

FIGURE



conversation with **AIDAN DUFFY**
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Smoking Imitation, Jesmonite, epoxy resin, epoxy clay, metal, ceramic, pigment, acrylic, fabric, cord, 36 × 63 × 23 cm, 2023.



Smoking Imitation (detail), Jesmonite, epoxy resin, epoxy clay, metal, ceramic, pigment, acrylic, fabric, cord, 36 × 63 × 23 cm, 2023.

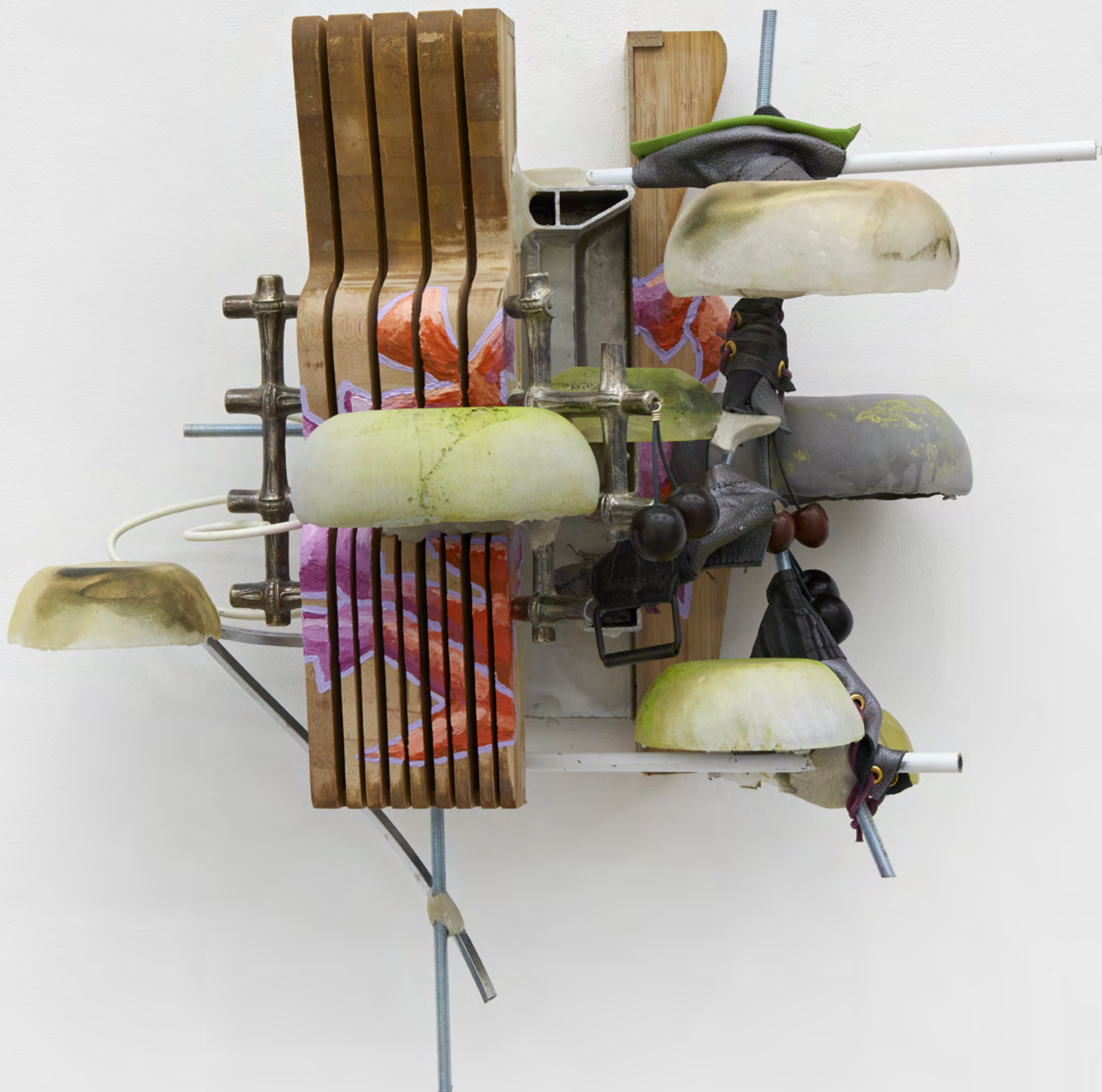
MARCO GALVAN *in conversation with*
AIDAN DUFFY

MG

Your polymorphic sculptures combine a vast range of materials, from found objects to Jesmonite casts, from fabric to epoxy clay and metal. Where did you start, and how did you first approach art?

