

WARES! Extraordinary Ceramics and the Ordinary Home

Von Romberg and Emmons Galleries
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**dates may change slightly*

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Earthenware. Stoneware. Kitchenware. Homeware. From ancient pottery for cooking and storage to modern decorative objects adorning the home, ceramics have a long, important history in domestic settings. This exhibition adds a contemporary twist to the association, with objects that signal an irreverent or even zany approach to the medium. Robert Arneson's *Case of Bottles* mimics factory-made glass soda bottles but adds a wonky, handmade feel. The miniatures of a newly married couple by Beatrice Wood playfully hint towards a disruption in domestic harmony. Woody De Othello fuses household objects with body parts, lending shape to the emotions that are latent but nonetheless expressed in domestic spaces. These alterations draw the ordinary—bottles, chairs and bites of food—into the extraordinary, prompting us to reevaluate our relationship with the things we encounter in our homes every day.

Checklist + Didactics

[no image]

Gifford Myers
Holding Out/Holding On, 1982
ceramic and acrylic
SBMA, Gift of Richard C. and Rosemary Hill Bergen in Celebration of the Museum's 50th Anniversary, 1991.181.2

This miniscule sculpture depicts an intricately painted and delicately designed home. Perhaps, this house will eventually be demolished and rebuilt as a skyscraper like the austere ones it is sandwiched between. For now, it is holding out. However, its final stand seems futile against the threat of an assumption into a real-estate market, which minimizes its family and emotional life and values the house as a possession. "A house is no longer a home," Myers says, "It has become nothing more than a commodity—just like art."



Beatrice Wood
Untitled (Beatrice Wood and Steve Hoag), 1938-1939
glazed ceramic
SBMA, Gift of Francis M. Naumann, 1997.57.1
© Estate of Beatrice Wood, Courtesy Beatrice Wood Center for the Arts/ Happy Valley Foundation



Beatrice Wood
Untitled (Beatrice Wood and Steve Hoag), 1938-1939
glazed ceramic
SBMA, Gift of Francis M. Naumann, 1997.57.2
© Estate of Beatrice Wood, Courtesy Beatrice Wood Center for the Arts/ Happy Valley Foundation



Beatrice Wood
Untitled (Helen Freeman), 1938-39
glazed ceramic
SBMA, Gift of Francis M. Naumann, 1997.57.3
© Estate of Beatrice Wood, Courtesy Beatrice Wood Center for the Arts/ Happy Valley Foundation

Like miniature toppers for a wedding cake, the figurines in both versions of *Untitled* (Beatrice Wood and Steve Hoag) depict the artist and her second husband on the occasion of their Las Vegas wedding. Their elongated, languid bodies drift in different directions, gesturing towards an emotional disconnect. But a juvenile-like awkwardness allows the scene to be humorous rather than tragic. In real life, they had a marriage of convenience that remained unconsummated. Alternatively, the figure of Helen Freeman, Wood's traveling companion and friend, is intimate and sensual. She is nude, and her lips are the most prominent feature on her face. As a group, these biographical works suggest the artist's longing for passion outside the confines of domestic partnership.



Anthony Sonnenberg
Pair of Candelabras (Flesh and Bone), 2020
Porcelain over stoneware, found porcelain tchotchkes, glaze
Courtesy of the artist and GAVLAK, Los Angeles

Sonnenberg begins with something ordinary, such as a vase or bowl, and builds upon it with layers and ornamentation. In *Pair of Candelabras (Flesh and Bone)*, the vessel-like forms are overwhelmed by a lush shroud of intricately applied flowers that emerge from twists, contortions, and folds in the clay. Its abundant details and curvatures add to a sense of motion, and its surface appears to grow and flourish like a living thing. Beneath this illusion of agitation, there is only stasis, not movement. This juxtaposition of a sensual exterior with an interior stillness reflects what Sonnenberg has said about his work: "We all want love," he remarks, "and we're all thinking about dying."



Robert Arneson
Case of Bottles, 1963
glazed ceramic and glass, 10 ½ x 22 x 15 in.
SBMA, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Stanley Sheinbaum, 1969.3

Arneson commonly engaged with objects that seem to be functional, as in this case of soda bottles. Although it appears to be a readymade, as if the artist gathered and arranged the actual objects themselves, *Case of*

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Bottles is entirely handmade. Arneson captures the economical and efficient reductiveness of many mass-produced objects. In the realm of visual art, reductiveness is often connoted by a lack of finish or refinement. Here, the artist has not smoothed edges or concealed the mark of his hand. A sketchier kind of modeling is apparent. The crate is constructed so that, over time, it succumbs to attrition. Inexpensive materials are used, some of them store-bought. Indeed, this rough style captures in conceit the immediacy and hasty creation of industrially produced objects. Moreover, it democratizes artistic production. While such an approach requires a steady hand, skill, and representational sense, anyone can be trained to take ubiquitous imagery and capture it through these means.



