

A MOUNT-RUSHMORE-RESEMBLING PIECE OF CHEDDAR CHEESE MELTED TO A PERFECTLY FLAT SQUARED SLICE

RICHARD JOHN JOES IN CONVERSATION WITH DANIEL JACOBY

Anybody invited to realize a project in 1646 is asked to engage in conversation with a previously unknown correspondent.

This conversation takes place via e-mail and stretches through the whole period during which the artists develop their initial idea into final results. 1646 invites the correspondent at the other end of this contact to figure his/her way through this actual process.

In trying to picture what result the artists' work is going to, such exchange can become a reflection on the amount of otherwise untraceable choices of the moment which make up to the artists' practice.

This issue is part of the exhibition by Daniel Jacoby *A Mount-Rushmore-Resembling Piece of Cheddar Cheese Melted to a Perfectly Flat Squared Slice*, December 7 2013 till January 12 2013 in 1646.

This artist
Daniel Jacoby

This correspondent
Richard John Joes

Concept and design
Nico Feragnoli

1646.

Boekhorststraat 125, 2512 cn, The Hague
The Netherlands
<http://1646.nl> - info@1646.nl

8 NOVEMBER: Richard John Jones [RJJ] to Daniel Jacoby [DJ]

I think it would be good to start with your first intentions, I was interested to know how the whole thing began! Maybe you could explain a little about what you were planning for the show. If this is too specific perhaps you could let me know a little about your approach. Bests,
Richard

10 NOV: DJ - RJJ

Hi Richard,

Well, it might sound silly put this way, but the starting point was towels - no specific one, just towels in general. Think of how many things you can do with them: lie on them, dry, cover or clean things, reserve seats, stop noxious gases from entering through the gap beneath a door, hold hot objects. Remember also *The Hitchhikers' Guide to the Galaxy* (a towel, it says, is about the most massively useful thing an interstellar hitchhiker can have) or the expression 'to throw the towel' Somehow I felt that many of the ideas that had been floating around my head lately were gathered in these shapeless pieces of fabric. And even if not, their versatility and customizability would allow me to expose almost any idea on them, which was itself something for me to think about!

It's not usually the case that I have this object-oriented approach in my practice, but since my interests had become more and more indefinite with time, I thought an object would free me from committing to sometimes limiting concepts or ideas. Of course, during the process, as it usually happens, other things displaced the towel to a secondary level and/or I found better ways to communicate the ideas I thought were contained within towels.

Do you have many towels at home?

11 NOV: RJJ - DJ

Yes I do have towels - I think everybody does! I completely understand where you're coming from actually, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* was spot-on with the importance of towels. Having hitchhiked (not around the galaxy per se) I can appreciate how a good towel can become a blanket for sleeping, something to lay on, shelter from the sun, basic clothing and of course something to dry yourself with (plus all the uses you had previously listed). I also like your analogy with the expression 'to throw in the towel', this comes from sport and I suppose it suggests that if you hold the towel you're ready to compete, ready to win - not having a towel, in this sense, not only makes you a bit of a loser but demonstrates that your not even IN the game... So I'm understanding your interest in towels as something that is to do with game playing or adventure, something utilitarian but also imbued with huge personal significance - with a towel you are ready for anything, the galaxy is ready for you. I also think that towels can become signifiers. In your last email I thought merely of plain towels but now I remember the embarrassment I have felt at having 'the wrong towel'. For example, towels can also be printed as flags, embroidered with classy insignia, heavily patterned or photo-printed. They can suggest your personality, your sexuality, your level of fitness, your readiness for competition or conversely your relaxed decadence.

So where have you taken this - and at this point where are you with the exhibition?