AD

My parents are really into art and music, so I was going to museums and concerts as a kid. Although at that time I found it quite boring, I was a restless child and wanted to be running around outside instead. But over time, I started to appreciate what I was looking at and listening to. They started me on double bass when I was really young and spent a lot of my teenage years around music and musicians. I remember there being a point where I had a choice to either pursue music or art. I wasn't particularly gifted at art, but it felt much more exciting than playing in orchestras for the rest of my life, although now that seems



Straight Back to It, Jesmonite, epoxy resin, epoxy clay, metal, wood, pigment, acrylic, fabric, cord, 57 × 62 × 33 cm, 2023.



Straight Back to It (detail), Jesmonite, epoxy resin, epoxy clay, metal, wood, pigment, acrylic, fabric, cord, 57 × 62 × 33 cm, 2023.

pretty nice. But yeah, I drew a lot, quite detailed drawings, and it wasn't until I was at Chelsea I really got into sculpture. I've always been attracted to sculpture most as a medium, to experience and to make. I felt like sculpture had the ability to play out a narrative in ways I'd never felt before. It changed what I thought art was and could be. When I graduated, I was a bit lost for a few years without the money for a studio or materials, but I suppose that's when you get creative. So from then, I was experimenting a lot, which is how I ended up with the work I'm making now.

MG

As I was mentioning, materials play a crucial role in your creative process. Your sculptures associate industrial material and found objects, assuming at times natural shapes. How do you source and select the materials in your work?

AD

It's very intuitive. In terms of material, I just go for whatever interests me; there isn't a logic or methodology to it, and I never really have an exact idea of what I'll do with a material. I spend a lot of time on eBay, at markets, charity shops, and get given a lot from friends and family. Most times when I'm working on a sculpture and I think this one object will be perfect for it, it usually isn't, so you kind of just have to be always looking and trying different things out; the material ends up telling you what to do. I can find something on the street on the way to the studio in the morning, and it becomes the beginning of a new piece by the afternoon. Or I'm watching a music video or film and see a piece of clothing, object, or body movement that seems interesting to me. Then I try to figure out what it is that drew me to that particular thing and how do I create the same effect within a work. Do I use an exact reference, or is it in the assembly of parts that



Dun Cana Remix, Jesmonite, epoxy clay, epoxy resin, metal, leather, acrylic, pigment,
45 × 54 × 27 cm, 2022-2023.



Ridin' Empty with Beading, Jesmonite, epoxy clay, metal, fabric, cord, beading, acrylic, pigment, 70 × 82 × 122 cm, 2022-2023.

MG

this certain movement or energy is encapsulated? When I came to your studio a few months ago, you mentioned that there were materials that stay in the studio for a while before finding a new life in your sculptures...

AD

Yeah, there are piles of stuff everywhere. I'm a hoarder in the studio, but it's necessary. Whenever I throw something out, it always ends up feeling like the perfect missing piece. There's a lot of material in the studio that's been sitting there for years or that I don't feel ready to use. I have a lot of material that feels far from what I've recently been making, and I know I need to find a bridge in the work to these objects. I picked up a surfboard on Facebook Marketplace last summer, but I'm still totally lost in how it's going to become part of a sculpture, but I know there will come a day where a surfboard will make sense.

MG

Fusing the natural and the synthetic, the shapes of your sculptures—like the ones presented at Art-o-rama such as *Smoking Imitation*, 2023, or *Fresh and Damp*, 2023—recall elements from the natural world like mushrooms or jellyfish. In what way does nature influence your practice? Are these references made on purpose or do they arise more organically?

AD

Yeah, it's pretty organic. Growing up in Scotland, I've been surrounded by nature in a rural environment. Being within those vast landscapes, you really understand how small and insignificant you are. I know it's a bit passé to say that, but it's true. You live by nature's rules up there. It's something I've grown up with, so I feel like it subconsciously became the most natural way for me to look at construction. Then the other half of my life, I've been in London, so it's really just a mix of those two worlds. Although my use of natural references is not so much about trying to reproduce nature as much as a signal to reduce



The Grapevine, Jesmonite, epoxy clay, epoxy resin, metal, wood, fabric, cord, pigment, glass, fabric, plastic, acrylic, 125 × 60 × 23 cm, 2022-2023.

oneself and accept the exterior. I always have that Strauss line “the world began without man and will complete itself without him” going through my head. I try to mirror this surrendering to the outside within the practice, by using found objects either casted or as raw material as the work. I’m also thinking a lot about how to merge timelines in the work. I’m interested in constructing sculpture with contradiction, having each part have no obvious relation to the other but to get all of these separate pieces to live in harmony as a whole. It’s about creating new connections and affiliations. I still very much see them as abstract sculpture despite there being recognizable parts and obvious influences.

