

**PRESSBOOK**

Genesis BELANGER

*Time Out*

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## Genesis Belanger talks about how reception areas are tools of oppression



Blurring the boundaries between mediums and styles, Genesis Belanger makes ceramic sculptures that explore the psychology of power and the anxieties that surround it. With a background in animation, fashion design and advertising, Belanger constructs dreamlike installations like the one resembling a receptionist area that's currently on view in the New Museum's window gallery. Recently, the artist sat down in her Williamsburg studio to discuss how such "liminal" spaces constitute a form of corporate control, and reflect our current political climate.

### **How did you wind up making the work you do?**

I applied to grad school with a painting portfolio, but knew right away that I'd be happier creating three-dimensional work. Once I was there, I started experimenting sculpturally with all kinds of materials. My studio happened to be next to the kiln so I started using ceramics, as well, though I stopped for a few years after I received my MFA. Then I bought a small kiln, and as soon as I did that, I transitioned to ceramics full time.



Photograph: Charles Benton

**You also studied fashion design, and you've worked in advertising. Did those experiences have a bearing on your approach?**

Yeah. I rely on a lot of skills that draw on fashion. For instance, all of my clay objects start as a flat slab, and I actually make patterns for the shapes I create, like the way you would when sewing a dress. As for advertising, I was attracted to it because of how brilliantly it deploys visual language, despite my distaste for the whole point of selling stuff. I was impressed with way ads manufacture desire without consumers even being aware of it. My aim is to make things that are desirable, too.

**Let's talk about your New Museum project. How did you settle on it?**

I knew I wanted to make a waiting room, because it's a kind of liminal space that is relevant to our moment.



Photograph: Charles Benton

### **Relevant how?**

Well, I suppose I was thinking of it as a metaphor for existing in a society or culture with an imbalanced power structure. There's this general sense of unease and maybe even talk of revolution. People are no longer content with the piece of the pie they've been given, but there's really nothing they can do about. It puts them into this political limbo.

**So the waiting room represents a kind of political purgatory or form of entrapment.**

Exactly. People tend to rebel against those kinds of spaces unconsciously. What you often do when stuck in a situation like that is to try to distract yourself through a compulsive activity—like eating snacks or something. You resort to self-medication.



Photograph: Charles Benton

**It's interesting that you given the piece a midcentury look, except with a lot of weird shit happening.**

I did a lot of research into period airport lounges, hospital waiting rooms and office lobbies to find things that I could reference in the specific elements I was building. So the furniture is very '60s inspired. I also noticed that a lot of these places have long drapes dividing the space in a way where you can't see what's going on behind them. So I decided to incorporate curtains. I made a receptionist's desk with an open drawer, facing the window, so you can look into it from the street. It's filled with pill packets, half-eaten candy, a bottle of booze, a toothbrush and an oozing tube of toothpaste.

**The typical stuff you'd find in an office desk....**

Yes. They're meant to reflect the things you might busy yourself with while doing something dreary for a long time. They're coping mechanisms. Addiction is also a coping mechanism, and in general, I believe that it's a symptom of oppression, as well. We see that in opioid epidemic, which disproportionately effect people who feel powerless. That sentiment leaves them susceptible to modes of escape.



Photograph: Charles Benton

**How does this relate to being in limbo poitically?**

I think a lot of people feel that they're stuck in a place that limits their opportunities. When Obama was president, there was at least the hope that we'd be able to transcend the ills of the past. Now, people seem to want to turn the clock back to an era where the elites had even more power. It's almost like finding a sense of security in being trapped.

**On a different subject, your style seems to mix Pop Art and Surrealism. Is that a fair description?**

Definitely, though I think my work is more Bauhaus-Pop than Surrealist-Pop. But there's obviously a little Surrealism in there.



Photograph: Courtesy Perrotin New York

**Right. Your objects are strange in the same way that something like the famous “Leg Lamp” from *A Christmas Story* is. Does film, in fact, inspire your objects?**

Maybe subconsciously. I was a film, animation and video major at RISD, but I don't pay that much attention to movies, anymore. I just don't have the time to watch them, I guess.

**Does your work have an autobiographical component?**

I think so. I often think that artists are filters, and that, hopefully, they're engaged enough with their particular moment to filter their experiences into something of their time. I had a professor once say that if you wanted to really understand an author you read all of their books and you start to see them in their work. So I think it would be impossible for me to strip myself out of work.