

sculpture

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**SANFORD
BIGGERS** >>>

**MARION
VERBOOM**

**LIANA
STRASBERG**

**SHINIQUE
SMITH**

**KENSETH
ARMSTEAD**



\$9.50US/CAN



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ON THE COVER:

Sanford Biggers, *Caniggula*
(detail), 2020. White marble on
custom cedar plinth,
77.13 x 33 x 32.88 in. overall.
PHOTO: Lance Brewer, ©
Sanford Biggers, Courtesy the
artist and Marianne Boesky
Gallery, New York and Aspen.



Attire,
2010.
Lead,
59 x 24 in.

38

90

Duo,
2020.
Steel, plaster, burlap,
sand, pigment, and
shower curtain hooks,
196 x 67 x 67 cm.



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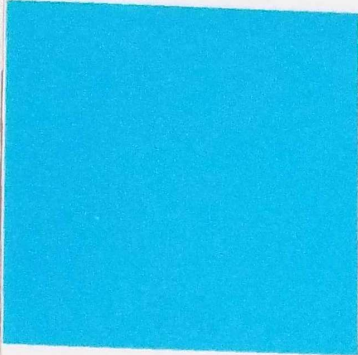
Material Instincts:

A Conversation
with
Daniel Giordano

by Jonathan Goodman



Cannoli
[F(akkt)ocaccia],
2016–19.
Artificial kumquat,
bald eagle excrement,
cattails, ceramic,
contact lenses, epoxy,
leather, nail polish,
shellac, sparklers,
steel, steel coat hanger,
and Tang drink mix,
13 x 10 x 10.5 in.



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Material Instincts:

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Cannoli
[Fakakt]ocaccia,
2016–19.
Artificial kumquat,
bald eagle excrement,
cattails, ceramic,
contact lenses, epoxy,
leather, nail polish,
shellac, sparklers,
steel, steel coat hanger,
and Tang drink mix,
13 x 10 x 10.5 in.



FROM THIS PAGE:
*Self-Portrait as the
Coprophagist*,
2019.

Buoy, coprolite, Dior
lipstick, hardware, key chain,
moisturizing face mask,
pin cushion, sewing
machine needles, steel
coat hanger, and T-pins,
12 x 6.5 x 4 in.

My Apricot I,
2016–18.

Ceramic,
approx. 2 x 2 x 2 in.

Daniel Giordano works on the third floor of his family's former coat factory in Newburgh, New York (across the Hudson River from Beacon), where he makes outlandishly beautiful sculpture from the most unlikely of materials. Very much aware of Modernism but not beholden to it, Giordano represents a new kind of creative thinking. His work is startling, and he negotiates issues of taste with nonchalance, allowing high culture to mix easily with the popular and the mundane. The amalgam might be regarded with suspicion, but the exuberance of Giordano's work is compelling. Not only does it suggest a passionate affection for everyday life, it retains the quality of the experience and the process behind the construction. Throwing caution to the wind, Giordano creates a valid space for childhood memories, his understanding of recent art history, and his love of the American demotic. He is currently working toward a solo show at MASS MoCA, planned for March 2023.

Jonathan Goodman: You have played semi-professional tennis, studied accounting at Pace University, and received an MFA in sculpture from the University of Delaware. How have these disparate experiences influenced your work?

Daniel Giordano: I'm retired from playing tennis competitively, but I still love it. My aggressiveness in the game works in tandem with the passion that infuses my sculpture. I love the physical attributes of tennis, and its instruments often find their way into my work. Balls, string, grommets, weighting tape, and Har-Tru American Red Clay (a court surface) find a new life as sculptural materials. Business school gave me perspective on running my own operation and made me realize that I needed to pursue my passion—making visual art. While I was in the MFA program, I had the equip-





Cannoli
(the Grip of Goran),
2016–19.

24k gold leaf, acrylic paint, ceramic, contact lens, cork, epoxy, fibered aluminum coating, glass-glazed brick, hardware, leather, lichen, Megan Murphy Martinez's hair, milk paint, peat, powdered pigment, sewing machine needle, sewing machine timing belt, shag fabric, sparklers, steel, Tang drink mix, tennis ball, tennis racket grommet, tennis racket string, ticks, upholstery, and foam,
20 x 23 x 21 in.

