

Simon Dybbroe Møller



Left: Simon Dybbroe Møller, *The Embrace*, 2015, color photograph, dimensions variable. Right (foreground to background): *Shame Shield* (young Cultural producer smoking a cigarette & modern ceramics), 2015; *Shame Shield* (young Cultural producer smoking a cigarette & young Cultural producer smoking a cigarette), 2015; *Shame Shield* (young Cultural producer smoking a cigarette), 2015; all ceramic glaze on Phillip Starck–designed Duravit urinal divider, each 28 x 16 x 3 1/2”.

ON A CROSS-ATLANTIC FLIGHT, I read Asta Olivia Nordenhof describing a woman taking off her top to press her breasts against the tiles of an Italian piazza on a hot, hot summer day, to milk the heat from the granite or marble, and then push her burning hot nipples against the closed eyelids of her lover. It made me want to be that woman, or be that lover. But it doesn't end there. I want to be the sun and the tiles, the skin and the weather, architecture, seeing, and cultural history. In short, I want to inhabit that image, not obsess about terms like fluidity, liquidity, or the virtual. After all, our cities are still built on dirt and piping. Elaborate systems of drains and valves and pipes run through every bit of land we live on, transporting water to and bodily matter fro. When we look at these tubular arrangements today, they seem archaic. Are we really still relying on such dumb mechanisms? Don't they seem weirdly outdated—the weighty architecture of the pre-digital?

Or is it just symptomatic of our leap toward dematerialization that we instinctively think of these physical connections between our bodies and what we used to call nature as relics of an earlier type of civilization, the progress narrative of technology obscuring their undisputable and very contemporary significance?

I like to think that some things invent themselves. Or come into being for reasons so complex or suppressed or unarticulated that it seems better to see these objects as almost entirely independent from us. They have slipped into the world or been hushed into existence. These objects, then, are nonverbal articulations of our collective subconscious. One such cloudy object can be found in men's public restrooms. It is called a partition, a divider, a splash screen, and—with more drama—a shame shield. In the US they are often made of steel—how fitting. In Europe they tend to be ceramic, and therefore when isolated seem like more delicate, worthy objects. Ceramics, as our Sunday museum visits tell us, is what survives from a civilization.

The industrially formed and fired ceramic is cold, seamless, and easy to clean, but its surface is also almost milky in its opacity. It has depth. Working these modern-day fig leaves with a brush has put me in mind of ancient Greek vases, Picasso's summers spent painting ceramics, hygiene, white boards, toilet scribbles, pages of a book. Just saying.

I had a novel experience last week. A John Chamberlain metal cluster sculpture installed on a flexible wooden floor changed my understanding of the character of these classic pieces. I think forever, but what do I know, maybe it is just a passing feeling. The rather unspectacular congenial clatter they produced as I moved around them still resonates in my ears—like when you perform a physical activity you have never performed before and become aware of muscles you didn't even know you had. It feels different to be in your body afterward.

Experiencing the weight of another person's body is one of the most essential, emotional things I can think of. On airplanes it is the overall load that is important, not the heaviness of each individual. Still, even before we board we engage in that activity so specific to flying: the constant shifting around of mass. If our suitcase is too heavy when we weigh in, we move a book to our carry-on. Then we board, and drinks are served and everybody eats, and then lines start forming in front of the toilets, and out-of-sight bodily matter starts sliding through the high-tech tubing of this incredible machine. It all doesn't change anything, though. This is where weight is constant, where dieting won't save us. What a great experimental model it is.

— *As told to Lauren O'Neill-Butler*