12 NOV: DJ - RJJ

Yes, exactly. Those countless personalities a towel can have is what led me to them in the first place. They are like blank canvases; even when they have a motive printed or embroidered on them it remains superficial, if you know what I mean. Of course, there's also a (less profound?) intention to explore the sculptural possibilities of towels. Every time you extend them or put them onto something, they will fold or wrinkle in a different way. Same thing would happen with almost any soft material, but somehow with towels that happens naturally: people leave them to dry on various furniture or objects. And that's what I'm trying to bring out with a series of pieces that will take a prominent space in the main room. They are called Towel Sculptures and are basically that: towels that have kept the shape of its underlying object - no longer there - because they were dipped in glue. Anyway, apart from those, there aren't many towels in my mental image of the show right now. And less than a month ahead of the opening I think I have a somewhat clear idea of which elements (call them pieces) will constitute the show. But instead of listing them all, maybe I can go one by one, starting from the one that has been in my head the longest: This is a sort of video-tutorial. It's a screen capture of a 3D modeling software in which it's taught how make an origami cube. So, it starts with a basic square plane which has folding marks on it. It gets folded (just as if it was paper) and a few steps further you finally see a perfect cube. The video ends with the process of rendering in which you see that the result is exactly the same that you would get with a quick Add Cube command. The piece is called How-To Go the Way Around the Way Around It (if that wordplay is correct in English...).

I think this piece, in relation to the stiff towels, also focuses on the process by which neutral objects (a piece of paper, a towel) acquire shape and become signifiers (a cube, an amorphous shape resembling something). But hopefully you'll see more connections to the pieces that I will explain later too.
Any comments so far?

22 NOV: RJJ - DJ

It has been a good ten days since we last exchanged mails - apologies for my silence.
I wanted to find a picture which I took that I was reminded of by your last email but I think it is lost to broken hard drives of previous computers :(
I think you have to give me some more info - I understand giving shape to the objects no longer there and I'm keeping up with the neutrality/symbolic flexibility of towels, but I'm a little more confused about your video. So you are trying to show a long way and a short way of rendering the cube, when in the end both are virtual - but then how am I to understand your towels with the information about this new piece?
I'm making an analogy in my mind of the towels wrapping themselves around the objects, then just being rendered as they are - like how I imagine the video? I like this relationship with virtuality but perhaps you could tell me more about that - wrapped, indicative of the object, covered, draped, plastinated... and... virtual.
Wow - an email conversation with work I can't see and an artists I barely know - maybe this is also the long way around the short way around...?!
Just a thought - I'm enjoying these email moments.

22 NOV: DJ - RJJ

How you doing, Richard?
Think of those two works I just explained as small pieces of a large puzzle: with just two of them, any clear connection

we try to guess is likely to sound far-fetched or even pre-tentious. The problem is that as time goes by, I can't help but change the rest of the pieces, so you will probably never be able to put together the whole puzzle. :/ At least until the opening.

Let me try a more macro-to-micro approach to give you a grasp of the exhibition in its totality. Actually this is something I just came up with this morning. Remember 1646 has an entrance hall and then (after you go past the office) a larger exhibition room? Well, all the physical pieces will be situated in the large room, while in the entrance there will be no object but rather a series of speakers with different text-rich audio tracks. The idea is to sort of mirror the physical installation onto the audible side - or the other way around, if you prefer. The things and their hypertext will be intentionally put apart, and it's in this gap where I think most of the magic happens. Pretty much like I did in Platypus Logic (<http://danieljacoby.com/z/platypus-logic/>) where I handed every visitor a sort of audio-guide headset to listen to during their walk around the installation. This time, however, it has gotten more complex, since it's not just one linear text, but a series of audios that correspond to a series of physical works. Besides, there's a temporal gap between the reception of each of these fragments.

And before finishing, let me leave you with another piece description: This is a photograph of a quite sculptural and geometrical form modelled with fresh smashed potatoes. Below, on the floor, there's a creased sheet of small white bathroom tiles (you know, nowadays tiles don't come all loose, but in compact sheets to speed up the precise placement of them). This piece takes the elaborated title: Modeling Lessons: You Teach Me Tabasaran, I'll Teach You Esperanto. It mixes the idea of learning process - also present in the video tutorial - with an exchange of rather exotic knowledges - Tabasaran, a language spoken in the Russian Republic of Dagestan, known to be one of the most complex languages in the world due its abundance of cases, and Esperanto, the most widely spoken constructed, and therefore simple, language.

