



Huma Bhabha
Critics' Picks, Artforum, October 2015
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Although Huma Bhabha's hodgepodge of economic sculptures has earned her a reputation as "the artistic equivalent of a magpie," critics continually scrutinize their knotty surfaces in search of topical significance: race, gender, politics. The Pakistani-born Bhabha, meanwhile, insists that she is primarily a formalist committed to the material challenges of her métier—a claim that her current exhibition of new works substantiates.

Titled "Wages of Fear," the presentation purports to attribute significance to and extract meaning from the detritus of urban industry. Indeed, Bhabha sourced most of her materials—including aluminum and tires—from the land surrounding her Poughkeepsie, New York, studio, and the resulting assemblages may be interpreted both as vestiges of and cautions against waste. The charred, oil-slicked cork figure in *From Beyond* (all works 2015) resembles an apocalyptic totem, while *Host*, with its architectural armature of interlocking Styrofoam chambers and its percolations of dimpled clay, recalls a chemical plant post-meltdown. But these works are also self-reflexive, as their constituent substances were formerly used to build the very landscape they now symbolize and condemn.

Numerous untitled paper compositions are similarly indexical, recording the production of the neighboring sculptures. Placed on the floor while Bhabha worked, the sheets document blooms of residual cork dust she tracked across the brick floor, or flecks of spray paint that missed the mark. Like housepainters' tarps, they bear witness to the struggle between an artist and her tools, facing off in the blank space of a studio.



Huma Bhabha, *Host*, 2015, styrofoam, clay, wood, wire, acrylic paint, aluminum, pine cones, 36 x 21 x 49".