

Brunch

— with —

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David Rodriguez Caballero

Artist, New York



"It changes a lot when you sand. If you fold, the light will act very very differently. That's a very important part of the work. It is like building with the light, the light being material for the painter, like oil. It's like the great architects, they build the houses with shadow, too. That's the idea."

Guest: [David Rodriguez Caballero](#), Artist

Location: Studio of David Rodriguez Caballero, New York

Photography: [Kimisa H.](#)

Words: [Daisy Jing](#)

Special thanks: Matthew Lodes





So you just came back from Spain?

Yes, I just came back from Spain. I had two big shows there. One had almost 100 pieces with outdoor sculptures between two old Renaissance buildings in a marvelous Renaissance walled garden. It's a dialogue between antiquity and modern: heritage and contemporary Art.

I read that each piece of the work you do, it takes hundreds of hours.

Yes, it takes a lot. It consists of work in groups. First I do drawing, then I make a three-dimensional model on a reduced scale. After that, I'm ready to do the piece in its actual scale and material: aluminum, copper or brass.

You divide your time between New York and Madrid, and a lot of the production is done in Spain?

Yes, most of the production is done in Spain. There I have a team that knows how to work and has the information to do it the right way. The process takes a long time and you have to be very careful. They know how to do it. Here in New York, I spend two months thinking and developing new ideas and then go to Spain for around two or three weeks in a warehouse in Madrid and finish the work there.

The whole thing is quite crafty.

Yes.

The angles are different, and then the light is different.

Yes, it changes a lot. Because of the light, you can get a shadow that's black and you can have it almost white, it's the same material. It is the idea of the tone in it, not color. Build with the shade as what those architects did in Ancient Greece.

Then if the setting in the gallery space is different, your work will feel differently, too.

Yes.





What have you been working on lately?

I just finished 10 pieces of vinyl that I took with me to Spain to get framed. I am trying to see how it works on the paper. When I have the samples, I can start with the big ones. It's like building a painting.

You cut the stripes in a very precise way.

It's precise, but it's not perfect. That's why I like working with the vinyl. Imperfection brings value to the work and makes it all the more human.

It gets intense.

Intense, yes. It reflects the light and it sets the tone. With aluminum, you sand it, you take off material, in this case, with vinyl, you add material. But it's the same process because it's something to do with the light.

It is more and more like lacquer.

Yes, yes, the lacquer.

Do you usually work by yourself?

I used to have two assistants here in New York. It depends on the moment of the process. In Spain, I have three assistants and two teams of 5 people for the outdoor sculptures.

So aluminum is the material that you started working with. Why?

Because I love it. I fell in love with it. There was no rational reason.

It's a very hard material to work with.

