



Walead Beshty: White Shadows

11.19.19 \\\ Posted by David Behringer



A Partial Disassembling of an Invention Without a Future: Helter-Skelter and Random Notes in Which the Pulleys and Cogwheels Are Lying Around at Random All Over the Workbench (9 October 2013–8 October 2014)

Artist Walead Beshty produced over 11,000 blue cyanotypes of EVERY object that passed through his studio over the course of a year. Thirty-eight percent of them (a mere 5,120 pieces) are currently on view at the Petzel Gallery in New York in a massive 3-room exhibition titled: "Abstract of A Partial Disassembling of an Invention Without a Future: Helter-Skelter and Random Notes in Which the Pulleys and Cogwheels Are Lying Around at Random All Over the Workbench".

Petzel

David Behringer, "Walead Beshty: White Shadows," *Design Milk*, November 19, 2019.



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A Partial Disassembling of an Invention Without a Future: Helter-Skelter and Random Notes in Which the Pulleys and Cogwheels Are Lying Around at Random All Over the Workbench (detail)

A "Cyanotype" is an early photographic printing process. In modern times the process can be found under the name "sun print" and most commonly used by elementary school classes to make white silhouettes of leaves. You can buy one of those kits here on Amazon (not sponsored). Essentially, the traditional store-

bought kit contains paper that is coated with a UV-sensitive chemical that turns blue when it's exposed to sunlight*. Place a leaf on the paper, expose it to sunlight, and create a permanent white shadow of that leaf.

Petzel

David Behringer, “Walead Beshty: White Shadows,” *Design Milk*, November 19, 2019.

But Walead Beshty is *NOT* using pre-treated paper from Amazon. Instead he is creating his own UV-sensitive surfaces using the chemical applied to any and every piece of paper that passed through his studio over the course of a year – every receipt, FedEx slip, personal letter, hand-written check, or cardboard box – are all transformed into objects that can capture white shadows when exposed to the sun. And rather than capturing leaves or twigs, Beshty instead uses the shadows of EVERY non-paper object that passed through his studio in that same time – scissors, pens, water bottles, a ladder (!!!), push-pins, and more. In short: This artwork contains two things on every page – the shadow of EVERY OBJECT from his studio captured ON every piece of paper that entered his studio over a year.



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This is the second exhibition of the piece since it was created. The original location/exhibition ALSO couldn't fit all 11,558 pieces – as mentioned above, THIS current exhibition is only 38% of the total produced – which is CRAZY to consider when you stand surrounded by this overwhelming mass. So to choose WHICH works are displayed and where they should be placed, Beshty only considered the size and shape of each potential piece.

Petzel

David Behringer, "Walead Beshty: White Shadows," *Design Milk*, November 19, 2019.

He spent 12 days in the gallery with a team, choosing, sorting, and arranging the works to fit the walls PERFECTLY. This is a 3-room, floor-to-ceiling jigsaw puzzle; one of the most meticulous and complex "hangings" of any exhibition I've ever seen.



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Also on display are several massive books – each measuring nearly 28 by 20 inches when closed! Because no gallery space can fit the 11,000+ objects (so far), Beshty created a volumed catalog that contains photographs of EVERY print. Each cyanotype was photographed front and back and printed at 1:2 scale. One side of the page has the “front” of the work and the other side of the page has the “back” of the work (I wish all art books worked like this so I could see the back side of every famous work of art). The gallery contains only 7 volumes of these books. The full project requires 59 books to see it all!!!



Prologue to A Partial Disassembling of an Invention Without a Future: Helter-Skelter and Random Notes in Which the Pulleys and Cogwheels are Lying Around at Random All Over the Workbench (1 August–8 October 2013)

The newest work in the exhibition – and my personal favorite thing in the neighborhood – are the framed newspaper pages that hang in the front of the gallery. To immortalize the days he spent installing the work, Beshty purchased a newspaper every day during the process. They hang on the wall in chronological order, marking all 12 days of installation.

Petzel

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Walead Beshty, Installation at Petzel, NYC

Each newspaper is cut and rotated in a pre-determined pattern of circles. Where small gaps appear between the cuts, Beshty has applied gold leaf – a reference to the Japanese technique of Kintsugi, that repairs broken ceramics with gold.



Blind Collage (Three 180o Rotations, The New York Times, Wednesday, October 15, 2019)

Blind Collage (Three 180o Rotations, The New York Times, Wednesday, October 18, 2019)

Blind Collage (Three 180o Rotations, The New York Times, Wednesday, October 23, 2019)

Blind Collage (Three 180o Rotations, The New York Times, Thursday, October 17, 2019)

Petzel

David Behringer, "Walead Beshty: White Shadows," *Design Milk*, November 19, 2019.

Walead Beshty sets up a scenario with various rules and then lets "life" happen within those restrictions. The surprise is just how beautiful those results are, and how they preeminently change the way you see the "real world" – whether it's a FedEx receipt, the shadow of a ladder, or the front page of the *New York Times*.



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What: Walead Beshty "Abstract of A Partial Disassembling of an Invention Without a Future: Helter-Skelter and Random Notes in Which the Pulleys and Cogwheels Are Lying Around at Random All Over the Workbench"

Where: Petzel, 456 W 18th Street, New York, NY

When: October 24 – December 14, 2019

All images courtesy of the artist and Petzel, New York. Photographed by Thomas Mueller.

**My description of a cyanotype is a bit oversimplified. I purchased [that kit](#) on Amazon and have been playing with it for the last 3 days. In fact, the store-bought sheets are a light baby-blue when removed from the black light-blocking envelope. You place a leaf on a page before QUICKLY setting it out in the sun and waiting a recommended 2 minutes (I found best results by waiting 10 minutes since the November sun is low in the sky right now). The parts of the paper that are exposed to sunlight turn a deep denim blue before you run the sheet under water to halt the process and reveal the pure white shadow of the leaf.*

<https://design-milk.com/walead-beshty-white-shadows/>