

**Brie Ruais: *Movement at the Edge of the Land***

June 5–August 28, 2021

Brown Foundation, Central Galleries, Outdoors



*Uncontrollable Drifting Inward and Outward Together (130 lbs times two)*, 2021, Glazed stoneware, rocks, hardware  
© Brie Ruais, Courtesy albertz benda, New York

Brie Ruais creates abstract, ceramic sculptures that operate on the scale of an individual body, while dynamically engaging the surrounding architectural and natural environments. Employing her own physical features and bodily force as artistic tools, the sculptures are shaped by bursts of physical energy. Ruais uses the equivalent of her body weight in clay for each sculpture, a metric that is indicated in the title of each work. The circular ceramic works are based on her foundational movement entitled *Spreading Outward from Center*, which consists of pushing a mound of clay radially outward from a central position on the floor.

The artist's movement-based practice is legible through the scrapes, gouges, and gestures embedded in the surfaces of the sculptures. The resulting ceramic works seem thrown onto a surface by a vigorous force, bursting into various forms and colors and defying physical laws. The imposing pieces appear almost delicate, despite their size and weight, evoking a fragile equilibrium that symbolizes the relationship between society and nature.

"My practice relies on the understanding that the land and the human body share similar vulnerabilities and ways of being affected, marked, and colonized," says Ruais. "The clay is pushed and spread out on the floor, rammed and compressed against a wall, torn and desiccated; I see the sculptures as bodies imprinted with the forces that have shaped them."

*For Movement at the Edge of the Land*, Ruais created a site-specific environment at the Moody that reflects the transformation of the landscape, both through human interventions such as mining practices and infrastructure development and by elemental forces. The pieces interact with both the exhibition galleries and the Rice campus, while referencing the transformation of the American West. Through her *Earthwork* photograph series and the video work *Tidal Movement*, Ruais documents ephemeral interventions on the land, in the Great Basin area in Nevada and Brooklyn's shoreline, respectively. Ruais's sculptures raise urgent questions about the effect industrialized civilizations have had on nature, but also offers us ways to reconnect with our natural environment, and to embrace our dependence on the earth and its resources.

About the artist:

Brie Ruais (b. 1982, Southern California) is one of the foremost young sculptors working in clay today. She is part of a new generation taking on the traditionally male dominated field of large-scale ceramic sculpture to challenge the limits of the medium. Ruais received a BFA from New York University's Steinhardt's School in 2004, and an MFA from Columbia University's School of the Arts in 2011. Her work has been shown in various exhibitions, such as *Formed and Fired: Contemporary American Ceramics* at the Anderson Collection, Stanford University (2020), *Afterimages* at Musée d'art de Joliette, Québec (2020), and *America Will Be! Surveying the Contemporary Landscape* at the Dallas Museum of Art (2019). She has received numerous awards and residencies including The Pollock Krasner Foundation Grant (2018), The Sharpe Walentas Studio Program (2018), the Dieu Donne Fellowship (2016), and The Shandaken Project Residency (2014). She lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

This exhibition is curated by Frauke V. Josenhans, Associate Curator, Moody Center for the Arts.

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“This edge of the land, where our human habitat finds its veritable limit, where the power and force of nature has found historic and mythic expression, this is where we are small and finite, where clay mediated my relationship to the natural world.”  
- Brie Ruais



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The artist Brie Ruais (b. 1982, Southern California) has conceived a site-specific exhibition for the Moody Center for the Arts that evokes a powerful encounter with the elements through large-scale ceramic sculpture. Working with the equivalent of her body's weight in clay, Ruais' relationship with the material allows her to explore themes of embodiment, materiality, and the interdependence of the human and ecological worlds.



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The works on view, created through a process-based performance, compress, spread, and interact with the architecture, as they expand over the walls, floors, and grounds. The sculptures generate and inhabit two apparently opposite spaces, the desert and the shore. The resulting contrast illustrates the dualities that define our society: the margins and the center; the mind and body; the natural and human worlds. Each gallery prompts a physical and sensorial experience through the engagement with the earth-colored, emergent ceramic sculptures.

