

Julie L. Belcove, "The Agitator," *DuJour*, Fall 2015, p 116.

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Once Walead Beshty had gained traction with his conceptual, often photography-related art, he became intrigued with the furnishings of galleries showing his work in Los Angeles and London—with unexpected results. He suggested replacing all the galleries' desks with sheets of polished copper, instructing staff to go about their business as usual. "The design of the gallery affects how people understand the work," says Beshty, 39, based in Los Angeles. Over time, the staffers' phone calls, note-taking and coffee cups left marks on the shiny "Copper Surrogates," which Beshty then hung on the galleries' walls like paintings.

Much of Beshty's work hinges on such social and commercial interactions. In his "FedEx" pieces, shatter-proof glass cubes are displayed with the standard cardboard boxes in which they must be shipped, by Federal Express, each time they're transported. Viewers might be drawn to the off-kilter Minimalism of the cracked and battered cubes, but in Beshty's eyes, "the work really is only the airway bills. It's an agreement between a receiver and a sender. It talks about possession."

The son of a Libyan father and an American mother, Beshty spent much of his youth in what he calls the "alienating suburban sameness" of Pennsylvania. "Why do things look the way they do?" became a constant question, he says. A mediocre student, he discovered the dark room in high school and became fascinated with how photographs are made—a curiosity that can be ascertained in his "Photograms." Some of his latest, made by exposing curled photographic paper to light, will be shown at Petzel Gallery in New York beginning November 19.

After graduating from Bard, he spent a year writing for *Artforum*, then entered Yale's vaunted MFA program. He found the school lacking. "It's pretty anti-intellectual; it's kind of conservative," says Beshty, who has a somewhat austere manner. But he found mentors in artists Roni Horn, Philip-Lorca diCorcia and Catherine Opie, the last



An Artist's POV Clockwise from top, Beshty in his L.A. studio; color and chemistry test strips; *Copper Surrogate* (60" x 120" 48 ounce C71000 Copper Alloy, 90° Bend, 120" Bisection/10 Sections: ...), 2015, copper sculpture.

The Agitator

Known for his visually dynamic sculptures and photographic works, L.A. artist Walead Beshty draws inspiration from chance and the ghostly passage of objects through the material world

WRITTEN BY JULIE L. BELCOVE PHOTOGRAPHED BY ROB KULISEK

of whom helped lure him to L.A., which he calls a gentler city than New York.

His star on the rise, Beshty has lately kept up a punishing schedule, including a recent two-month stint in a Guadalajara ceramics factory to make his contribution to the Venice Biennale: cacophonous sculptures melded from debris left by past ceramics jobs and casts of the workers' and his own hands, installed alongside collages fluttering from a pole that he fashioned from the Mexican tabloid newspapers. The works could be said to be "about" many things: labor, detritus, economic imperialism, ephemerality. But Beshty cautions against society's tendency to put artists on pedestals. "Just because I'm an artist doesn't mean that when I do something aesthetic it's automatically more special." ■

THE FULL TITLE OF WALEAD BESHTY'S A PARTIAL DISASSEMBLING IS SO LONG, IT CAN'T FIT IN THE 140-CHARACTER LIMIT OF A TWEET.

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