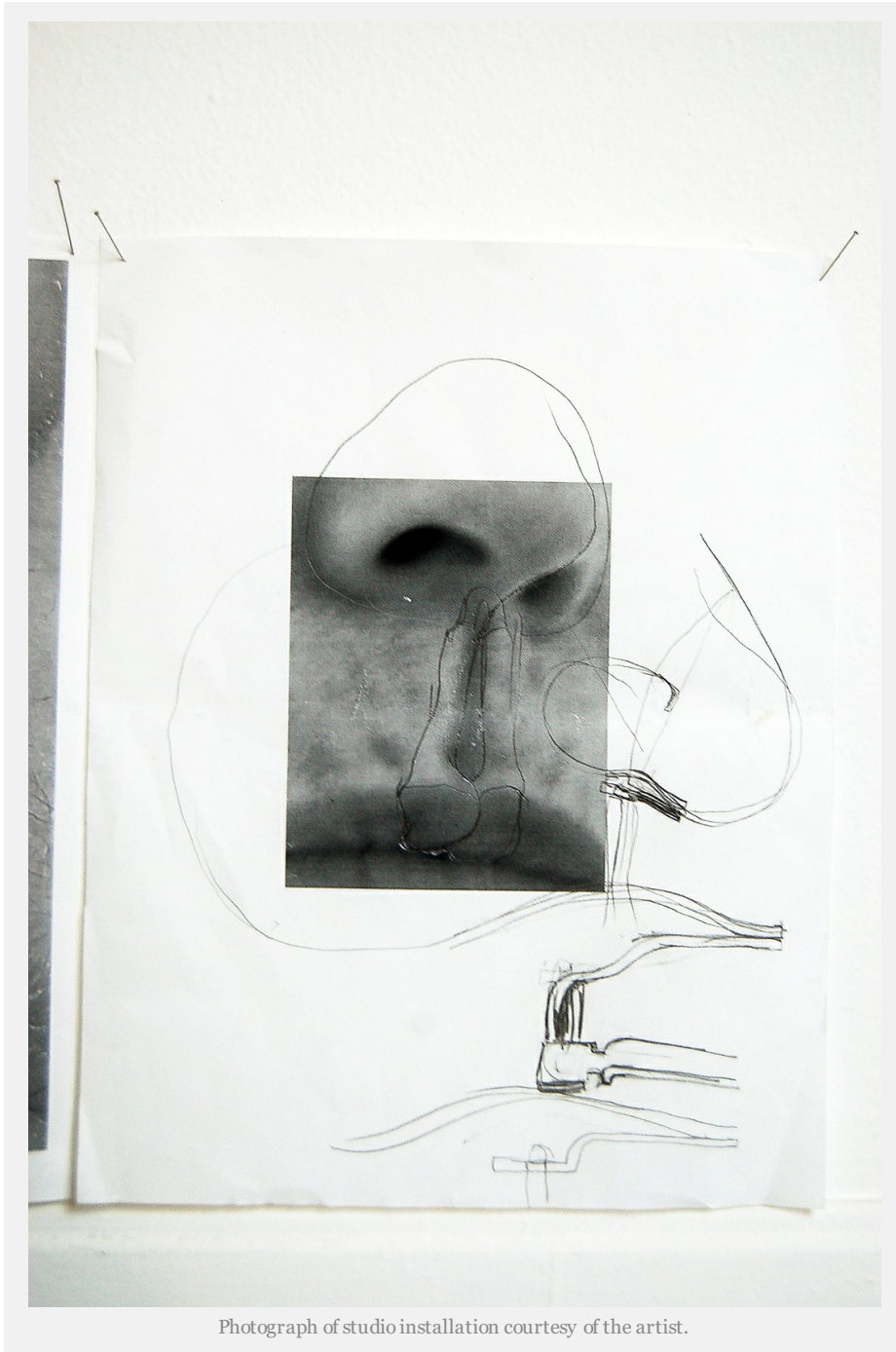


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Rebecca Ripple on 'Licking Yellow Fog' and other things



Photograph of studio installation courtesy of the artist.

Geoff Tuck:

Rebecca! Such a coincidence you email me tonight. I've been working on a message to you today, and I just shut down my pc with it in draft. What the heck – I'll begin again here and now:

Will you tell me about the print or drawing of the bridge of a nose that was posted on the wall of your studio? As an organic shape, how does it relate to your bubble forms, which I understand to be building blocks for the work.