---PS:

One of the shapes modelled with smashed potatoes is a symbol that I have arbitrarily chosen and decided to regularly feature it in my future works. It's a symbol that works as opposed to regular symbols: it's not the 'graphicalisation' of a concept but rather the conceptualisation of a graphic - a container for meaning, a symbol to be nourished by the context its exhibited in.
Too bad about the loss of that image file of yours, but maybe you can describe it for me (so I'm not the only one struggling to write images! :P)

25 NOV: DJ - RJJ

I was speaking to my friend Jo! yesterday night and at some point he started telling: 'Once when I was in Canada (cause he's from Canada), I looked to the sky and there was this square cloud, it was just amazing!' I think just before we were speaking about rainbows for some reason. But anyway, this idea of the square cloud... like suddenly nature refuses to fulfil your expectations of chaos.
Have a good Sunday!

3 DEC: RJJ - DJ

And you know what? I did have a great Sunday!
This made me think about my favourite vegetable - the Romanesco Broccoli. I always considered it to be more like cauliflower - I would be interested to know how it is called in other languages actually?
But this aside - only days to go until the opening how are things going - you have your video, the towels? Should I now expect to see square clouds? Oh, and my allusion with

the Romanesco in different languages was a cue to begin to talk about the use of language, titling in your work. It seems to me that this is important and hasn't come up over emails yet!



4 DEC: DJ - RJJ

The Romanesco Broccoli is indeed a curious vegetable. Funny that you brought that up, because not so long ago Tamara used it in a piece: she wrote a recipe to cook these vegetables. Actually, she did that as part of a sort of multi-format exquisite corpse, in response to a photograph of a broccoli-resembling object. And talking about food and recipes, there's also a bit of that in the exhibition. Remember the photograph with the smashed potatoes used to model small geometrical shapes? Well, there's been some changes to that. Basically I decided to get the table into the exhibition space and exhibit the whole cooking/modelling scenario. I still don't know how exactly it's going to look like; I guess I just have to put my 'hands on the dough' (as goes the Spanish expression for getting caught in the act).

It's true that there's also an interest in language in this project and I would say it's quite a recurrent subject in my practice. I even tried to invent my own alphabet while I was doing the residency in Casino Luxembourg (of course it was a tremendous failure!). But this time I'm trying to focus in the use of stylistic devices and expressions. There's one expression in particular that has been in my head for over a year now: 'comparar papas y camotes' (literally 'to compare potatoes and sweet potatoes', or the equivalent to 'to compare apples and pears' in Peru). Somehow it brings together two ideas I've been working with lately: the curiosity for finding connections between far-fetched ideas that should actually not be 'compared' and this idea of the neutral object (the potato) that, like towels, only gains its meaning from the context and the multiple uses it has.

I started collecting similar expressions and equivalent expressions in foreign languages. The two things that are compared vary on each different part of the world (some I find hilarious, like 'grandmothers and machines guns'). The list of compared words I collected is so heterogeneous that you can even make a story just with those words. I wanted to include this in the project very badly, but it wasn't until last week that I came up with a solution. I thought I could make a memory game in which the corresponding tiles, instead of being two identical things, would be the two similar things you're not supposed to compare as equals. But that seemed a bit too direct, so I've decided to make it a bit more open. Take a look at the front window of 1646 when you come on Friday. ;) Then there's something I'm not going to show this time, but I think it's worth mentioning. A few months ago I

started writing a series of phrases that are supposed to be some sort of anti-clever slogans. You know the typical phrases people get stamped on T-shirts?