“ Individual taste is the result of experience. Everything we look at and absorb from the exterior world shapes our idea of ‘good taste.’ ”

ment and facilities to elevate the production value of my work, which includes a wide variety of activities: casting metal, forging steel, chiseling wood, and firing ceramics. I also refined an intuitive approach to incorporating found materials into the sculptures. Before graduation, I mass-produced cast aluminum and raku-fired ceramic parts to use in future sculptures. I am still incorporating those pre-made components into my work today.

JG: After living in New York for several years, you returned to Newburgh to make work in your family's former coat factory. Why did you leave New York? Does Newburgh live up to its burgeoning reputation as a city for new art?

DG: In the summer of 2013, I moved back to my hometown because my work was evolving from collage to loose assemblage and I wanted to take advantage of the sprawling space available in the factory building. I refer to the property as “Vicki Island” after my aunt, Vicki, who was the inspiration for my grandfather's coat manufacturing business, Victoria Rose. Vicki Island is my dynamic playground. Together with my friend and fellow artist, Samuel Boehm, I've hosted six exhibitions in different areas of Vicki Island; the program, naturally, is named Vicki. Since her conception in 2016, Vicki has attracted audiences from far and wide, and she has fostered a fine arts community here.

Newburgh can be bleak, crumbling, and depressing, but it is nevertheless beautiful. It is gritty, real, romantic, and symbolic. It has a buzzing pulse. Like the Hudson River School painters before me, I seek an eagle's perch from the rooftop of Vicki Island, while

the deep bass vibrations of the intercity rumble below. Newburgh provides endless inspiration.

JG: Your work is all about materials: you've incorporated your aunt's cheesecake into a resin cast and used bald eagle droppings and beef jerky. Why do you use food, and what about the archival problems? How important is it for viewers to see and recognize these elements?

DG: My material choices are instinctual, and many hold memories. One of the most immediate physical signifiers of culture is food. Being raised by proud, first-generation Italian-American parents, I was surrounded by our traditions and history. My sculptures combine found, fabricated, constructed, and traditionally sculpted parts. Experimenting with surface treatment and wrestling with scale have become priorities—fine-tuning the relation of art to the body.

Epoxy is my ambrosia. I have also electroplated temporal objects in rare metals. These are means to immortalize otherwise ephemeral material. The components cannot be a mere means to an end to create form; rather, they should offer an entry point into the work, which must speak to my personal intuitions first and foremost. Food is simply one of many materials that I use. There is no hierarchy in my choices. I use a combination of historical art materials, such as metal, stone, wood, and ceramics, and non-traditional ones, including urinal cakes, ticks, coprolite, Tang Orange Powdered Drink Mix, and liquid vitamin B12. Recently, I have conceptualized using the work of other artists as a material. Rather than engaging with these artists directly and collaboratively, their work would enter into the world of my material lexicon.



THIS PAGE,
LEFT TO RIGHT:
Pleasure Pipe LVI,
2020.
Rose wood, banksia
pod, Dremel tool,
hardware, and epoxy,
7 x 3.75 x 4.5 in.

Pleasure Pipe III
(Frank),
2019.
Black locust, epoxy,
hardware, linseed oil wax,
Murano glass, steel
coat hanger, and Tang
drink mix,
6.5 x 7.5 x 3 in.

OPPOSITE:
Hoof I,
2019–20.
Acrylic house paint,
canned tomatoes,
cattails, deep-fried batter,
epoxy, fibered aluminum
coating, hardware,
Har-Tru American Red
Clay, iron quartzite,
marble, oil-based clay,
paint can lid, polyure-
thane, vitamin B12,
wood, and wood stain,
83 x 41 x 23 in.



JG: Your work cheerfully crosses the boundaries of good taste. Is this approach inherited from past experience or a deliberate transgression of Modernism's dying influence?