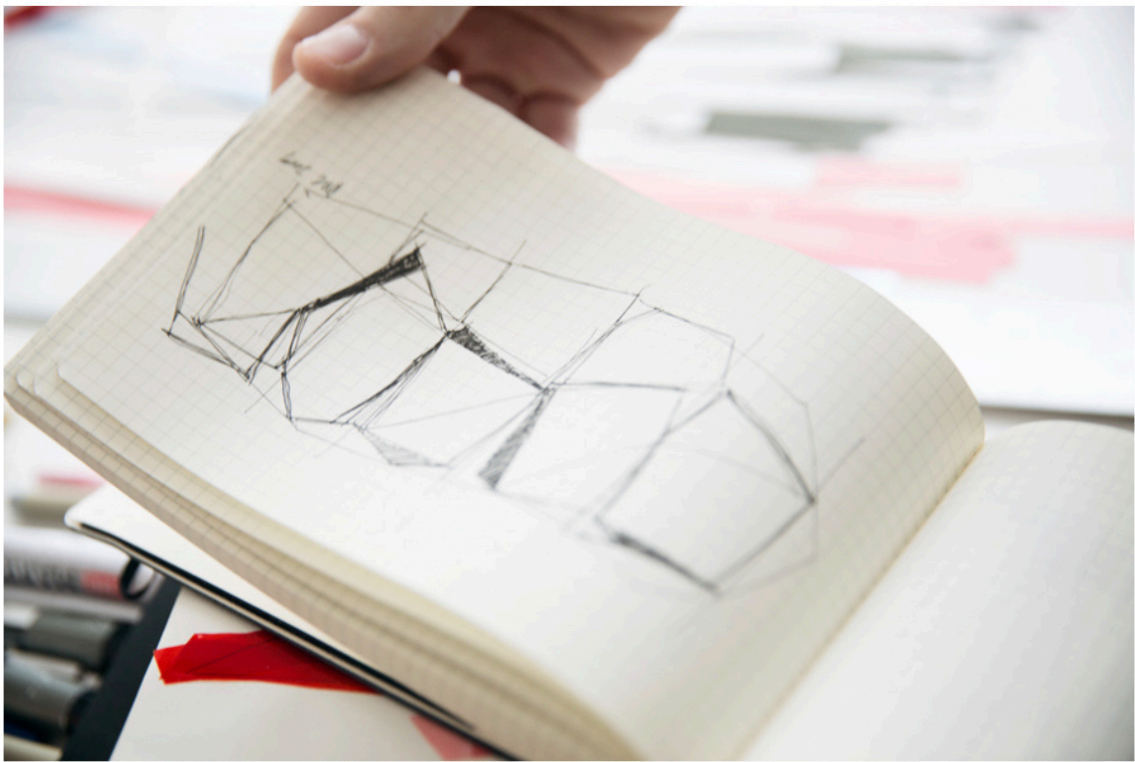
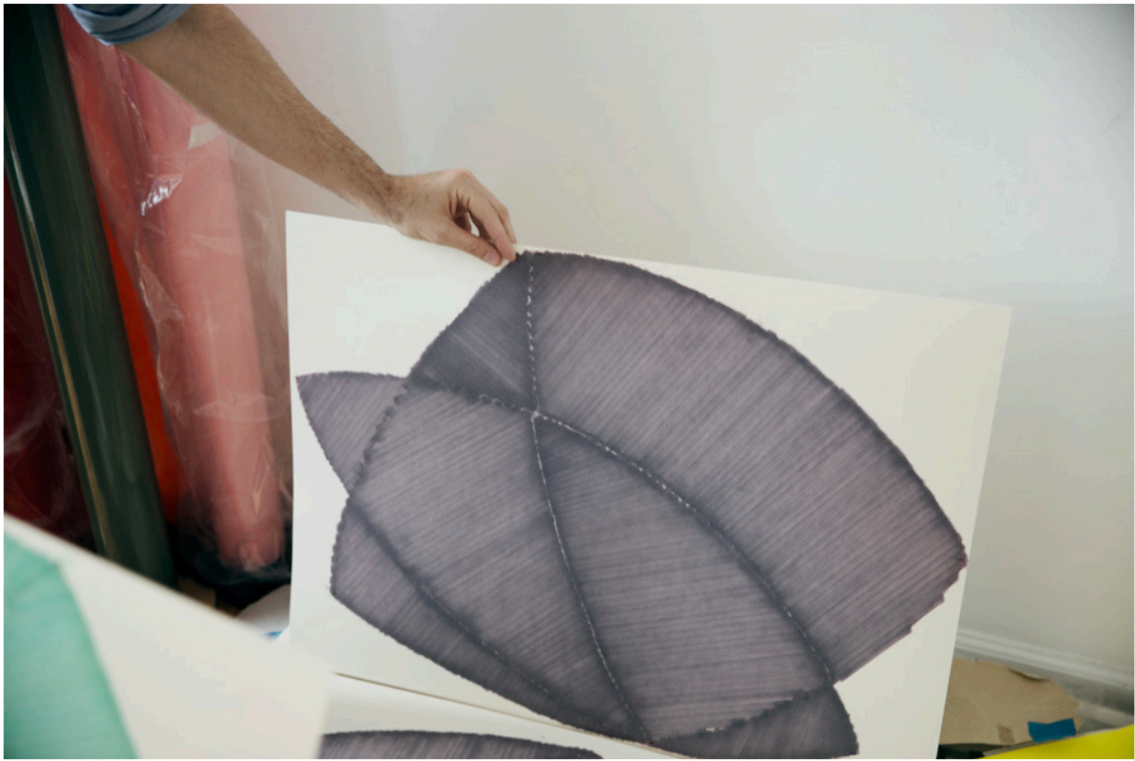
Yes, you have to learn, you have to sand, you have to understand the material. Often the material reacts unexpectedly, and that opens new doors for future works and ideas.

