

REGEN PROJECTS

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Clockwise from left: Walead Beshty with copper sculptures in his Los Angeles studio. A 2013 photogram. Recent creations displayed in a corner of his work space. He is represented in the U.S. by L.A.'s Regen Projects (regenprojects.com) and New York's Petzel Gallery (petzel.com).



CHANCE ENCOUNTERS

Creating compelling sculptures and photographic works, Walead Beshty finds beauty in the accidental and the everyday

Artists like Robert Rauschenberg and John Cage often credited happenstance as a key collaborator. A similar embrace of uncontrolled forces guides Walead Beshty, a Los Angeles talent known for his conceptually oriented, visually engaging sculptures and photographic works. A greater influence, however, may be the logistics of the art world itself—the movements and exchanges that unfold behind the scenes as well as the people and objects that facilitate them.

Beshty's latest show, on view at L.A.'s Regen Projects from February 26 through April 5, includes six polished-copper pieces that he calls "surrogates." Each consists of a ten-foot-tall rectangular sheet

that has been bent diagonally, horizontally, or vertically to make crisp angles. It might sound like a formula for pristine minimalism, but the shiny artworks are meant to showcase the fingerprints of the handlers who install them.

"Copper is a reactive material, so contact with the oils on your skin will accelerate oxidation," Beshty explains. "To conserve these works is to destroy them."

This notion of the ever deteriorating recalls the glass-sculpture series that helped fuel Beshty's meteoric rise over the past decade. Designed to fit snugly into FedEx cartons, the shatterproof pieces were mailed to exhibition sites without protective packing material and then

displayed with all the dazzling cracks and chips they acquired on the journey, along with the cardboard boxes they came in.

"I was interested in making work that physically changed as it circulated through the art world," he says. "What if you could put the entire system into the object?"

His creations are also often gorgeous. Take, for example, the rolls of film Beshty accidentally exposed in an airport X-ray machine but printed anyway, producing vibrant streaks worthy of a fine sunset. His "color curl" photograms with spectral kaleidoscopic bands are equally ravishing—and the likes of mega-collectors Eugenio López Alonso and Michael Ovitiz have taken notice.

"I certainly like it if the work is beautiful, but that's a surplus effect," Beshty says. "I can only think about that after I consider how it's made." —JORI FINKEL