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Discussion: Trans-Pacific Dialogue

Mindy Solomon, Glenn Barkley, Andrew Casto, Virginia Leonard, David Hicks, King Houndekpinkou



Introduction

The currents that guide the diversity of contemporary ceramic practice are myriad, complex and global. This panel, and accompanying exhibition, advocate that curatorial practice aiming to engage these diverse legacies consider contextual threads that vary widely in geographic provenance. Though our origins are thousands of miles apart, we find unity in our mark making, color usage, and stylistic associations. We speak the universal languages of abstraction, accumulation, and ornamentation, and we push to create work that oozes life into the exhibition space. These efforts link our ceramic legacies to contemporary pop culture, music, and spiritually; to experiences of pain and sadness, and to forces of reconciliation and growth, all while recognizing and cultivating the sublime in the imperfect. While our conceptual frameworks vary, our visual tendencies collide and reverberate with commonality.

Glenn Barkley

Most of my work is a response to the things around me, to popular song, the garden, conversations I have with people about art and the Internet.

When I am in the studio making things and really doing it I am thinking about things constantly.

Some parts of making my work are incredibly boring and monotonous but I still love it. Putting all those holes or sticking slip into the spaces left by the tools when I made them has its own kind of repetitious Zen state. I used to say be the slump but as I've kept making things now my ambition and abilities are starting to coalesce. Which is a bit of a shame really. I might start to take up throwing seriously.

Andrew Casto

"Casto's forms are loosely structured branches that seem to divide infinitely, rising and gracefully melting into their own formations. Casto builds strata with soft hues and flecks of gold that flow over mounds of fluid slip and glaze. He extracts a visual language from geological processes like erosion, linking these dynamic changes to the repercussions of stress and how it shapes us physically, mentally and emotionally. Creating a tempo with his work, Casto repeats and evolves each ceramic form, relating these transformations to our fluctuating surroundings."

Press release by Aimee Odum for Vibrant Things, Andrew Casto, Evan D'Orazio, Hilary Harnischfeger at Greenwich House Pottery, October/November, 2017, New York City.

David Hicks

Hicks states that he is just beginning to understand the attraction he has to the agricultural. The shapes and themes he references can be found in the fields surrounding his home. Forms that could be hanging from trees, buried in the dirt or rusting in the shed, find their way into his work. He has a fundamental understanding of these organic and sometimes mechanical forms. They seem to be autobiographical and they explain the natural processes of agricultural cycles. In the agricultural world, there are cycles that feel like allegorical references to a human struggle, a struggle that starts with fertilization, moves through growth, and finally ends in decay. This process is raw and connected to his understanding of self.



KING HOUNDEKPIKOU 1 *Melting Pot: Tears of Gold on the Altar* (8"x9.8") black stoneware from Lanzarote (Spain), clay from Sè (Benin), red stoneware from Westerwald (Germany), gold luster, 2018 VIRGINIA LEONARD 2 *This Is My Story* (16"x16"x23") raku and paper clay, stain, lustre, decal and resin, 2018 photo by Oliver King 3 *Last Night With God, Queens Mary's, 1986* (16.5"x15.3") Raku Clay, Stain, and Resin, 2017, photo by Oliver King GLENN BARKLEY 4 *All Things Must Pass* (12"x15"x31.5") ceramic, 2017 DAVID HICKS 5 *Blue Clippings* (19"x11"x30") ceramic, rope, and metal, 2017 ANDREW CASTO 6 *Assemblage 185* (7"x7"x14.5") porcelain and 18k gold lusters, 2018



King Houndekpinkou

I was born in France to Beninese parents and grew up in the Parisian suburbs where people come from all over the world, especially from France's ex-colonies of North and sub-Saharan Africa. Spending my childhood in this melting pot of different cultures was a gift from France. Though things are changing for the better, the French system remains elitist and it is difficult to climb the social ladder when you are part of those minorities. However, I believe this environment has influenced my vision of a borderless practice of ceramics as I mix clays from various locations to offer a different perspective on cross-cultural dialogue.

Besides what I produce in the studio, I also carry out a life-long project called "Terres Jumelles" (or "Twin Soils" in English). It consists in creating sister-cities between the pottery cities of Benin (West Africa) and Japan. These unions are materialised by symbolic works made out of the mixture of clays from both countries. This is my way to express a strong belief of mine: ceramics has the power to "melt" borders and foster cross-cultural dialogue through the clay, a universal material.