DG: Individual taste is the result of experience. Everything we look at and absorb from the exterior world shapes our perception of "good taste." I'm not so much interested in being transgressive in the context of Modernism. My work doesn't aim to subvert the influence of the modern or postmodern periods; I am most focused on an earnest and sincere approach to making, and that is ultimately more personal. My approach is about intuitively conjuring and then improvising applications. I treat my work like a visual poem. Through various procedures and material combinations, each sculpture takes on its own form, texture, color, and scale. My hope is that, being so personal, my work conveys something universally human.

JG: You often work in series, including "My Clementines," "Pleasure Pipe," and "Self-Portrait."

My Scorpio I (2016–19), however, is a one-off. Could you talk about these works?

DG: The "Pleasure Pipes," which revel in the legacy of my grandfather, convey representations of smoke billowing from wall-mounted tobacco pipes. For the "Self-Portraits," I begin with a foundation of moisturizing face masks and work out features from there. The face masks are an excellent template to build on, and I can embody anything I ever dreamed. "My Clementines" stem from traditional processes of shaping clay. Napoleon Bonaparte once said, "Quantity has a quality all its own." My goal is to produce 1,001 handmade luminescent spheres. They are inspired by a childhood Christmas memory involving a crate of clementines buried under a pile of snow marked by reindeer hoofprints and littered with remnants of chewed carrots. It was like discovering

Tutankhamun's tomb. *My Scorpio I* is made out of two battered and deep-fried, welded Husqvarna motocross bike frames, combined with other materials. Part of my process involves salvaging specific objects and repurposing them into sculpture. They shed their veneer as functional objects within the Duchampian tradition of the readymade, but I take it into the realm of the personal and completely alter their physiognomy through the selection of meaningful materials.

JG: Are there any historical or contemporary sculptors with whom you feel particularly in tune?

DG: Medardo Rosso is fascinating because he used the byproducts of traditional casting methods, such as wax and plaster, to make his objects. They are not traditional sculptures but constructions—loosely figurative, straddling the line of the identifiable. There is also something very supernatural about them. Hans Bellmer was a real maverick. His objects are familiar in that they suggest the body, but they are also incredibly other and remain fresh to this day.

Peter Eide, my favorite contemporary painter and dear friend, culls his visuals from an array of well-known and esoteric films and other sourced materials, converging them into a visual orgasm. He has a wild style, a freehand approach to making imagery in accordance with his personal visual vernacular, and he manipulates paint in a way that I've never seen. Jim Lee is my mentor. His work is scrappy and close to Minimalist precedents, barely hanging on like the tunes of a band fronted by Mick Collins; it just works. Jim's material alchemy often leaves me puzzling at how to refine my material procedures. And Yasue Maetake works in a way that feels very familiar—I trust her judgment, and we enjoy talking shop. I deeply admire her ability to execute large-scale sculptures with ease. She has an uncanny ability to channel Japanese mythology and sci-fi creatures flawlessly into her output.

JG: Is your work essentially American? And what does that mean?

DG: I want my work to embody my Newburgh, channeled through my personal perspective as a second-generation Italian American and my family's culture, our dynamic and stories. In this way, my work





“If I were to create with the viewer in mind, it would obliterate the qualities that make my work genuine.”

represents an authentic American experience. I've been toiling away in my family's factory building among old dusty coats and sewing machines. Vicki Island is located on the same street where George Washington resided toward the end of the Revolutionary War. These Italian and American (and Italian-American) elements fuse into a deep-rooted foundation for my explosive, holy cannoli expression.

I often take strolls along Newburgh's shoreline and collect industrial castoffs like grog-warped bricks, multicolored, organic-shaped epoxy bits, driftwood, marine foam, glass, and whatever else strikes my fancy. Aluminum was an important material for America during the Space Race era. Considered the “modern metal,” it adorns the tip of the Washington Monument, which was constructed with Indiana limestone, another important material. I prefer to pulverize it, then mix it with epoxy and Nesquik Strawberry Powder (my childhood favorite) to cast forms.

THIS PAGE:

Family,
2015–20.

Aluminum, cattails, enamel, epoxy, iron, self-tanner, shellac, upholstery foam, urethane resin, urinal cake, and vitamin B12, 91 x 20 x 20 in.

