

RICHARD REZAC

Cast

April 2 - May 8, 2021



Richard Rezac, *Limb (Yellow)*, 2020
Cast bronze and oil paint
12.25 x 12 x 3.25 inches

*In the social world, everything goes wrong. In the physical world, something always goes wrong. In the world of geometry, it is safe. Geometry becomes a symbol of behavior.*¹

—Louise Bourgeois

CHICAGO, IL—Rhona Hoffman Gallery is pleased to present *Cast*, a solo exhibition by Richard Rezac. Featuring a series of works made within the last year—a period whose insular time has been marked by recollection, in the absence of new visual material or experiences entering an artists' frame of reference—the exhibition underscores Rezac's four-decade career of invention and permutation in sculpture. Since the 1990s, the artist has crafted modulations of the Baroque, presenting the control and calibration of architectural details and subjects in unexpected and elegant combinations. Following a residency at the American Academy in Rome from 2006–07, Rezac's ongoing interest in Italian architects Francesco Borromini and Andrea Palladio are revisited in *Cast*, combining elements such as readymade doorknobs, crown moldings, Florentine costume, and structural building plans in expressions of enigmatic geometry. Whether floor-based, wall-bound, or suspended, Rezac's relational objects possess an inextricable connection to the body of the artist and the viewer alike. From arabesques fashioned to the scale of the artist's forearm, to the miniaturized scale-shift of a skyscraper transformed into an abstract architectural model, *Cast* embodies each of the functions its title implies—how one form is poured into the outer edges of another, how actors enter and exit a stage, how a shadow falls.

¹ Moyra Davey, lecture "Artists on Artists," presented by the Dia: Foundation, 2016.

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In *Root's plan (Monadnock)* (2020), a fabrication of wood painted in two hues of mint and aluminum is installed upon the gallery floor. The work pictures a remarkable scale-shift from the sixteen-story Chicago brick skyscraper designed by Burnham & Root, the legacy of which the latter (John Wellborn Root) is recalled in the work's title. While the piece exudes a visual harmony, the edges of its construction perfectly aligned to create a pair of proportioned arches, the form hinges upon its asymmetry. Embedded with references to Palladian design—the Classical style developed by Italian Renaissance architect Andrea Palladio, whose influence has defined Europe from the seventeenth century to the present—the sculpture evolves in the context of its Chicago-based surrogate, a building that the artist encountered over years of exiting an adjacent train station.² In the absence of the iconic brick façade, the towering imposition of the Monadnock building is transformed in Rezac's parenthetical interpretation into a type of fiction; one that is visible from above in place of below.

In *Averno* (2020), we look up—a rich butter yellow apparition whose bloated figure, like a string of diamonds upon a playing card, appears to inflate around the edge of its rigid linear support. Seemingly hollow, though fashioned from carved cherry wood and aluminum, the weight of the work is expressed by the duality of its presence—at once familiar and mysterious, common and elusive. The title of the work, a reference to a volcanic lake near modern Naples whose noxious gas “once felled any bird flying through”³ maintains a particular resonance with the performance of freezing time. We are reminded of the tableaux of bodies caught mid-gesture in the excavations of Pompeii; their motionlessness was not in response to shock, but to the poison that permeated the air before the eruption and struck them immobile in the poses of daily life. Rezac's suspension of form presents similar moments of capture and stillness.

Throughout *Cast*, the recurring pattern of the diamond develops as the backbone of the exhibition. *Limb (harlequin dress)* (2020), the fifth in a series of sculptures by the same name, pictures a composition of two lozenge shapes that are unevenly dissected. The left side is painted in a muted orange, while the mottled surface of the fired bronze remains untouched on the right. The reference to the garment, first worn by performers who played the role of the jester in sixteenth-century Italian theater of the *Commedia dell'arte*, is approached formally throughout Rezac's *Limb* series. Contrary to the checkerboard, even and ordered, the harlequin pattern is one built of confusion. The early costumes, sewn together from scraps of silk, replaced the neat alternation of black and white out of necessity; the kaleidoscope of elongated squares in sporadic jewel-tones with no discernable logic echoed the mischief of the character. In *Limb*, Rezac imposes a minimalist distance and distillation onto his subject—*Limb (yellow)* (2020) zeros in on a singular rhombus held within a fractured frame; *Limb (section)* (2020) presents a dissection of an inventive decorative molding that protrudes from the wall in

² Judith Russi Kirshner, “Richard Rezac: *Cast*,” exhibition brochure. Rhona Hoffman Gallery, 2021. ³ Kirshner, “Richard Rezac: *Cast*,” exhibition brochure.

curves and reveals. Each form viewed en suite possesses a signature of calculation and restraint.

In a lecture on Louise Bourgeois, speaking on the *Insomnia Drawings*, artist Moyra Davey quotes the artist, who states, “In the social world, everything goes wrong. In the physical world, something always goes wrong. In the world of geometry, it is safe.” What did Bourgeois mean by ‘safe’? In thinking about Rezac’s work in *Cast*, which opens nearly one year since the beginning of pandemic-enforced quarantine, this question reverberates through the affect of the work. A safety that serves as a protection from chaos, from unraveling—born of logic and based on rules. In geometry, exactitude is requisite. Elegance is not merely an aesthetic quality, but a mathematical necessity. As the artist notes, “There is a misconception that Baroque architecture is the most complex yet underlying the visual splendor of its ornamentation exists a structure that allows it to stand, a simplicity.”⁴ In the case of Rezac, whose objects are derived and transposed into the three-dimensional via his own meticulous drawings, like blueprints, the final shape of the artwork is only gleaned once it comes off the page and begins to exist in space. The parts not pictured on paper must be resolved in the flesh—a geometry that heals once the cast is removed.

—Stephanie Cristello

⁴ Richard Rezac, in conversation with the author, 2021.