MG

In your practice, it seems like words also play a relevant role, especially through the titles of your works which sometimes juxtapose an interesting combination of words. Where does the inspiration for the titles come from?

AD

I have a really long list on my phone of phrases and titles that I think could work and match them up with what I’m working on sometimes, but most of the time titles come to me while making, from reading something, watching a film, listening to music, or something a friend says. The titles usually come when I’m around halfway on something, when the sculpture starts to come into its own, starts to become its character. At this point, the sculpture and title start to work together; the title often guides its eventual final form. A work I have in the Art-o-rama presentation, *Journalism*, features a textile cutting from a Galliano newspaper print vest, it reads *Gazette*. Behind are casts from a rock face I casted from Dun Cana in the highlands. I was thinking a lot about the way bodies record time, wrinkles in the face, the rings on a tree, or layers of rock



Low-key Thriving, Jesmonite, epoxy resin, epoxy clay, pigment, fabric, metal, wood, glass, beading, lamp wiring, 51 × 90 × 50 cm, 2022.

squeezed one on top of the other recording how many millennia it's been around and thinking about this through the lens of what we call journalism. Casting the rock, making reproducible copies with Galliano's newspaper print for me kind of calls into question the layered realities of objects and information, and their position on value systems.

MG

London-based curator Charlie Mills stated that your work creates a “fascinating juxtaposition of terms for the viewer: between artistic intent and spontaneous incident”. The unexpected and the strangely familiar. How do you relate to this aspect of your work?

AD

Yeah, my process is a bit of a push-pull between intent and spontaneity, but I'm super open to anything that comes my way. The intent of yesterday won't be the intent of today. When I go into the studio in the morning, I see the work as a totally new sculpture ready to be chopped in half and turned upside down. Spontaneity is embedded in the process, then I suppose at the end things are refined, and I start to think about where I want the energy to be situated, what to pull out and what to push back. There needs to be a feeling of urgency in the construction balanced with a sense of resolution. I can call a work finished when it's done something I feel I haven't had a part in creating, when it's giving me something that I didn't put into it. Basically, when it starts to feel like an unsolvable equation, then it can go out and live in the world on its own, and do its thing without me.

MG

The six new sculptures that you're showing here at Art-o-rama appropriate both the walls and the floor of the booth, creating a visual engagement on various visual levels. How do you build the relationship between your works and the exhibition space?

AD

It is fairly instinctual as well. It usually doesn't take very long because whenever I'm working



After the Function, Epoxy resin, epoxy clay, metal, MDF, plywood, glass, pigment, acrylic, spray paint, fabric, cord, rhinestone fringe, 55 × 48 × 20 cm, 2023.

on a show, I'm working on every piece at the same time. I'm already figuring out the relationships between each of the works as I'm making them over three months or so. It's quite natural once I put them into the gallery space that this goes here and that there. I'm starting to think about the spaces I show in a bit more and about the install; I feel like that's a whole other ball game I'm yet to get into. Thinking about lighting and the gallery as a space to manipulate, trying to think outside the white cube where the sculpture interacts with the space in a more peculiar way. I'm making work for a guerrilla sculpture garden with friends in Burgess Park end of September, which I think will be a really fun opportunity to start thinking about these relationships. Where the work can extend beyond the actual object, how sculpture affects the space and vice versa.

MG

Sometimes you incorporate light bulbs into your work. How did you approach that? Was it intuition, a random process, or something that you had been experimenting with for a while?

AD

That was quite random. At first, I was putting them into sculptures because I was afraid of making bad sculpture so that if it's a bad sculpture, then at least it is functional and at least I might be able to persuade a friend to store it in their house. It was that at the beginning, but then it became very much about having an energy source pumped through the sculpture and having a wire falling out of a sculpture plugged into the wall, like an object on life support or something. Because my work is quite decorative already, it's fun to further messy distinctions between art and design.