*Withdrawing Body, Emerging Earth*  
2021  
Glazed ceramic, raw clay, dirt, rocks, gravel, construction debris  
Courtesy of the artist and Albert Z. Benda, New York



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The floor installation *Withdrawing Body, Emerging Earth* is made of eight mounds of dirt, gravel, and rubble, arranged in a circle that continues beyond the building. The gallery's wall of glass bisects one mound, bridging the inside to the outside and revealing the false boundaries between the constructed and natural environment. The porosity created by the windows provides a line of sight and a path for movement, allowing the viewer to experience both proximity to and removal from the materials that articulate our everyday lives.



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*Dance performance by Oliver Halkowich of the Houston Ballet*

The fragility of the ceramic sculptures and the marks of an absent form evoke a sense of both the body and earth as vulnerable.



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The outdoor works manifest as sculptures in two parts: ceramic perimeter sculptures surround holes dug in the ground, while the inner forms rest on the dirt piles nearby. These interventions in the landscape imitate the impressions made by the artist's own body, which she uses to create each piece.

*Withdrawing Body, Emerging Earth*

2021

Glazed ceramic, raw clay, dirt, rocks, gravel, construction debris  
Courtesy of the artist and albertz benda, New York



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The artist's chosen medium of clay mediates the interaction between our built and natural environments. Through large piles of aggregate that intersect the grounds, Ruais encourages the viewer to connect man-made materials with nature, stressing the transformation of raw material (dirt and rocks) to construction material (gravel).

*Making Space From the Inside (Rio Tinto Kennecott)*, 130 lbs  
2021  
Glazed stoneware, hardware  
58 x 56 x 2.5 in  
Courtesy of the artist and albertz benda, New York



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For this wall piece, Brie Ruais created a diptych based on her foundational movement *Spreading Outward From Center*. The two radial clay bursts, one of white clay and one of black, are spread out and scraped open in the center, creating a central void from which the clay expands outward, stretching into its environment. In both elements, the empty space is highlighted by a gestural circle of glaze, bright blue on the right and black on the left.

*Uncontrollable Drifting Inward and Outward Together (130lbs times two)*  
2021  
Glazed stoneware, rocks, hardware  
90 x 172.5 x 2.5 in



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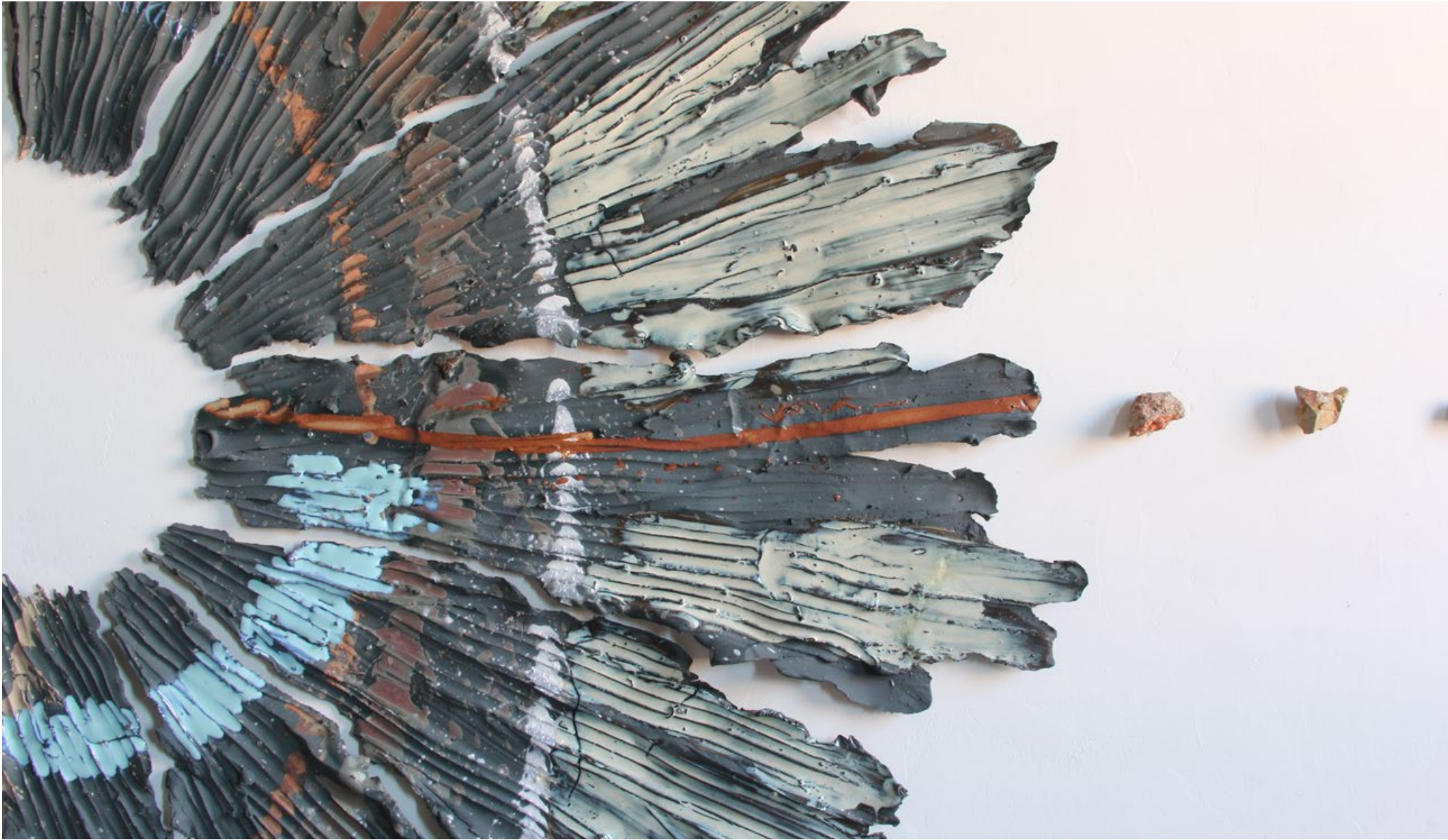