Woody de Othello
Twice Over, 2023
Glazed ceramic
Courtesy of the artist and KARMA, New York and Los Angeles
© Woody De Othello

[no image]

Woody de Othello
Glazed ceramic
Courtesy of the artist and KARMA, New York and Los Angeles
© Woody De Othello



Woody de Othello
Bone broth, 2022
Glazed ceramic
Courtesy of the artist and KARMA, New York and Los Angeles
© Woody De Othello

Woody De Othello transforms domestic wares and furniture into anthropomorphic ceramics. Fatigued, sunken forms are enlivened by playful, vibrant colors and high-gloss glazing. De Othello imagines his forms as taking on “the stresses and psychology of their owners.” “[A]ll this stuff [references] my personal history,” he explains. “It’s coming from a place of experience.” In *Twice Over*, a face emerges from an enlarged jug seated atop a stool. The vessel references face jugs, dating back to the mid-19th century, that were created by African artisans and ceramicists enslaved on South Carolina plantations. Often depicting outdated technological forms or archaic objects, De Othello’s sculptures are a “subtle jab,” the artist describes, making immediate and tangible the ways in which history and its material realities continue to bear upon present-day lives.

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Stephanie H. Shih
Salmon Tail, 2021
Ceramic
Courtesy of the artist and Berggruen Gallery, San Francisco
© Stephanie H. Shih
Photographer: Robert Bredvad



Stephanie H. Shih
Salmon Steak, 2021
Ceramic
Courtesy of the artist and Berggruen Gallery, San Francisco
© Stephanie H. Shih
Photographer: Robert Bredvad



Stephanie H. Shih
Poppies and Eggs (Opium Bust, 1864), 2023
Porcelain, ceramic
Courtesy of the artist and Berggruen Gallery, San Francisco
© Stephanie H. Shih
Photographer: Robert Bredvad



Stephanie H. Shih
Gold Plum Chinkiang Vinegar, 2022
Porcelain, ceramic
Courtesy of the artist and Berggruen Gallery, San Francisco
© Stephanie H. Shih
Photographer: Robert Bredvad

Stephanie Shih transforms goods found in Asian-American grocery stores and homes into sculptures characterized by hand-painted, imperfect lettering and rustic, irregular surfaces. *Gold Plum Chinkiang Vinegar* represents an ingredient typically found in an Asian-American kitchen but likely unknown elsewhere. “I wanted to give a nod to everyone who actually knows the most important dipping sauce is not soy sauce,” the artist says, “but black vinegar.” While Shih’s subject matter is non-grandiose and immediate, the pieces are not necessarily as direct as the objects they represent. The artist pushes back against Orientalism, a 19th-century Euro-American art movement that depicted a narrow, exoticized version of the “Orient” for a Western audience. By showing modest, everyday items, she deflates inaccurate and demeaning fantasies about the Asian diaspora while lending faithful shape to her community, as she expresses, art “[f]or us, by us.”



Seth Bogart
Cheeks, 2023
Ceramic
Courtesy of the artist
© Seth Bogart



Seth Bogart
Jack Smith's Perfume, 2019
If You Like Giorgio..., 2018
Coco Mademoiselle, 2019
Talk To Me!, 2018
Chanel Chance, 2018
Eau de Cheeks, 2022
White Diamonds, 2019
Acqua di Gio, 2018
Ceramic
Courtesy of the artist
© Seth Bogart

Bogart's ceramics feature vibrant colors, shoddy modeling, misshapen forms, and imperfect texts. "I like to make things fast and wonky," the artist says, "I'm interested in something looking kind of wrong." The perfume bottles differ in size, shape, color, and brand, but they feel of a piece. The consumer goods they mimetically represent offer the pretense of differentiation, though they all sell the same thing. In some ways, Bogart's pieces function like mass-produced commodities: as objects of possession and exchange. Consumers have an emotional investment in the things they buy, and the operative at work is that the commodity is magical, just for you for you are special. Bogart does not criticize the false promises of consumerism but embraces them through his own sense of whimsy and play. An identification with stuff does not do away with a sense of self. In fact, the objects around us may help us discover who we are. "I remember when I was younger, I suddenly was like, 'I have so much pink stuff,'" Bogart recalls. "I'm so weird, why do I like pink so much. I put it all away and then finally I think I was like, you should just accept what you're into and your look."

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Viola Frey

Homage to Dubuffet, 1977-1980

glazed ceramic

SBMA, Museum purchase with funds provided by Eli and Leatrice Luria and the Carol L. Valentine Art Acquisition Fund, 1998.10a-c

This work's title refers to Jean Dubuffet (French, 1901–1985), the founder of Art Brut, or Outsider Art, whose work Frey enjoyed and admired. With its rich, painterly surface, the homage shows Dubuffet's signature technique of creating rough surfaces and breaking up color and light. Frey depicts an idealized American female figure in 1940s dress placed in relation to a dog. Between them is a wall that features figurative imagery rendered in black outlines, including horses, skeletons, self-portraits, and the behatted figures of Howard Kottler (1930–1989), a leader of modern ceramic art. Frey often encountered prejudice in the male-dominated world of mid-century ceramics headed by Peter Voulkos and Robert Arneson. *Homage to Dubuffet* lends shape to her complicated reality as a woman artist. As woman and dog stare at one another, we are prompted to confront an uncomfortable question: In this bizarre engagement, is she the spectator, or the object of the gaze?