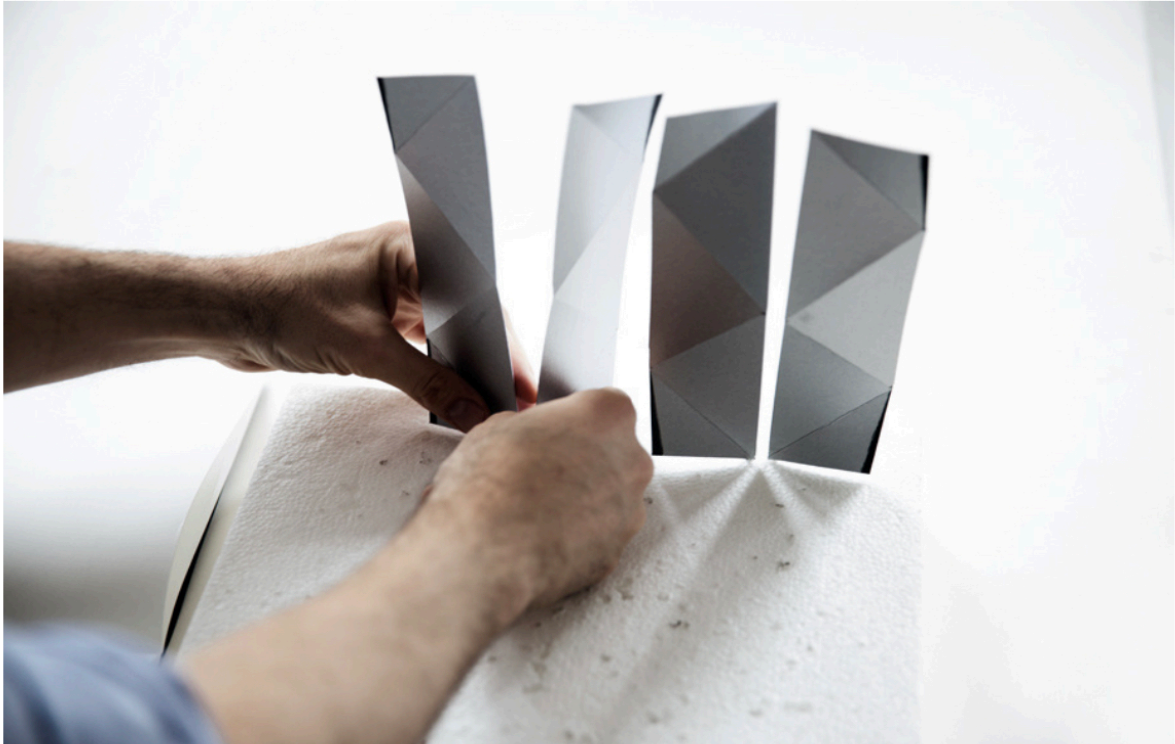
The way it takes in the light is quite different.

