

Beta-Real: The Materiality of Loss

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“Beta-Real: The Materiality of Loss” aims to expose the Real as the Beta-Real; fixed memory, fixed identity and fixed history as nothing more than traces of memories, identities and histories, each stable only for a fleeting moment. The Beta-Real names a “beta version” still in development, always already shifting, always becoming, and not yet ready for release. The Beta-Real encourages us to linger there, in the in-between: between the tangible and the intangible, between what remains and what is left behind, between what is remembered and what is forgotten, between what is cast and the mold from which it is cast.

Our design research project begins from this notion of becoming in order to transform and disrupt norm-building around collective histories, memories, and heritage, where the meaning of the supposedly authentic, solid, and fixed past begins to unravel and reveal its temporal nature. Through an elective architecture seminar, we used an iterative process of slipcasting ceramics as our methodology to explore an architecture of becoming which unsettles rather than reifying, stabilizing, or fixing reality, memories and heritage. Typically, the slipcasting process—a technique commonly used in the mass production of ceramics—is use to make multiple identical casts from the same source mold. In theory, this plaster source mold never deteriorates and an infinite number of copies can be perfectly cast from it. In reality, the mold continuously decays with each iteration, even if ever so slightly. Taking inspiration from this time-based process, we exaggerated this materiality of loss, this difference in sameness. Grappling with the contested narratives of the Erie Canal Monument in Syracuse NY, we enacted acts of deterioration on the mold over time, exploring how multiple contradictory narratives could be held in productive contradiction through time.

Cast from the same mold, each stone is the same yet different. This impossibility of reification is already embedded in the process of slipcasting. Describing the project, K Michael Hays argues, “the Jouissance of the double negative, of the slipcast...goes back to the notion that architecture is ultimately about potential and opportunity, not about fixing and regulating.”¹ Unlike the word, which attempts to fix and stabilize meaning, slipcasting reveals that words (fixed meanings and stable interpretations) have already become inadequate. Hays continues: “It is the Jouissance of slipcasting and the pleasure—the painful pleasure—that in slipcasting you don’t know what the object is. Is that the object? Or is the mold the

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object? Or is the CNC routed foam that made the mold, is that the object?”² Confronting the limits of affirmative commemorative practice, the design research sought out remembrance without affirming, speech without words, where one remembers that remembrance is forgetting. Through this Jouissance of lack, through the materiality of loss, we explored an architectural language of becoming, of potentials and possibilities, produced through time to wrestle with our always already fleeting reality, with becoming.

ENDNOTES

- 1 K. Michael Hays, “Linda Zhang & K. Michael Hays: Beta-Real: The Materiality of Loss,” gallery talk at the Syracuse University School of Architecture, May 3, 2018.
- 2 Hays, “Linda Zhang & K. Michael Hays: Beta-Real: The Materiality of Loss.”

BETA-REAL: The Materiality of Loss

CONTESTED MEMORY & ITERATIVE SLIPCASTING AT THE ERIE CANAL MONUMENT, SYRACUSE NY

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[i] K. Michael Hays, "Linda Zhang & K. Michael Hays: Beta-Real: The Materiality of Loss," Gallery Talk, Syracuse University School of Architecture, Slocum Hall, 3 May 2018.
[ii] Ibid.

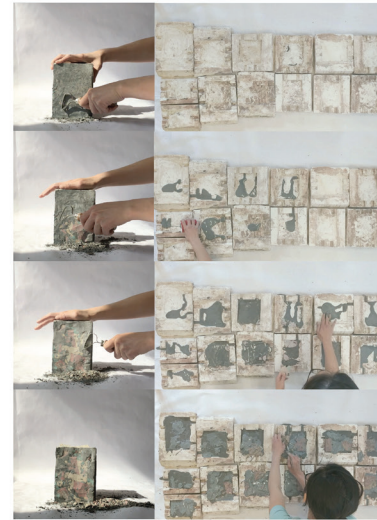


Figure 1. Iterative casting process by students Amelia Gan and Sabrina Logrono.



Figure 2. Excavated surfaces of the iteratively slipceramic cast hollow stones.



Figure 3. Hollow slipcast stones (top) versus molds of the slipcast stones (bottom).



Figure 4. Reconstructed from a fragmented 3D scan of the Erie Canal Monument, this installation present itself as a series of relays between what remains and what is left behind, between what is remembered and what is forgotten, between what is cast and the mold from which it is cast.



Figure 5. Relay between the hollowness of the stones and the void of the molds, which directly contrasts the purported solidity of the exterior of both.