



Clay's Sweet Symphony

2014 Scripps College
70th Ceramics Annual

A Review by Judy Seckler

THE SCRIPPS COLLEGE CERAMICS ANNUAL HAS LONG set a precedent of featuring emerging and prominent artists at its yearly event, and rarely disappoints. For this exhibition, co-curators Kirk Delman and Mary McNaughton invited curators of previous exhibitions to be part of the conversation by showing their own work. A great part of the discourse was reflected in clay's ongoing changing identity. The 2014 Scripps College 70th Ceramics Annual held at the Ruth Chandler Williamson Gallery at Scripps College in Claremont, California, US from



25 January to 6 April 2014, was, at times, interactive, architectural, sculptural, minimalist, naturalistic, fooled the eye and also bowed to tradition.

Artists included Tim Berg and Rebekah Myers, Kris Cox, Adam Davis, David Furman, Phyllis Green, Wayne Higby, Douglas Humble, Karen Koblitz, Cindy Kolodziejski, William Manker, Tony Marsh, Nobuho Nagasawa, Richard Petterson, Steven Portigal, Kathleen Royster, Adrian Saxe, Virginia Scotchie, Nancy Selvin, and Paul Soldner. The sophistication and inventiveness of the work



Facing page, left: Adam Davis. *Davis Pigeon [Untitled (Dyads)]*. 2013. Clay, paint, cement, rope, string, anchor shackles and faux taxidermy. Dimensions vary. Photo by Adam Davis.

Facing page, right: Kris Cox. *Bali 1*. 2012. Pigmented wood putty, acrylic, asphalt emulsion, doll, fabric, wood, beeswax and clay on wood panel. 60 x 20 x 12 in. Above: Phyllis Green. *Odd Old Things*. 2009–2013.

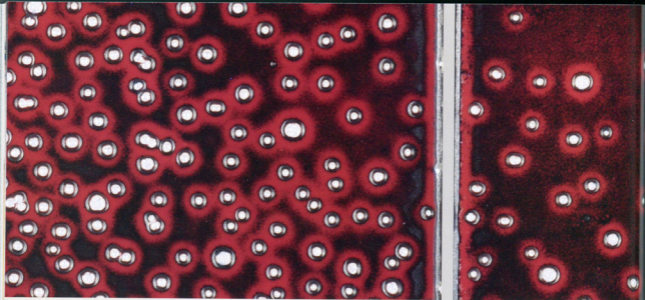
Ceramic, fibre and beeswax. Dimensions vary. Photo by Ave Pildas. Left: Karen Koblitz. *Tattoo Series: Abilova's Swallow-Inshallah*. 2009. Ceramic and graphite on paper. 36 x 25.5 x 14 in.



pushed boundaries in every direction.

Several sculptures including Adam Davis' *Davis Pigeon* and Kris Cox's *Bali 1* used mixed media to enhance or disguise ceramics, depending on one's interpretation. In Davis' sculpture, a pigeon sat on a massive sphere bound and tethered to Earth by rope. Additionally, Davis positioned an eagle and a raven on track lighting, hanging from the gallery ceiling. Freedom of flying contrasted with the weight of the world, while the choice of a pigeon instead of a more exotic species suggested a bit of satirical commentary.

In contrast, *Bali 1* was a texture trove of exotic elements. Cox collaged a ceramic animal horn, paintbrush tips, fabric, metal chain and wood to an anthropomorphic conclusion. Elements of nature and artifice collided in a dynamic, tactile setting that evoked multiple primitive meanings. Phyllis Green's *Odd Old Things* went one step further, creating an assemblage of footed but headless sculptures, sprouting assorted candles. Is shock or amusement an appropriate response? The stout figurines were both disturbing for their lack of facial features, yet possessed a jaunty spirit augmented by tutus made of tulle. For a public that embraces the different and unknown,



baby faces, silhouettes and assorted framed nipples, breasts and pubic hair. These haunting, symbolic juxtapositions, so rich in detail, transported the viewer into an alternate, fantasy-filled universe with erotic overtones.

Another section of the gallery was devoted to practitioners of *trompe l'oeil*. In David Furman's *Walnuts* and *Jake's Tools*, the artist, in all his obsessive-compulsive glory, recreated a plate of nuts. The colours and textures were so authentic that the sculpture beckoned the public to grab the metallic nutcracker for a snack. Similarly, rusty construction tools resting in a bucket covered in rivulets of dried paint were correct down to the last rivet and thread. Using a different approach, Douglas Humble created



a series of utilitarian coffee mugs, *Humble Cup #2a*, randomly smashed together as if by an earthquake. Shards sliced through the air at odd angles giving the work its vibrant appeal. Several other artists used architectural reference points in their work. Wayne Higby's appropriately titled *Fizz Detail 2* was a series of burgundy-hued panels, expertly capturing an effervescent display of colour and texture. His ceramic cosmos ran the gamut from calm to frenetic.

In Adrian Saxe's *Untitled Antelope Jar (Blue on Blue)*, the artist offset the surface of an appealing blue jar with pieces of volcanic rock and anchored the work to a volcanic base. A delicate figure of an antelope guarded the jar's lid, and embellishments in the shape of clock fly wheels rested on either side of the animal. The sculpture's collage elements complemented each other although the mystery is in how Saxe made it work. Although many more pieces deserved discussion, Tim Berg & Rebekah Myers' *A Thing of the Past 1* could be viewed as the exhibition's *pièce de résistance*. Part designer furniture, part prehistoric fossil, the sculpture was inset with a glass-topped diorama, containing a volcano surrounded by small black and white dinosaurs. The glossy black ambiguous fossil dominated the table's wood grain, creating an edgy alliance. After admiring the polished surfaces, hands found their way to control buttons that activated a volcano, setting off an eruption with

Above: Tim Berg and Rebekah Myers. *A Thing of the Past*. 2013. Custom walnut table, epoxy coated foam, automotive urethane, ceramic, glass electronics and hardware. 66 x 70 x 70 in.

Photo by Susan Einstein.

Facing page, top: Wayne Higby. *Fizz*. 2013. Stoneware tile with earthenware glaze. 48 x 84 x 1.5 in. Photo by Lee Somers. Facing page, left centre: David Furman. *Walnut Still Life with Purple Tray*. 2013. Ceramic, underglaze, glaze and lustre.

3 x 7.25 x 7.25 in. Photo by David Furman.

Facing page, below left: Douglas Humble. *Humble Cups 2*. 2013. Porcelain. 9 x 10 x 6 in.

Facing page, right: Adrian Saxe. *Untitled Antelope Jar (Blue on Blue)*. 1985–1986. Porcelain, stoneware, raku and metallic lustres. 22.12 x 12.5 x 9 in. Photo by Anthony Cuiña.

smoke. For purists, the interactive component might seem more spectacle than substance, however, in the process the artists stripped away expectations to include a welcome element of surprise.

The 45 works represented demonstrate that the *Scrapps 70th Ceramics Annual* continues its reputation as a laboratory of innovation. Artists drew upon emotional, spiritual, social and political concerns to create powerful works of drama and mystery that will surely resonate for years to come.

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