OPPOSITE:

Study For Brother (Biped),
2015–17.

Aluminum, artificial teeth, ceramic, epoxy, marzipan, and Tang drink mix, 22 x 12 x 16 in.

JG: How much of your life do you want viewers to know, or is that question irrelevant to your practice?

DG: The work is personal. My sculptures mean a great deal to me, and my life's narrative is what drives me to make them. The material lists for my sculptures give the viewer insight into my impulses. The selection process is so integral to my personal sensibilities that sharing material information is paramount. But I think of the work as its own entity, functioning on its own, separately from my conceptualization of it; it goes beyond my own logic. Part of the process of creating is embracing the spontaneity of the work as it develops.



**Talent I (Titanic),
2016–20.**

Aluminum, artificial
teeth, brick, cable ties,
canned tomatoes,
cattails, clay, deep-fried
batter, dental floss, Dior
lipstick, epoxy, fibered
aluminum coating, hard-
ware, hosiery, iron ore,
iron quartzite, Nesquik
Strawberry Powder,
phosphorescent acrylic
paint, steel, and wood,
48 x 32 x 36 in.

Experimenting with materials is unpredictable and exciting. The only thing I can anticipate is that the work will change from my initial nebulous ideas to its fully realized form. Ultimately, the work operates independently of my motivations. I respect the viewer's personal perspective. There is no need to impose one particular interpretation. My work is not an intellectual exercise but an emotional one.

JG: Right now, you are not associated with a particular gallery. What kind of context do you want for your work?

DG: I am an exhibitionist by heart, but I'm not committed to anything unless I see a mutual benefit between whomever I choose to work with and myself. I care about real relationships and bask in the bonds I have with other artists and people in the industry. The work is versatile in terms of exhibition contexts; it could flow effortlessly between museums, galleries, and project spaces. I feel strongly about having the proper amount of time and space to make art without compromise. So, right now, I will only seek exhibition opportunities that benefit the work first. Some sculptures can take months, or even years to make, which allows me an open window of time and ensures that I am able to make the best work possible without concession.

JG: What are your thoughts about the current state of the art world?

DG: The "art world" has become an umbrella term that includes a number of different entities, including DIY projects, art fairs, and what is depicted on social media. It is difficult to summarize. Instagram, for instance, is a wonderful resource for self-promotion in a non-invasive way, but it is supplementary to real relationships; however, I've initiated real human connections through it that wouldn't have occurred otherwise. Social media is beneficial, but we need to prioritize the importance of seeing work in person. The sensuous experience of viewing art in person cannot be replicated.

JG: You are in your early 30s. What would you like to see happen in the next 10 years?

DG: I aspire to attract the attention of curators and confirm more institutional support, and I'd like to bring my work to a wider international audience. It would be really wonderful to remove some of the logistical burdens from my process in order to focus more on the conception of the work. I hope to generate a larger budget for electroplating objects and casting forms in metal. While I currently have the assistance of my father, Tony, with sculptures that require a second set of hands, eventually I would like to have a small team to help realize larger projects.

The factory is the embodiment of my family's legacy, and it is my obligation to transform the space into something that will allow me to sustain the expansion and breadth of my work. My ultimate goal is to streamline the space to facilitate various processes—building a metal foundry and an area for kilns. Right now, many aspects of my production have to be outsourced; to have those processes immediately available in-house would be a gift.

JG: It is hard to see your work in a tastefully appointed living room. Is your roughness of approach a political statement? Or does your work deliberately marginalize such questions?

DG: I work in a variety of different aesthetic strains. If you are asking if I think about my work within a commercial context, the answer is no. The priorities of the work always come before commercial considerations. I have a certain disdain for the notion that artists need to make work with sales in mind. I believe that art should first be for its own sake—it would be cynical of me to think otherwise. If I were to create with the viewer in mind, it would obliterate the qualities that make my work genuine. That said, great work has less to do with aesthetics, and more to do with steering the conversation toward the new. I am interested in artists who throw out the playbook and make their own rules. ■

