

# HUFFPOST

THE BLOG

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## David Shaw at Feature Inc.

By Elizabeth Insogna

The conversation below with David Shaw is about and coincides with his solo exhibition at Feature Inc., up through November 16th, 2013.

**Liz Insogna: *Twin, Bog* and *Single* share the elements of glass, pentagon, mirror and tree trunk. Structurally their components are in harmony and they are related. The immediacy of the works of glass give an illusion of fluid free form and feel like something frozen in time. We feel parallel to the time the work exists in, but are still asked to engage with it; which in concept leads to a reconciliation between two worlds. The mirrored elements continue the poetry here on the edge of what is above and what is below. Could you talk a bit about the duality (and multiplicity) of existence as relates to this installation?**

David Shaw: Multiplicity, yes. As for any Dualism, I think Descartes et al. fucked everything up by positing the divisibility of mind and body. The man lay in bed for three weeks, feverishly developing an aphorism that has been misinterpreted and manipulated to control people ever since he woke up. If anyone had walked into that room and punched him in the arm, he may not have thought. So therefore he may not have been? I think not. He would just have a sore arm. Ambrose Bierce came closer with, "Cogito cogito ergo cogito sum." "I think that I think, therefore I think that I am."



David Shaw; Installation View of "Eat Out", solo exhibition at Feature Inc., New York, 17 October - 16 November, 2013, Courtesy of the Artist and Feature Inc., New York

So there is uncertainty in that reflection, and while in "Eat Out" there is the illusion of an above and a below, I wanted the mirroring and the multiple time frames suggested to indicate that ours is likely a far more complicated reality. The "natural" growth of the branches seem to hold up the surface of some clear, chemical pond, which while locked in a freeze-frame moment displays the evolution of what? Culture? Society? It's the table we set for ourselves. I often think about the hubris involved in how we go about trying to understand our reality. It's a sort of cultural narcissism. It's inevitable and tragic and really very funny.



David Shaw; *Single*, 2013; wood, mirror, glass, 89 x 49 x 51" (detail), Courtesy of the artist and Feature Inc., New York

**LI: This brings me to *Jack*. When we spoke about “Eat Out” and came to him and his head/ helmet/crown, you pointed to a similar glass object within *Twin* and mentioned the concept of narcissism. I see him; and he in contrast with the exquisite beauty surrounding, is heavy and opaque save for his “head” and other protruding parts. He is made of the thickest trunk. His pentagon “legs” are the only black element in the entire installation. He appears equal parts magic, awkward, playful, and intimidating. You said there’s a bit of a joker in him, and as we know with the presence of a joker image - in any context - all bets are uncertain. Could you talk about *Jack*?**

David Shaw: Yes, *Jack* is awkward, almost off balance, dancing or shocked. I think of *Jack* as a jester, not the king. His “crown” is temporal and illusory, just a moment’s splash. The role of the jester, the joker or the clown is to disrupt. But he is in ecstatic wonder if not bewilderment as he notices his image reflected in *Twin*, in that Primordial Pond or at that dinner party, not as a guest, but as a part of it all. The dialectics of Nature vs. Nurture, of social constructs vs. the chemical structure of matter, of eternal geometry vs. natural growth become all mingled and muddled and interconnected as *Jack* sees it all as a game. He is inside and outside at once. And now he sees where it all came from. He sees how it evolved. How a splash made a crown, made a cup, made a setting, made

a society and it's all in a moment. It can all pass. It's not important; that's the humor. *Jack* knows we made these things; we made ideas, structures, societies, rules, we even made ourselves and it could all change in a moment. It is ephemeral. It is about to disappear, and *Jack* can't help but be happily surprised to see his image reflected in it.



David Shaw; *Jack*, 2013, wood, glass, epoxy, paint; 71.5 x 33 x 28", Courtesy of the artist and Feature Inc., New York

**LI: Now let's go back to the beginning and simultaneous entrance to your exhibit - the power of your relationship with water. The fluidity and motion found frozen in "Eat Out". Let's move into its engagement with magic and the forces surrounding. Friend and artist Jesse Bransford named something in your work and made something for it/you. Quoting the words directly from the statement: " Using a synthesis of several magical systems, Aqua/Sal is a site-specific installation and rectification ritual for the artist David Shaw and seeks to realign Shaw's historical dissonance with water and the watery forces in his life." Could you talk about all of this?**

