

## An Interview with Exhibiting Artist Denise Treizman

**Let's start with the title—*Hard Yes, Soft Excess* is such an evocative phrase. What does it mean to you, and how did it shape the direction of this exhibition?**

The title came after a lot of back-and-forth brainstorming. Like most of my titles, it landed through play. I was drawn to its confident rhythm and the wink of humor embedded in it. *Hard Yes, Soft Excess* holds a kind of tension that mirrors what's happening in the work—materials that might initially read as industrial or domestic, like tires, balloons, or mattress foam, but reveal themselves to be squishy, bendy, almost too soft once you engage with them.

I'm interested in giving these overlooked or familiar objects a new context—one where their softness isn't hidden or incidental, but becomes the point. The “hard yes” signals an unapologetic embrace of materiality, of play, and of excess.

**Your work balances playfulness with rigor. What are you drawn to when you begin creating—color, form, material, emotion?**

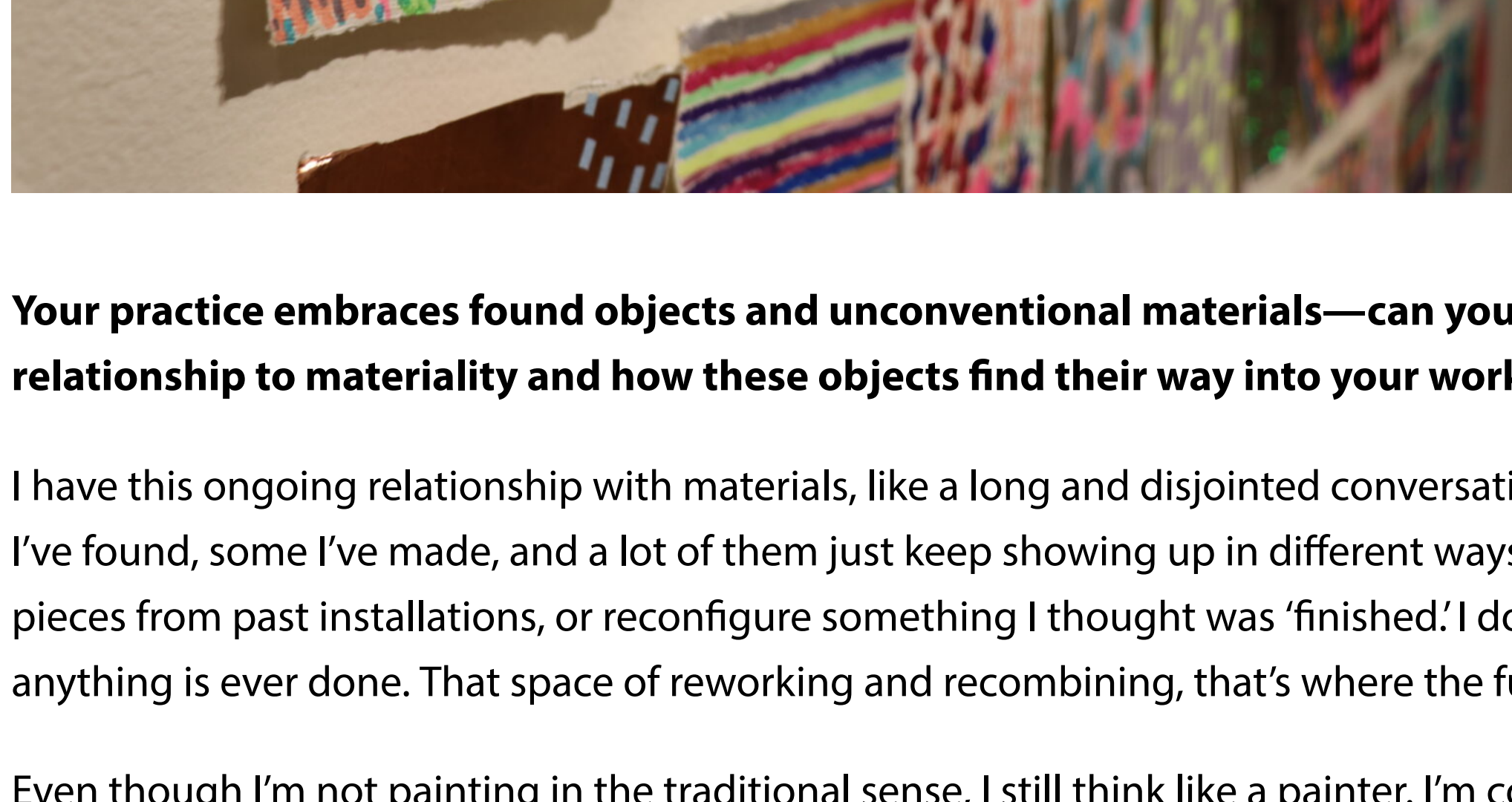
Everything is created in a very intuitive and open-ended way. I usually don't know how or when things will end. There's no fixed structure or method, but I'd say it almost always begins with the material and whatever I have at hand. That's actually why it's so hard for me to get rid of things—I need to see them, have them around me. Sometimes just having something in front of me is what sparks the idea, or helps me figure out where it belongs in a piece.