MG

Is there any reference to architecture or design when you conceive the light sculptures?

AD

Totally, those two floor pieces at Art-o-rama are



Fresh and Damp, Jesmonite, epoxy clay, emulsion, pigment, acrylic, fabric, beading,
77 × 40 × 72 cm, 2023.



Fresh and Damp (detail), Jesmonite, epoxy clay, emulsion, pigment, acrylic, fabric, beading, 77 × 40 × 72 cm, 2023.

interpretations of Castiglioni's *Cocoon* lamps. I made the shape of one of his cocoon lamps in clay and then cast that in Jesmonite and resin to make the body of those works. I look to design a lot for inspiration. I think when referencing design, you reference functionality, desire, and value in a really interesting and particular way. I'm attracted to design objects that are influenced by ideas of nature like the Castiglioni's cocoon or Noguchi's akari, so coveted, meticulously designed and clean, and then making them kind of camp. It's fun to drag that modernist design kicking and screaming into a sort of expressive disarray. For a show I have coming up at 243 Luz in October, there's a work influenced by BLESS's cable jewelry project from 2005 where I approach design in a more straightforward way.

MG

I remember you mentioning that a huge part of your inspiration and creative process is related to music and films. Is there within your sculpture here at the booth did they incorporate this?

AD

I'm often thinking in cinematic terms when working on a sculpture, thinking about the narrative, characters, soundtrack, coloring, and energy. How all of these aspects working together, or against each other can condition your physical and visual experience. I want people to be part of it and experience all the emotions that come with watching film and to hate it or to love it. One of the sculptures, *After the Function*, the small one on the left of the back wall, the textile in that object is in part inspired by an outfit worn by Bad Gyal. Imagery clothing worn by reggaeton, trap, and dancehall artists inspire a lot of the color and textile I use; it's also the music I listen to most in the studio. In the solo at South Parade earlier this year, I used a lot of this chartreuse lime color; you can probably find it in almost all of the objects.



In and Out of the Mud, Jesmonite, epoxy resin, epoxy clay, metal, plastic, glass, pigment, acrylic, spray paint, fabric, beading, cord, 66 × 78 × 65 cm, 2023.



In and Out of the Mud (detail), Jesmonite, epoxy resin, epoxy clay, metal, plastic, glass, pigment, acrylic, spray paint, fabric, beading, cord, 66 × 78 × 65 cm, 2023.

It's a color you see a lot on performers. I love that color; it has so much energy and life to it; it's like grass on steroids that kind of feeling. When I was making that show, my sister told me about the chartreuse dye developed in Victorian times; people became obsessed with the dye as it was brighter and bolder than any green that had come before. The thing was that the dye was made with arsenic, which meant that it ended up killing a hell of a lot of people. They had chartreuse wallpaper, carpets, clothes, curtains; it was everywhere. So chartreuse, the most vibrant green, a color associated with health and vivaciousness, is also a color of death by aesthetic desire.

MG

AD

Does color prompt other references in your work?

