

P. S. 1/MOMA Greater New York 2005 Catalog Essay

Bethany Bristow's work occupies a juncture between sculpture, photography, and performance. The artist began using glass, her chosen medium about 15 years ago, using it in combination with materials that have a direct opposition to its physical qualities. Her source matter consists of domestic bottles and jars, objects of mundane origin that she melts down and transforms in her studio. Then, in a series of urban interventions, she places the resulting sculptures directly in the world: on sidewalks, city piers, and box-truck taillights. Once satisfied with the placement of the work, she photographs it and walks away, leaving it to the vagaries of city life. Will it be run over, claimed by someone who has received an email from the artist, or taken by a passerby? Only the photographs will remain to document the work's existence. Bristow developed this methodology after her concerns about the traditional commercial structure of the gallery system compelled her to investigate alternate means of displaying her creative output, leading her to use the city as her gallery space, with the world as her audience.

In the street, Bristow's amoebic forms suggest beautiful escapees from some mysterious laboratory. Jauntily adorned with feathers in cheerful tones of pink, yellow, and turquoise, on closer inspection they seem to reveal a much grimmer secret: they ooze a clear viscous goo onto the sidewalk, a fluid that surely was essential to their survival. It runs down the concrete and is smeared across several lanes of busy traffic. Is this the site of an avian experiment gone terribly wrong? The nest of some unseen feathered alien? Here the normally impermeable and impervious surface of glass takes on a fragile, biomorphic quality. It is a vessel that has changed state, and in the process has failed to contain its contents, its lifeblood spilled for all the world to see.

Sarah Suzuki