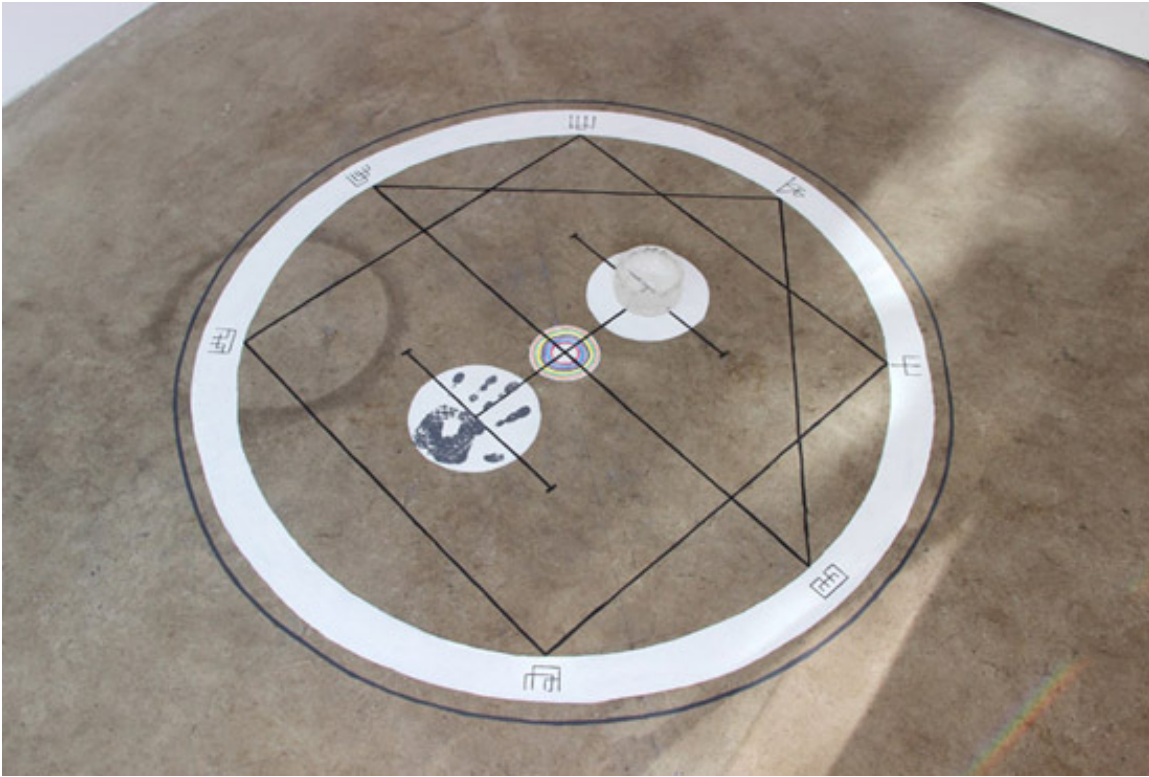
DS: I do have a strong relationship with the concept of fluidity and also to the frozen moment. I am interested in mutability: in the edges of systems, the threshold areas and liminal spaces, where things breakdown and accidents happen, where something can be there and not there at the same time, forming and dissolving, in a state of flux, raw and vulnerable. Freeze framing an image of what should be in constant motion, or sculpting a fluid state allowed me to contemplate what I thought was happening all around me and also gave me a chance to question why I/we might have wanted to control that reality in the first place. Working with this watery imagery in glass allowed me to address what I see as some of the problems surrounding knowledge and consciousness, particularly naming. I am mostly interested in the moment before conscious identification occurs.

As for magic, I can't actually speak to that, because I don't believe in it or even like it very much. Magic is fraught with the magician's personality and is ultimately an uninteresting form of entertainment. Jesse, on the other hand, gave me quite a gift with his exhibition, *Aqua/Sal (for David Shaw), 2013*. He recently has begun putting to use this vast body of knowledge he has been accumulating over the years, knowledge of the esoteric and alchemical traditions, astrology and sacred geometries, knowledge he is beginning to employ to possibly effect change. It is a brave move, to alter and take liberties with what are some longstanding traditions, then further move toward what is in effect shamanism, especially in this art world. There aren't just a few skeptics. So I was humbled and honored and not a little bit nervous that he dedicated this work to me, and what he sees as my "problem."