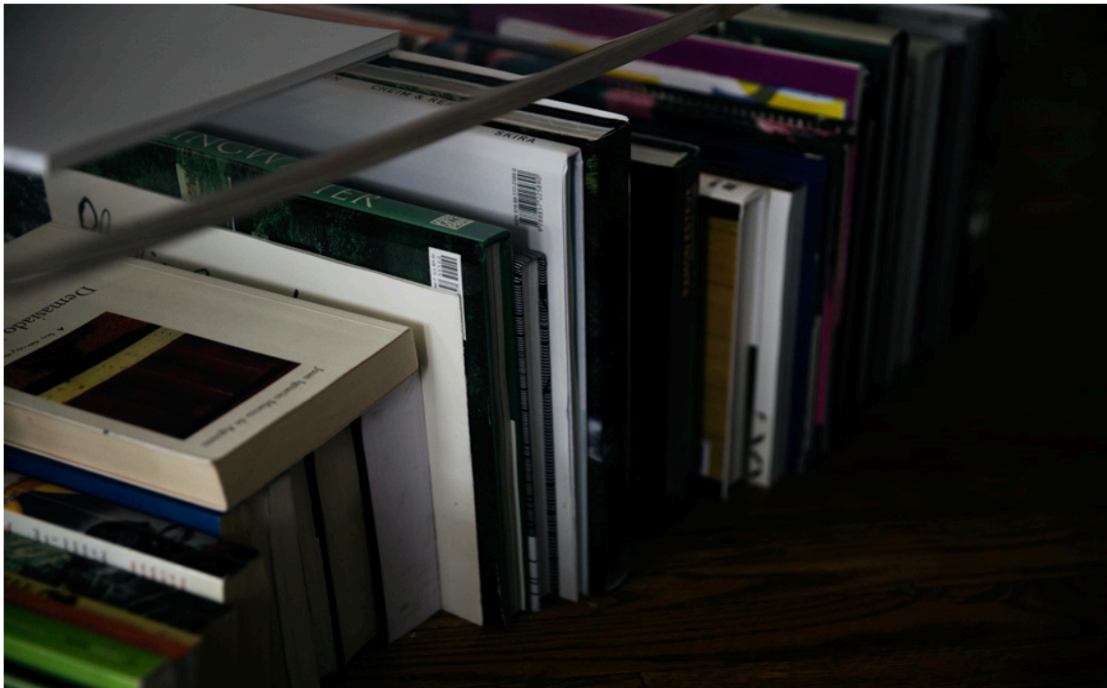
Yes.

Is it because of the angles that were cut, or the surface treatment? Which one makes a bigger difference?

It changes a lot when you sand. If you fold, the light will act very very differently. That's a very important part of the work. It is like building with the light, the light being material for the painter, like oil. It's like the great architects, they build the houses with shadow, too. That's the idea.







Are you always interested in painting and sculpture?

Yes. I started as a painter, making geometric abstraction oil paintings on canvas. In 1998, I began to include materials such as metal in order to talk about specific concepts of painting. Later when I took on making the sculptures, I started to fold and to include the curve (organic element) in the pieces. First I did wall sculptures and then free-standing sculptures.

How did you go from working with aluminum to brass and now to vinyl?

At first, I started with aluminum. I was trying to fold aluminum but I could not. That was a long time ago. Then I folded the paper and started to develop a kind of abstract origami.

While I was working with the paper, the paper was almost transparent, so I put some vinyl there to add some color. When I have the vinyl stripes on the table, I was like, wow, this is so interesting! So I started working with vinyl. I use the same color, or kind of same color for the base, same color but with different tones.

You are creating your own color.

Yes, that's it.

That seems like a natural position.

Yes. Vinyl is a "retinal" exercise, a pictorial experience that constantly reminds me where I came from: the painting, my origin.





"Were it not for shadows, there would be no beauty." - Jun'ichirō Tanizaki

You've cited "In Praise of Shadows" by Jun'ichirō Tanizaki as one of your greatest inspirations. Are there any other big influences on your work?

Yukio Mishima was a great influence on my start as an artist. SANAA is a source of inspiration. Norman Foster also.

What about influences from working and living in New York?

Many inputs that one receives in this city and therefore many influences. There have been three important influences for me: Jazz, skyscrapers and architecture of the city, and my experience with African iconography through the MET.

Do you listen to music a lot, and when you are working?

I love music. I love jazz. I love classic music. Flamenco, too. But when I work, I try not to listen to music because I lose my focus.

Do you have a naming system for your pieces?

Just the date when I finish. I was naming them "untitled" in the beginning, but there are so many!