savage Mind* (1962), is a kind of 'intellectual bricolage', taking what is on hand to deal with the world, rather than inventing a new tool. In the realm of photography, where Beshty has done most of his work, this takes the form of aleatory photos and sculptures that explore a politics of aesthetics. Where do photographs come from? What is the process in which they are made? Rather than being wholly extruded from the earth in seamless and seductive snaps, Beshty's recent series of photographs are created with very clear prescriptions for creation, and rather than inventing new tools, he uses the established practices at hand. Beshty folds the photo paper into radically different shapes and sends it through the regular processing machines. The folds and chemical fixatives result in strange colours and fractured patterns burned into the paper, like anarchic stained-glass windows.

Rather than snapshots of the world, the photograms deal directly with the play of light on paper. While the early pioneer of photograms László Moholy-Nagy used it as a formal experiment with light, Beshty uses the photogram as a material experiment with photographic process. In an effort to reveal every stage of this process, Beshty has included within the exhibitions photographs of photo-lab staff, the dealers assigned to sell the work and the machines on which it is created, all of which reveal many of the same coloured marks and imprimaturs as the folded photograms.

Alongside the photograms and photographs are two sets of sculptures, both with different but equally notable connections to the artist's photographic practice and each defined by the shape of FedEx boxes, the tool of transit for much of the work. One set is made of selected (and I presume failed) photoworks by the artist, shredded, mixed with concrete and shaped into blocky abstract forms by the FedEx boxes. One might point to John Baldessari's famous act of torching all his paintings, but this in some ways furthers the demystification involved in the artistic process; all of the failures are included in the arrangement, along with the successes. The other set are shatter-proof glass boxes displayed stacked on top of the FedEx boxes they've travelled in from their inception, both indelibly battered from their transit.

The whole breadth of both shows, which included at least four different series of works, follows the process of creation, transit and distribution of a work of art. But the works themselves are not overly weighted with their conceptual intentions. They retain a cracked elegance: modern, strange and nearly alchemical, even though the mysteries implied by alchemy are nowhere to be found. Though, like Sol Lewitt's wall drawings, the artist attempts to demystify the process, knowing how they are made takes nothing away from their beauty. *Andrew Berardini*



SSCC 139751 REV 10/05 FedEx(R) Large Box, Priority Overnight (Los Angeles-Berlin trk#846690884209, Berlin-Los Angeles trk#852272429633), 2007, mixed media, dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist and China Art Objects Galleries, Los Angeles