That approach carries through everything I make—from large, site-specific installations where I'm combining different materials, to weaving, where I get lost in the process of building patterns on the loom, or even in mark-making when I'm working on paper. It always starts with the material and grows from there.

**Can you share a memory or moment that sparked your path as an artist? Was there a *hard yes* moment that brought you here?**

I think the closest thing to a ‘hard yes’ moment for me was the summer I spent in New York in 2010, before I eventually moved there for grad school. Before that, I was mostly painting—colorful, abstract stuff... honestly, I wasn't totally sure what I was doing or where it was going.

That summer changed everything. Being in the city, walking around, seeing what people threw out, noticing textures, materials, leftovers—I started to understand that art didn't have to live on a canvas. It could be anything. My relationship to objects completely shifted. I began making temporary street interventions, bringing found objects into my studio. I started thinking differently about what I could use, what had value, and how art could exist in the world. At the time, I didn't totally understand where it was leading, but it felt right, so I just kept rolling with it. That shift pretty much set the tone for how I work now.



**Your practice embraces found objects and unconventional materials—can you talk about your relationship to materiality and how these objects find their way into your work?**

I have this ongoing relationship with materials, like a long and disjointed conversation. Some are things I've found, some I've made, and a lot of them just keep showing up in different ways over time. I'll reuse pieces from past installations, or reconfigure something I thought was ‘finished.’ I don't really believe anything is ever done. That space of reworking and recombining, that's where the fun is for me.

Even though I'm not painting in the traditional sense, I still think like a painter. I'm constantly making decisions about color, texture, layering, and composition. But instead of paint, I'm using objects. My gestures are made through how I hang a mesh, drape a fabric, or balance something unexpected in space. It's really about building visual relationships, letting things play off each other, collide, or sit awkwardly together. That's where meaning starts to form for me: not in the object itself, but in how it connects with everything else around it.

**How much of your process is planned versus improvised? Do you ever surprise yourself with where a piece ends up?**

I never really start with a fixed idea, it's more like a dialogue with the material. I'm drawn to the discarded, the overlooked, the absurdly colorful... stuff that doesn't pretend to be polished or perfect.

Chance plays a significant role. Like many artists, I make discoveries along the way. The challenge for me is knowing when to stop. I definitely feel that the more I've worked, the easier it is for me to identify when a piece is done. But then there is always the question, if I had more time or more materials, could I keep working on it? And would it make the work any better? And there is no answer for that. It would be a different piece..

I'm not interested in controlling every element; I want the work to surprise me, to fight back a little. It's a practice of letting go..of allowing humor, awkwardness, and contradiction to live side by side.

**Color and texture play such a big role in your installations. How do you think about those elements when you're building a piece?**

Decisions on color and texture are usually made on the go. I'm constantly finding materials, and usually it's the color or the texture that makes me pick something up or purchase in the first place. A neon plastic mesh, a fuzzy scrap of fabric, a squishy toy..they already have a presence before I do anything to or with them.

When I'm building an installation, like I said before, the approach is very much painterly. Bright colors might clash or vibrate next to something dull or soft, and that tension is what excites me. It's never just visual—it's tactile, bodily. I want people to feel like they could touch it, or that it might even touch them back.

I trust my instincts.. If something makes me slightly uncomfortable, or laugh, or even question what I'm looking at, that's usually a good sign.

What's the oddest or most unexpected material you've ever worked with—and did it make the final cut?

That's an interesting question, and honestly, I had to scroll through my own website to remember. When I lived in New York, I was always picking up things off the street—so many found objects that nothing really felt too odd at the time. But then I came across a piece called *Snow Cake*, and I realized, yeah, that's probably the most unexpected material I've worked with.

