

# MOUSSE

**Rochelle Goldberg “The plastic thirsty” at SculptureCenter, New York  
By Elena Tavecchia— March 19, 2016**



Rochelle Goldberg interviewed by Elena Tavecchia

Elena Tavecchia: What is the starting point of your exhibition “The Plastic Thirsty”?

Rochelle Goldberg: The plastic thirsty, as a condition, articulates the simultaneous occurrence of fluidity and dehydration in the industrial lubricant, which services the machine by enabling the components to work together-forever-apart. Consider the teeth of the gear in motion—the industrial lubricant is in between all points of contact so that they never actually touch. Throughout the exhibition this logic infects the motifs in play and calls into question modes of connectivity that equally transmit a loss of contact or a rupturing of terms. The initial backstory is a conversation with a severed fish head that is thirsty for a body of water. The body of water is not the fish’s actual body, but the body that it needs, and the body that we can’t provide for it. This conundrum unravels a complex set of relations that can no longer congeal as replacement flesh for the fish’s ghosted form.

ET: Chia seeds are a constant presence in your work, each time encountering different settings or partially controlled transformations.

RG: Throughout my intimate acquaintance with this species of seed I have become very aware of how thirsty it is, accumulating its own reserve of water in advance of sprouting. The seed in this stage signals its facility for hosting an adjacent or tangential growth that surprises our expectation of its going green potential. So a different kind of growth is being considered here; the seeds have been laced with a steel fiber and agitated into a phase of sustained oxidation. The moisture barrier of the seed will grow rust. This oxidation continues the ephemeral transformative aspect I have been exploring. The chia seeds become a host for a parasitic flourish that poisons its own capacity for reproduction.

ET: What is nature for you?

RG: Questions around nature tend

to reveal themselves in a tangle of broad terms. Here I connect with it through the intersection of animate and inanimate material systems—a confusing of what is alive or not. Any time we engage with a thing that can express vitality but is not human, it somehow becomes nature. I want to pursue a perversion of organicity and categories of species. Where does the intersection of animate or inanimate become unclear? I am a living corpse, and instances of life that are hosted by an alternate living organism are less easy to pin down.

ET: I noticed you have a recurring tendency towards a rhizomatic horizontal display, counterbalanced with vertical frames in dialogue with the architecture of the space.

RG: The physical body is redundantly framed by an architectural display that consistently intersects horizontal grounds with vertical barriers. Disorienting the structural language of our built environment is a tactic to destabilize it. And perhaps invites a limb to trespass.

Part of my work dialogues interiority with exteriority, and uses instances of tangles, coils, spills and leaks to disembowel the contour appearing in between an inside that also pushes out. In capping the SculptureCenter's arched tunnel with the face of a steam locomotive, the entire length of passage is rendered an interiority of a train spilling itself out.

ET: Severed body parts surface from the ground, or, in the past, they have been hinted at through abject forms that resemble empty toilet seats: is the human body evoked through its absence?

RG: The severed parts stand in for what we are willing to accept in place of a body or a species of being. The part in place of the whole also occurs as a linguistic device, metonymy, which informs the structure of how this asymmetry of contents occurs. "All hands on deck" for instance is redeployed in this piece as "Hands replace the deck". The severed relations of hands in place of the body is really violent; it disregards the specificity in favor of an anonymous. Here the hands work against their reduction, grabbing hold of, or getting caught in the passage of fiber-fluid. Where reach might seem to escape or increasingly lay wasted; the seed illuminated at the end of each fiber seems to ignite an idea of re-emergence. The human agent is implicated in terms of an absence. This is necessary to provoke the projection of potential presence, action, and viability.

ET: How is the texture of the ceramic determined?

RG: Refractive surfaces reveal themselves through distance and always appear as far away. This feeling of surface cancels out any evidence of intimacy or the mode in which the piece was made. All the ceramic works have the markings of fingerprints to perform contact. I find it interesting that the indentation on the surface of the ceramic material is the registration of the raw ceramic moving away from you while you are in the act of touching it. What model of contact or interaction in occurrence is this? The surface of the raw ceramic will continue to recede until you remove touch from it. The fingerprint arrives at the termination of this contact. Cold refractive glaze is an additional canceling out of trace, so that this trace of contact continues its illusory presence and dissuades the reality out of reach.

ET: "You will commit a crime"?

RG: Everyone is implicated.