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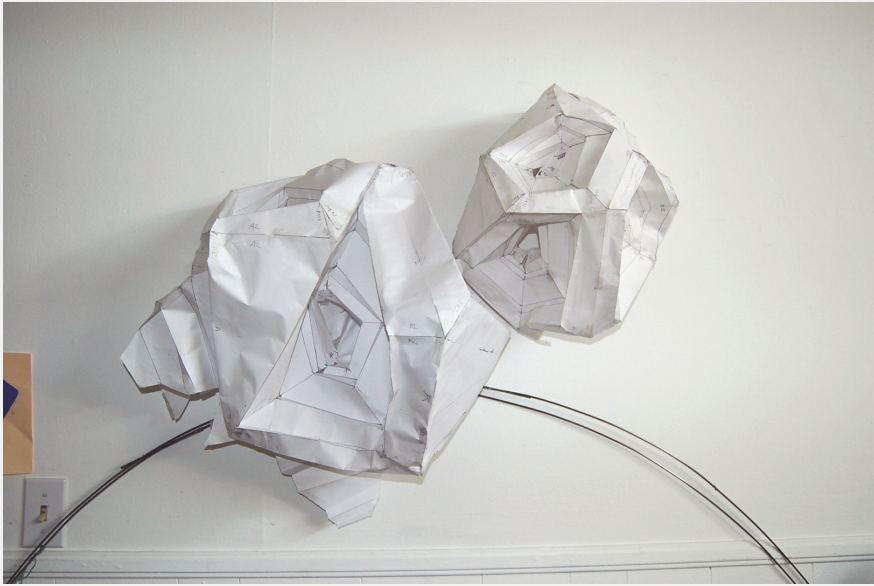
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Photograph of studio installation courtesy of the artist.

Rebecca:

Geoff – I was kicking myself for not writing notes during our visit because I couldn't remember specifics of what you said, only a feeling. But now I understand that your words melted over me and are not facts that can be conjured up as points of reference– they are liquid. I think as I am writing that such may be my desire for the tape I use in my work. I want it to meld things together—to be emotional glue of sorts. I hope is this true...I think it is.

They (the drawing of a nose and the cellular structures) are separate entities. They were up on the wall for 2 different works. I often hang parts of things, thought sketches and models around my studio. When I am fully engaged the information collides and I have surprises or it helps layer my understanding of work. I usually have dozens of drawings up on my walls. Rarely are works thought through from the beginning. That's why I like having already worked-out parts to play with. This process helps me to go beyond an internal control mechanism, which obsesses and repeats. The fragmentation allows for collision and surprise. I don't work with narratives or themes. I try to corral a breadth of things (concepts, feelings, cultural references—both personal and collective, materials, systems of organization) within a container. I think that is why I often default to a formal container to find cohesiveness. Maybe that's why I feel the *Medusa of Suburbia's* looseness/ formlessness lost a tension I thought it needed. Writing this now makes me question my need for formal cohesiveness—I desired it so strongly. I am skeptical of my desire for formal expression and its familiarity; yet I am afraid of the discomfort of not having formal tension. Not sure.

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Rebecca Ripple
Jesus is a Blackhead
2012
acrylic, aluminum, vinyl, tape
96 by 32 by 34 inches
Image courtesy of the artist and Gallery KM

But back to the image you referred to, at least I think it is the one you mean, it is the nose and lip area. The lip is the part I am interested in. I was trying to isolate a form that would hang under the nose like 'truck nuts.' (You may have not realized that the *Jesus is a Black Head* form is a nose. I think we talked about it.) I wanted the rubber hanging forms to give verticality to the piece and to keep it from being a plastic model for anatomy lessons. It wasn't very important to me that you saw the piece as a nose because the form was decided a long time after the blackheads as a presentation hanger of sorts. The way I tend to work is by one thing causing another thought and it goes down a road often far from where I began. I am still interested in the form so it may work its way in somewhere else sometime.



Rebecca Ripple
Medusa of Suburbia (detail showing cellular forms)
2012
plastic, aluminum, wood, tape, hair, florescent light
60 by 30 by 36 inches
Image courtesy of the artist and Gallery KM



Rebecca Ripple,
lang(uage)
(detail)
2009
wood table, bobbin lace, plaster, paint, acrylic, sculpt-a-mold, graphite
42 by 70 by 48 inches

The paper blobs are not the cellular structures I often use, but I do think of them similarly as building blocks. The structures I often use (e.g. the mirrored mylar *Medusa* body, the lace in *language*], the wire structures of *fid*) are actually the mapping of the space between cells. I like this because it makes concrete the dynamic or connection between forms, a *dialogue* and not the thing unto itself; this makes the *Medusa* body a verb of sorts. The forms on the wall are actually models for mathematically feasible structures, but I don't plan them out so the units falls short of enclosure. They are structure only— an abstract entity that holds color. I am intending them to be rubber or vinyl blobs impregnated with color. I want the color to be so saturated that the container can barely hold it. I think of them as nuggets of color; fruit loops in milk; saturated forms that you contemplate as a kid. For me the color will be the “thingness” and the container/ forms will be a way for it to be held. I think of them as the colors of an intense sunset—red, orange, blue, violet. I want them up above eye level and right now I think of them slumped on a cardboard wall, a horizon line. So the photocopy and the blobs you saw on the wall are very far from where I envision them going. It is possible they may work their way together. I am open to that.