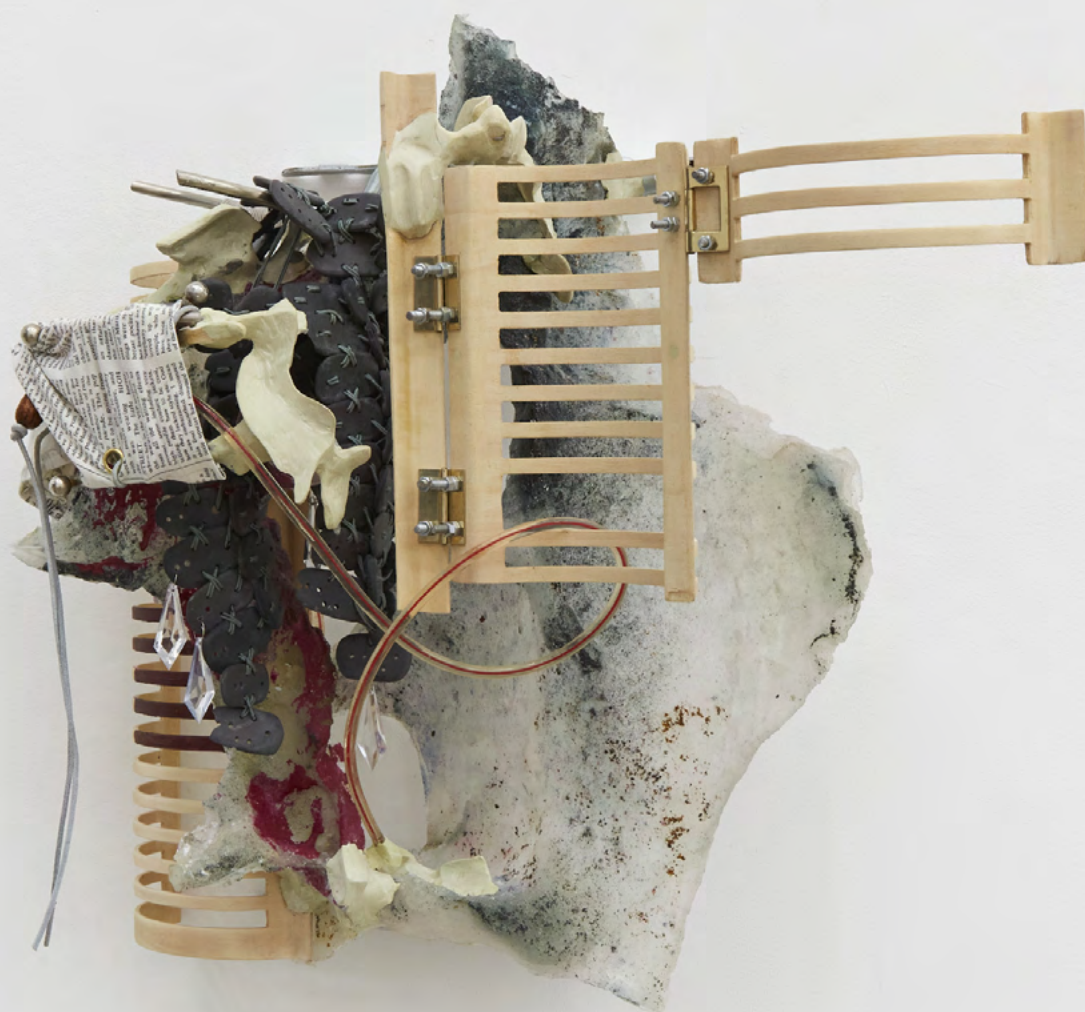
Yeah, for sure, every color I use has an association for me that gives it purpose; I don't use any shade of any color. I have favorites when it comes to combinations, but there's a reasoning behind it even if the work looks like it's just all been thrown together haphazardly in clashing colors. Lately, I've been using a lot of yellow and graphite, which I think the references are pretty obvious, but thinking about yellow tape and bees and those sorts of signals of danger. Or the blue I'm using a lot at the moment first came from thinking about the baby blue Nike tracksuit and what that signals.

MG

AD

The title of your solo show "young coin rite" at South Parade earlier this year referenced a 'coming of age' ritual in our current cultural and social situation. Could you speak a bit about the show?

At the beginning, I had no idea what I wanted to do for the show. I was also happy for it to be that way; it was my first solo show, so I wanted to give myself as much freedom as possible and to see what could come from that. I started to really think about the ways in which I could imitate or reflect on qualities in the lives of me and my



Revolving at Both Ends, Epoxy resin, epoxy clay, jesmonite, metal, wood, cord, fabric, found object, acrylic and pigment, 58 × 50 × 51 cm, 2022.

friends. Now getting to the stage in life of becoming a lot more concerned with figuring out what we want from life rather than living day to day. The sculptures grew personalities and started to express our experiences of desire, failure, instability, joy, and loneliness. I wanted the work to feel like an honest approach to encapsulating something very human and very real, not sure exactly what, but that isn't the point. It's about visually unfolding something psychological or emotional, something with no verbal rationality.



Protective Bae, Epoxy resin, epoxy clay, metal, fabric, glass, beading, wire, cord, thread, pigment, 65 × 42 × 25 cm, 2022.



Protective Bae (detail), Epoxy resin, epoxy clay, metal, fabric, glass, beading, wire, cord, thread, pigment, 65 × 42 × 25 cm, 2022.

Aidan Duffy, Figure Figure 2023
Courtesy of the artist.

PUBLICATION DIRECTION

Indira Béraud
indira@figurefigure.fr

INTERVIEW

Marco Galvan
marcogalvan@hotmail.it

VISUAL IDENTITY

Atelier Pierre Pierre
hello@pierre-pierre.com

www.figure-figure.fr

[Instagram](#)

[Facebook](#)

[Twitter](#)