

Robert Burnier's Objects of Allure at Andrew Rafacz Gallery

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BY CURTIS ANTHONY BOZIF | OCTOBER 7, 2025



Robert Burnier, "Horuso II," 2022, acrylic on aluminum, 28" x 29" x 2" / Photo: Andrew Rafacz Gallery

Not quite painting, and not quite sculpture, the work Robert Burnier has made over the past decade—and for which he’s become well known—fits easily within the category of “specific objects,” a term the artist and critic Donald Judd used most famously in his 1964 essay of the same name to describe art that is three-dimensional; that asserts one form over relational parts; that lacks what is typically thought of as composition; that is often made of non-traditional materials and

Specifically, Burnier’s objects are aluminum sheets upon which he has performed a variety of actions. You can check off “to crease” and “to crumple,” among others, on Richard Serra’s “Verb List.” These actions are defined by a doubling back that creates innumerable involute forms, a multiplicity of pocket-like interiors. The objects feel both voluminous and laceratingly thin. They relate somewhat to Dorothea Rockburne’s folded canvases, the hinged pieces of Lygia Clark and, most obviously, the twisted and crushed automotive scrap metal sculptures of John Chamberlain. (I can’t decide if these references, reaching back some sixty years, say more about the artist, your author, or contemporary art as such.)



In hues often sonorous and regal, Burnier airbrushes his aluminum after all the bending. He is a supreme colorist, making wavelengths buzz by deftly deploying close tones, tints and shades in such proximity. His combinations are rarely obvious; his gamut, deeper and wider than most. With a finish so flat they appear as swaddles of velour or velveteen, they hold light, the medium of vision, so that our eyes remain gripped to their surfaces. A curve captivates all the more when, as we follow it, it turns away to become a contour, falls into shadow, beckons our pursuit below a stretch of material, or plunges deep into a fold. Seductive veneers, elusive insides, the work calls to mind the philosopher Graham Harman, who, in formulating his object-oriented ontology, describes in “Guerrilla Metaphysics: Phenomenology and the Carpentry of Things,” how objects “withdraw” behind their sensual qualities and, concealing interior depths that we cannot access, enchant with exterior “notes” so charismatic they become objects onto themselves—the sparkles of a glistening body of water, the fractal spiral of a seashell—how they “allure.” The way Burnier’s art invites us to attend with greater sensitivity to form becomes salient when seen against the backdrop of the increasingly digitalized—that is to say, dematerialized—neo-feudal slopscape we now inhabit. Yet the work he has chosen to show in the small side gallery at [Andrew Rafacz](#) includes but one of these alluring objects, accompanied by three drawings.



Graphite and colored pencil on folded paper, replete with dog-ears and envelopes, describes the drawings, which are informed by Burnier's recent travels and were, as I understand it, mostly executed abroad; his experiences are apparently expressed in the titles and color choices. They're geometric in a way the wall-mounted objects are not, or rather, the geometry is rectilinear and more controlled, and this is a disappointment. Until seeing these, I hadn't appreciated just how important chaos, inherent to the crinkle, is to Burnier's work; the extent to which the material, while even in his hands, shapes itself. Behind layers and on the reverse side of translucent gampi paper, color is sometimes visible. This is most noticeable in the lower right-hand corner of "The Snowfall of 5 August 352 AD," where polygons of pale rose and dandelion cross to make one of marigold. I would like to have seen more of this filtering effect, as well as a closer look at how the crease can function as a line. I understand an artist's desire to incorporate works on paper into an already rich practice, but these drawings ultimately feel underdeveloped. Being the first time the artist has exhibited drawings, they probably are.



Robert Burnier, "Silvermine," 2025, colored pencil and graphite on gampi paper, 13.5" x 10.5"/Photo: Andrew Rafacz Gallery

"Horuso II" is four streamer-thick strips of aluminum joined at the ends by knotty twists to make a square hung like a diamond. In the usual matte: green gold, cerulean blue, titan green pale and cobalt green. On its back is a cumbersome armature that hinders what otherwise I'd call its grace. The diamond shape is less common in the artist's oeuvre, but still familiar. Over the past ten years, Burnier's work has remained remarkably consistent in its engagement with form, texture, mass,

volume, proportions and scale. But where consistency in the beginning can appear deliberate, after a while it can begin to seem unconsidered. Rather than embrace its surroundings by literally framing a portion of the wall, “Horuso II” looks strangely diminished if not overwhelmed by it. It pleases me to imagine a larger version—double, triple its size—commanding the wall and our attention. Implying the other objects are closed, Burnier refers to the diamonds as “open.” Open as in unfolding, an openness and opening—may he pass through it to discover a dimension of possibilities yet unseen, yet unfelt.

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Burnier-who last month was named to Newcit 's Art 50, 2025 list (he was also named to Newcit 's Art 50, 2023 list)-continues to enjoy a good deal of success. After mounting his first solo exhibition at London's Corvi-Mora gallery last year, his work was included in group shows at the Schneider Museum of Art in Washington State and the Astrup Fearnley Museum in Oslo, Norway. In June he held a residency with Blank Projects in Cape Town, South Africa, where he has also shown, and in July he was awarded a Pollock-Krasner Foundation grant.

Robert Burnier's *"Thumb Piano"* is on view at Andrew Rafacz, 1749 West Chicago, through November 1.