I'm pretty sure that the "historical dissonance" Jesse is referring to is the number of exhibitions we had together in Miami which were sabotaged by storms, one of them being the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina during which a piece of mine fell into a sinkhole. Well, there's that and the truly ridiculous amount of flooding I endured in my basement studio in Brooklyn during 2006-7. Okay, and then there is also my having drowned after being pushed out of a

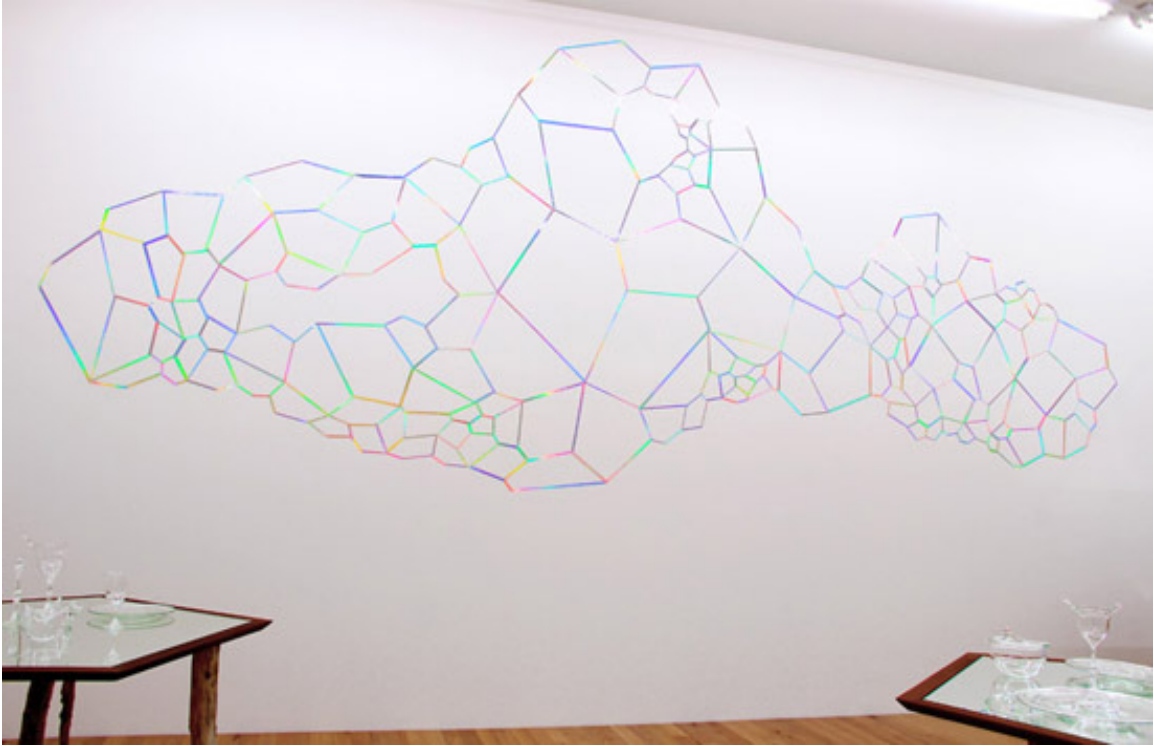


boat as a child. Oh, and I am a Pisces. So, yeah, I guess we could say I have water issues.



Jesse Bransford; *Aqua/Sal (for David Shaw)*, 2013 (detail), tempera paint, graphite on wall and floor, Prague crystal, salt water, dimensions variable; site specific installation at Feature Inc., Courtesy of the artist and Feature Inc., New York

David Shaw combines manmade materials (steel, glass, holographic laminate) with found, natural objects (most often tree branches without bark) to create sculpture that explores the indistinct boundaries between nature, technology, and consciousness. Recently, he has also been working with hand-blown glass, facilitated by a grant from the Nancy Graves Foundation. This culminated in his exhibition, "Eat Out" at Feature Inc., Oct.17—Nov.17, 2013. Shaw was born in Rochester, NY, in 1965, and received his BA in Fine Arts from Colgate University in 1987. He is represented by Feature Inc., NY and Galleria Astuni, Bologna, Italy. His work is in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, NY, The Artphilein Foundation in Vaduz, Liechtenstein as well as numerous private collections around the world. Shaw lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.



David Shaw; *I want to say cloud*, 2013; holographic laminate on wall; 93' x 234' x 50 microns; Courtesy of the artist and Feature Inc., New York