

# ART SPIEL

Reflections on the work of contemporary artists

DECEMBER 15, 2021 BY MARLEY MASSEY PARSONS

## Brie Ruais: Recording with Clay

### In Dialogue with Brie Ruais



*"Brie Ruais: Movement at the Edge of the Land", installation of exhibition, courtesy The Moody Center for the Arts and albertz benda gallery. Photo by Nash Baker*

Brie Ruais [b. 1982, Southern California] lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. She received her MFA from Columbia University's School of the Arts in 2011. Ruais' movement-based practice is legible through the scrapes, gouges, and gestures embedded in the surfaces and forms of the ceramic works. Each sculpture is made with the equivalent of her body weight in clay, resulting in human-scale works that forge an intimacy with the viewer's body. Through her immersive engagement with clay, Ruais's work generates a physical and sensorial experience that explores a new dialogue between the body and the earth.

## **Tell me about your background and how this led to your art career journey.**

I grew up in Southern California with parents who supported and nurtured my identity as an artist from a young age. I don't know that I've been in pursuit of a career as an artist so much as I've just always made art as a way of expressing myself and understanding my relationship to the world. I moved to New York City for college at NYU, studying art and liberal arts. I worked for fashion designers, galleries, textile designers, and as an assistant to artists over the years. I went to Columbia University for my MFA in art in my late 20's, and it was there that I developed the work I'm making now. I was curated into a group show at Salon 94 right out of school, and then started working with Nicole Klagsbrun gallery. Nicole was very supportive of my work, even after closing her gallery. Now I am represented by albertz benda gallery in New York City, Night Gallery in Los Angeles, and Cooper Cole in Toronto.

## **What is your favorite choice of materials, why do you use them, and how did you come about them?**

I have always shared an affinity with materiality and processes. For example, as a kid, I made flower drawings on paper by squishing up flower petals and using them like crayons. My practice allows me to explore a material like clay, for instance, and be curious about its tendencies, abilities, and embedded meaning. I started working with clay through the advice of my graduate professor Jon Kessler, and that's when I realized a material could open up meaning, curiosity, both challenging and speaking to my ideas in many different ways. Clay has the wonderful ability to record and capture time and human existence. We rely on ceramic artifacts to tell the stories of ancient peoples. That led me to think about human and non-human expression, and about a relationship to a material that allows emotion and presence to come through.

## **In regards to the nature of your work, how would you explain your connection to the environment?**

We have sculpted this planet so much that we think it belongs to us, but really, we belong to it. I foreground the inherent relationship between the body and the earth in my work. When I spend time in the desert I begin to see the way that the marks, mines, roads, and infrastructure reveal the movement of people, the way we both depend on and take from the earth. These marks of movement reveal human desire. This record of movement – both the human and geologic traces of the passage of time – is fundamental to my work.



*“Brie Ruais: Movement at the Edge of the Land”, installation of exhibition, courtesy The Moody Center for the Arts and albertz benda gallery. Photo by Nash Baker*

### **Do you have a favorite time of day to create? If so, why?**

For me, it’s more about tuning into when creativity is presenting itself. It can be any time of day, as long as there’s space, clarity, and there is no one around to see. Solitude is important, as is respecting any resistance that is present – if the time isn’t right, I never force it. I have learned the hard way, that forcing myself to make a piece for a deadline, for example, often results in work that feels limited in some way.

### **What are your favorite books? Have any of these inspired any of your work?**

To name a few – *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche* by Luce Irigaray, poetry by Mary Oliver and Ocean Vuong, *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Savage Dreams* by Rebecca Solnit, *Where I Was From* by Joan Didion. They have all inspired my work. I think that for a lot of artists, all experiences, including intellectual, filter through us into our work.

### **Could you elaborate on your experience planning and executing your exhibition “Movement at the Edge of the Land” at the Moody Center for the Arts?**

This was my first time really collaborating with a curator. Frauke V. Josenhans was wonderful to work with, and in an early studio visit I showed her some performance videos I was excited about and new work that was specifically inspired by my corporeal relationship to two geographies of investigation: namely, the shoreline of the island of NYC, and the very remote Great Basin desert in Nevada. Using two gallery spaces, one that



had a wall of windows and sliding glass doors that opened onto the university lawn, and the other which was an enclosed white box space, I was able to evoke the feeling of these two environments by creating site specific installations. With Frauke's support, it was rewarding to work on such a large scale and exhibit several facets of my practice for the first time, which included sculpture, video, floor installation, and photography.



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### **What can we expect at your next solo show *Some Things I Know About Being In A Body* at albertz benda gallery?**

I will be showing work that evolved from a performance that developed in a New Mexican clay quarry. I brought these performative gestures into my studio in Brooklyn to make a series of wall works that are evocative of wounds and gashes – much like the quarry itself which is an open pit in the earth. I will also be presenting an aerial video piece that is about the dialogue between the elemental earth and the human body. In my work, the puncture, the wound, and the scar are all records of transformation that hopefully, opens onto beauty, clarity and a sense of embodiment.



*Brie Ruais, Seeing You, 2021, 12 x 18 inches, Archival pigment print. Image courtesy albartz benda gallery*

Marley Massey Parsons (b.1998, Berlin, MD) is a multidisciplinary artist whose work advocates for acknowledging and unearthing the relationship between human and nonhuman worlds. Marley received a B.F.A in Painting and Printmaking from Salisbury University in 2019 and will earn an M.F.A from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 2022. Her body of work ranges from landscape responses, recordings and observations of humans interconnectivity with the environment using photography, painting, drawing, forged materials from the earth, writing, and video. Marleys work has been exhibited across Maryland and in Pennsylvania. In the Summer 2021, she was an artist-in-residence at Mass MoCA. She is currently a Visiting Artist Coordinator and Student Life Assistant at PAFA.