It's a video piece where I made a cake out of dirty NYC sidewalk snow, stuck candles in it, and then melted the whole thing with a hair dryer. In my mind, it was like a race between the snow and the candles. What would disappear first? In the end, all that's left is wax and a black dirt stain on the floor.

It was messy, temporary, and kind of ridiculous, but I showed it during open studios, and it ended up being my first (and so far only) video work. That piece really captured something I still care about: impermanence, play, and the quiet drama of everyday materials.

**There's a sense of movement and tension in your installations—both structural and emotional. What conversations or ideas are you hoping to invite viewers into?**

I think the movement and tension come from how the materials are pushed into a relationship with each other. There's a sense that things might fall, or are holding themselves together just barely. That physical precariousness reflects a kind of emotional state too..like being in between things, adapting, holding multiple contradictions at once.

I'm not trying to tell people what to think, but I do hope the work invites them into a kind of open-ended space—where absurdity and beauty can coexist, where softness can be powerful, and where the overlooked becomes something worth paying attention to.

There's also humor and awkwardness in the work, and I think those feelings can create connections. I want viewers to feel like they're part of the installation—not just observing it, but sensing it, reacting to it, wanting to touch it, or maybe even questioning how it holds together..

**Humor, excess, softness, disruption... your work holds many dualities. Do you think of your practice as a kind of visual balancing act?**

Interesting, I hadn't thought of it that way..but why not! It could be a balancing act, but not one that's trying to resolve anything. I'm more interested in letting opposites sit next to each other—softness and weight, humor and discomfort, chaos and control. The tension between those things creates energy in the work.

**How do you hope people *feel* when they step into this exhibition? Is there an emotional response you're aiming for?**

I hope people feel a little disoriented in a good way—like they're not quite sure what they've walked into, but they want to stay with it. I want the space to feel alive, full of contradictions: funny but tender, chaotic but intentional, playful but maybe also a little unsettling.

I'm not aiming for one specific emotional response. I'm more interested in creating a space where people can bring their own associations—where they can slow down, get curious, or even feel a bit off-balance. If someone walks away feeling surprised, or like they've seen something ordinary in a totally new way, that's a win for me.

There's also an invitation to not take things too seriously—to find pleasure in weird textures, unexpected color combinations, or in the way an object leans or almost falls. If the work can create a moment of connection, laughter, or even just pause, then it's doing what I hoped.

You've lived and worked in different parts of the world—how has your background and movement across places shaped your practice?

Born and raised in Chile, I grew up visiting my grandparents in Miami, where I developed a fascination with shiny materials, neon tape, lights, and similar elements. When I moved to the U.S. in 2010, I felt a sense of relief at having unlimited access to these materials—something I couldn't fully enjoy as a child, when I'd bring them back from trips but hesitate to use them.

New York, however, had the most profound influence on me. I was struck by the sheer volume of things people discarded, by the piles of trash bags and objects left casually on sidewalks. In Chile, we don't discard things like that. We either find someone who wants them or keep them, but we don't leave them in the street to become part of the landscape. My time in New York, with its abundance of discarded objects and walkable streets, was crucial in shaping my artistic language.

Now, living in Miami, I'm less inclined to stop my car and pick things up. It feels different here, maybe less authentic because I am not walking? I can't put it into words but it has a different “taste” for me...

**What are you curious about or exploring in the studio right now? Any new materials, ideas, or directions you're leaning into?**

Right now, I'm exploring wire mesh, both in installations and as wall pieces, looking at how to bring in more interactive components that engage the community. I want to create spaces where viewers can not only observe the work but also physically engage with it. Maybe by touching, moving, or altering certain elements. There's something really powerful about inviting people into the process, letting them be a part of the work itself. I'm experimenting with ways to keep the material's spontaneity and rawness while offering an experience that feels open and participatory.

**Do you have a dream project or setting you'd love to work in one day?**

In general, it's really important for me to keep expanding my career in institutional spaces. These environments give me the opportunity to push my work further, reaching wider audiences and experimenting with scale and context in ways that I can't always do in smaller venues.

A lot of the time, after I finish an installation, I immediately start dreaming about what it would be like at a much larger scale.. From this show, for example, I'd love to see the tire piece blown up tenfold, something like a massive 3D mural that you're confronted with.

**When you're not in the studio, what brings you joy or fuels your creativity in unexpected ways?**

I don't have one specific thing that fuels my creativity—it's more about being open to the little moments in life. It could be something as simple as a walk through the city, seeing a strange combination of textures, or just observing how light hits an object. I think my creativity is fueled by paying attention to the world around me and being open to whatever unexpected sparks come from daily life.