Catchy phrases that seem to make the person wearing them smarter. Well, I wanted to twist this idea by writing very simple and even silly sentences where the stylistic device was obvious, but the message not. 'Kant Can't Camp' was the first in the series. The repetition of similar sounds makes it notoriously sticky, but the meaning is a bit obscure, if not inexistent. By the way, did you know that your name contains what is called an alliteration. :) Unfortunately there's nothing exciting in 'Broccoli Romanesco', the Spanish name of those fractal vegetables. I looked up the word in other languages in search of something, but apparently it's quite a universal word. The funny thing is that when I clicked on the 'Simple English' link in Wikipedia it took me directly to the page for Cauliflower. I guess you're right that it's actually more like cauliflower than it is to broccoli.

4 DEC: RJJ - DJ

I wondered if I could make a request to see a picture of your library or book collection - if you are interested in doing this I can share mine too but I think you should go first!

4 DEC: DJ - RJJ

Well, my library is now unfortunately inside boxes... But I can offer this image in return:



Those are not my books (they are the books from a public library in Barcelona), but I took care of the sorting in 2008. :) Now I'm curious: since you asked me to send a picture, were you actually interested in the titles or in the way they look? Somehow the question of form vs. content appears to be relevant even when we're not talking about the exhibition. In any case, looking forward to see your books (list or picture)!

5 DEC: RJJ - DJ

Thanks for that - I will look at that front window in a new light.

I think you are being too hasty in writing off how exciting the Romanesco could be, for example, after following up with Tamara Kuselman I found out that it is actually a hybrid between broccoli and cauliflower. I thought there was some resonance with this with the Spanish phrase you liked 'to compare potatoes and sweet potatoes' (what's the special difference here) which in English is equivalent to 'apples and oranges' or my favourite phrase although maybe with a slightly different use is to describe complete difference as like 'chalk and cheese'. I think that the sweet potato is a great example of a limit of language though! In dutch the word for potato is derived from the word for apple with some additional context 'aardappel', much like

in french 'pomme de terre', therefore the sweet potato become a sweet apple of the earth... the appel is already sweet so I like how that one developed... hmmm maybe I'm getting off the topic.

Anyway, as for my request for a picture of your library it was a spur of the moment thing, mostly because how you have been working with language and also because I just, at the moment of writing the email, found an image of Terre Thaemlitz's library shelf (of which I am a huge fan) and it was quite an epiphany to see the titles that she had! At the moment my books are also largely in boxes but some of them I have here so a picture is attached... also of the boxes :-)

How's things going in the space now - only days away from the exhibition?



6 DEC: DJ - RJJ

Today we had a long but very productive day. The exhibition is almost ready now and I think it will be pretty good tomorrow with a few last tweaks. Another funny thing about comparing potatoes and sweet potatoes is that in its original language of the expression (Spanish) 'papas' and 'camotes' don't sound alike nor share the same etymology. But indeed they are similar tubercules. Chalk and cheese is also

featured in the exhibition; that's a nice one... also an alliteration by the way! And you're right, in some languages these expressions - even though they use the same structure, to compare A and B - have different approaches: some point at how two similar things are actually not the same while others try to emphasize how extremely different two things are. In a way, like seeing the glass have empty or have full. Oh, I could talk about words and expressions for hours...

Thanks for the picture with your books. I probably haven't read any of those, but I'm just such a lazy reader. I propose a book exchange, what do you think? Do you have any title in mind that would make sense around the exhibition? Well, need to rest for tomorrow. Looking forward to carry on with the conversation at 1646. :)

See you there,
D

6 DEC: RJJ - DJ

Great to hear that its getting there and I'm so excited to come and see the exhibition and can't wait to see the chalk and cheese reference! I'm completely up for a book exchange although I'm really happy the way you responded - I haven't read a fair few of the books that I have but I don't think that is what library's are really all about and I get the sense that you are working along the same lines - lazy reader but active collector!

Hope your glass is for ever half FULL, you alliteratively named friend,
Richard John Jones