When it comes to the aesthetics of my works, I look for disfigured lines and lively surfaces caused by heavy clay and glaze textures. These pieces look as if they have been plunged into acid, as if decomposing before your eyes. Creating these elusive surfaces often requires multiple firings (up to 8 sometimes) and litres of glazes.

Could this suggest the transforming world of ceramics, which is increasingly being accepted by the contemporary art world with a big "A"? Expressive, crude and political clay works are, in my opinion, adding tremendously to this debate.

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Virginia Leonard

The highly individual and evocative ceramics of Auckland artist Virginia Leonard are honest self-portraits that address her bodily scarring and experiences of chronic pain, injuries obtained in a serious motorbike accident in London in 1986. This event left Leonard hospitalized for two years and "changed and formed" the artist, which she recounts as having both a negative and positive impact. Confronting these issues, Leonard's wonderfully experimental ceramic practice employs the flesh-like materiality and tactility of the medium, and the physical presence of the sculptural form, to forge a personal material vocabulary for her body's scars and pain. As Leonard states, "chronic pain has no biological value. Modern medicine cannot reliably treat chronic pain. Chronic pain lacks both language and voice, the language of my clay making is my attempt to rid my body of trauma and reduce my level of chronic pain." The results are unique, emotive; visually arresting ceramic works that stand like materialized acts of internal speech and sensation bursting forward in the fluidity and sloppiness of clay.

Leonard continues to pursue the narrative of explosive surface and towering forms. Rich gold metallic glaze meshes with oozing red and threads of pink and white. Vein-like, pulsating and wholly visceral. Small diminutive sculptures provide a visual foil as they skew playful and inviting. The element of whimsy provides a sense of hopefulness. Leonard's recent ceramic works evolve from a process of stacking, in which the artist piles random individual pieces on top of one another, a methodology she refers to as "building precarious towers resembling my human form". Important to the development of the work's stature is not only that it's life-size but also that it's confronting and that it's positioned at eye level with the audience. Also as Leonard adds, "layering the work and stacking the work also references surgery and the ability to hide my bodily scarring. The more I assemble the more there is to look at which takes the viewer's eye away from the ugly bits."

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Mindy Solomon has dedicated her life to the visual arts as a practicing artist, educator, advocate, and collector. She received her Bachelors and Masters degrees in Studio Art and Art Education from Case Western Reserve University and the Cleveland Institute of Art, with additional course work at Ursuline College in Ohio in Art Therapy, Lacoste School of the Arts in Lacoste, France, and the Tyler School of the Arts in Philadelphia. Mindy lives in Miami with her husband of 32 years, Michael, and is the proud mother of 4 children and 2 son-in-laws.

Glenn Barkley (b. 1972) is based in Sydney, Australia. His work operates between ceramics' deep history, popular song, the garden, and conversations about art and the internet. Previously the Senior Curator at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Australia, Barkley is Co-Director of The Curators Department, an independent curatorial agency based in Sydney.

Andrew Casto (b. 1977) has completed over seventy exhibitions in eleven countries, with recent solo exhibitions at Galleria Salvatore Lanteri, Milan, Mindy Solomon Gallery, Miami, and Eutectic Gallery, Portland. He is currently Assistant Professor of Art and Head of Ceramics at The University of Iowa.

Virginia Leonard (b.1965) lives and works in Auckland, New Zealand, and earned her MFA from Whitecliffe College of Arts and Design in 2001. Recent projects include solo exhibitions at Mindy Solomon Gallery, Miami, and Two Rooms, in Auckland, New Zealand.

David Hicks (b. 1975) currently lives and works in California. Hicks' work draws inspiration from nature and agricultural products, and examines the formal qualities of plants and organic forms common to the American landscape. Hicks holds BFA and MFA degrees from California State, Long Beach and Alfred Universities, respectively.

King Houndekpinkou (b.1987, Montreuil, France) is a Franco-Beninese ceramicist who works and lives in Paris. Cultivating the "beauty of imperfection," King blends clays and other materials from all continents to create experimental works combining cross-cultural understanding and spirituality that often emulate the aesthetics of Beninese Voodoo altars.



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