Geoff:

Your use of cellophane tape in the show reminds me that transparency is very important in your work; but this does not seem to be transparency as revealing of process, or material, or even really to see through, but rather transparency as an effect, perhaps for its own sake, as though “transparent” was an object. The body or neck portion of *Medusa* is an example of this. Perhaps like with the cap we talked about as being a skin, you also wish your skins to be palpable, yet visually negligible and only partially registering as matter?

Rebecca:

Yes! I love the way you think. Okay – well, the tape was an obsessive need to have enough of it that it no longer reads as just tape, but like T.S.Elliot's yellow fog—it is an entity beyond itself, yet still itself. He anthropomorphizes the fog so it isn't unfamiliar, but it isn't specifically understood. In the *Fashion System* Barthes talks about how the physical clothing is imbued with meaning through the text and image—through the text it is given an intangible aura—something beyond the physical garment, and not what the image shows. I want my work to bring you to a place between what is presented, and if I need to introduce text to take you there, I do. I am interested in how meaning is contingent. I think it is basic semiotics, but it is a way for me to get at a feeling, a state, or an aura.



Rebecca Ripple
belt
2012
leather, tape, linoleum, acrylic
6 by 6 by 4 inches
Image courtesy of the artist and Gallery KM



Rebecca Ripple
belt (alternate view)
2012
leather, tape, linoleum, acrylic
6 by 6 by 4 inches
Image courtesy of the artist and Gallery KM

Geoff:

The tape in the piece “*belt*” registers bodily, as maybe saliva or pubic hair. Whatever it might be it looks private and not actually disgusting, but a little gross. *Jesus is a Blackhead*, on the other hand, is quite disgusting (ugh, blackheads). What does it mean to use such a likeness in this way?

Rebecca:

It is important that it is visceral so as to take you out of intellect and into gut. I am interested in how systems of belief such as Catholicism, capitalism, suburbia, or power of any sort can permeate our every thought and behavior. Pores are basic physical building blocks and Jesus is a psychological, intellectual, moral one. Black heads are part of us and other simultaneously. (Freud’s mirror stage...I think.) They are necessary and problematic.

Geoff:

The figure of Christ has cultural importance in a way none of the rest of your references quite manages. The statement contained in the piece seems provocative beyond other works in the show. Why?

Rebecca:

The *Medusa of Suburbia* or *Suburban Medusa* or *S&M*, I think works similarly to *Jesus is a Black Head*, but fewer people got my drift. To answer the question, “Why?” is tough. They were

the last two works conceived of for the KM show. They came to me as language and a basic sketch. I struggled with the form for the language. For instance in *JBH*, I thought first of 'god in my pores' and the inescapability of my early indoctrinations. So I saw a single pore with a Jesus in it. Then I thought of pores themselves. The Jesus face is a black dot within the pore. I love that it refers also to Jesus as black or Arab and we made him in our white European likeness. In *Medusa of Suburbia* and *Jesus is a Black Head* I wanted the street to be palpable while you were experiencing an interiority.



Rebecca Ripple
Medusa of Suburbia
2012
plastic, aluminum, wood, tape, hair, fluorescent light
60 by 30 by 36 inches
Image courtesy of the artist and Gallery KM

Geoff:

In another place, I think in the *Medusa* piece, a wide strip of tapes attaches to the wall. This tape could be structural or aesthetic or both, but the gesture there was so slight that I wonder about its use.

Rebecca:

I was frantically trying to get *Medusa* to stand upright. It was minutes before the opening. So the use of tape was structural, but I knew that piece was gratuitous and yet I left it. I wanted to keep it *because it is action without rationality, formal continuity, conceptual need, etc.* It was a place that happened through frenetic effort and just off from necessity...it allows for it to keep going—to not be a closed moment.



During our studio conversation, Rebecca Ripple spoke about her interest in, and desire for Baroque spaces, for the grandiose and twisted architectures of exaggerated emotion, heightened physicality, and totally base instincts. In her art, she uses materials that speak more of the banal suburban life most of us lead (tape, linoleum, fluorescent lighting) yet she coaxes these into twisted relationships and truly weird structures – as if one of the grosser of the Catholic saints had grown up ‘nice’ on Long Island.

*The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,
Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,
Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,
And seeing that it was a soft October night,
Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.*

-from *The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock*, by T.S. Eliot

Rebecca Ripple's exhibition *Licking Yellow Fog* was presented by Gallery KM, from November 3 to December 8, 2012. The preceding is an email conversation resulting from a studio visit with the artist in early January.



Rebecca Ripple,
lang[uage]
2009
wood table, bobbin lace, plaster, paint, acrylic, sculpt-a-mold, graphite
42 by 70 by 48 inches
Image courtesy of the artist and Gallery KM

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