Shared between the forms is a horizontal line of burnt ochre glaze, which extends onto the wall in a cascade of rocks. Ruais intends these rocks to connect the ceramic bursts to their geological source and to the architectural environment. The unity of the diptych is created by curving lines of glaze which create an even larger circle. It envelops the two forms and suggests an intimate moment of connection between the black and white bursts.

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Earthwork Photograph Series

While creating this series of earthworks that she began in 2019, Ruais considered surveillance photography as a perspective from which to document the relationship between the body and the land. Each earthwork was documented with a drone camera from a bird's-eye view, which emphasizes not only the monumental scale difference between an individual body and the expansive landscape, but also the human and machine marks embedded in the land.

*Scraped Through and Alongside*

2020

Archival pigment print

30 1/2 x 45 3/4 in

Courtesy the artist and Night Gallery



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The clay works themselves are ephemeral; meant to disintegrate into the land. Each image highlights a different kind of human gesture upon the landscape. In *With and Against*, Ruais has shaped an X out of clay to mirror the crossing of the roads. *Scraped Through and Alongside* locates a busy confluence of animal and tire tracks. *In the Crosshairs* is made in reference to the often invisible military use of the desert landscape.

*In the Crosshairs*  
2020  
Archival pigment print  
30 1/2 x 45 3/4 in  
Courtesy the artist and Night Gallery



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*Gravel Pit Gestures, Mine & Yours* depicts a local gravel mine, near the center of which Ruais has added another gesture in clay to a terrain that bears larger marks made by bulldozers. *Three Seasons Passed* completes the series, recording the disintegration of one of Ruais' clay works over time, and its integration into the landscape.

*Gravel Pit Gestures, Mine & Yours*  
2020  
Archival pigment print  
30 1/2 x 45 3/4 in  
Courtesy the artist and Night Gallery



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**SHORE**  
The artworks by Brie Ruais in this gallery evoke the coastline, where water and land meet and create a space that is constantly in flux. The sculptures seem to expand and contract on the wall, echoing infinite movement through their interlaced parts.

A video installation, *Tidal Movement*, projected on hanging scrims intersecting the space.



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The installation in this gallery alternates moving images with static sculptures to evoke the shore as a liminal space where disorientation and disintegration lead to transformation and integration.

The installation brings the viewer face-to-face with the powerful push-and-pull of waves at the edge of the land. The water is shaping the earth, just as the artist forms the clay with her own body.



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The sheer size of these creations plays a crucial role: the large, multifaceted sculptures, such as *Compressing from West and East, Six Times 135 lbs*, with numerous subtly-hued, folded sections, appear to contract and expand, imitating the natural forces of wind and water.

*Compressing from West and East, Six Times 135 lbs*  
2020  
Glazed stoneware, hardware  
74 x 128 x 6 inches  
Courtesy of the artist and albertz benda, New York



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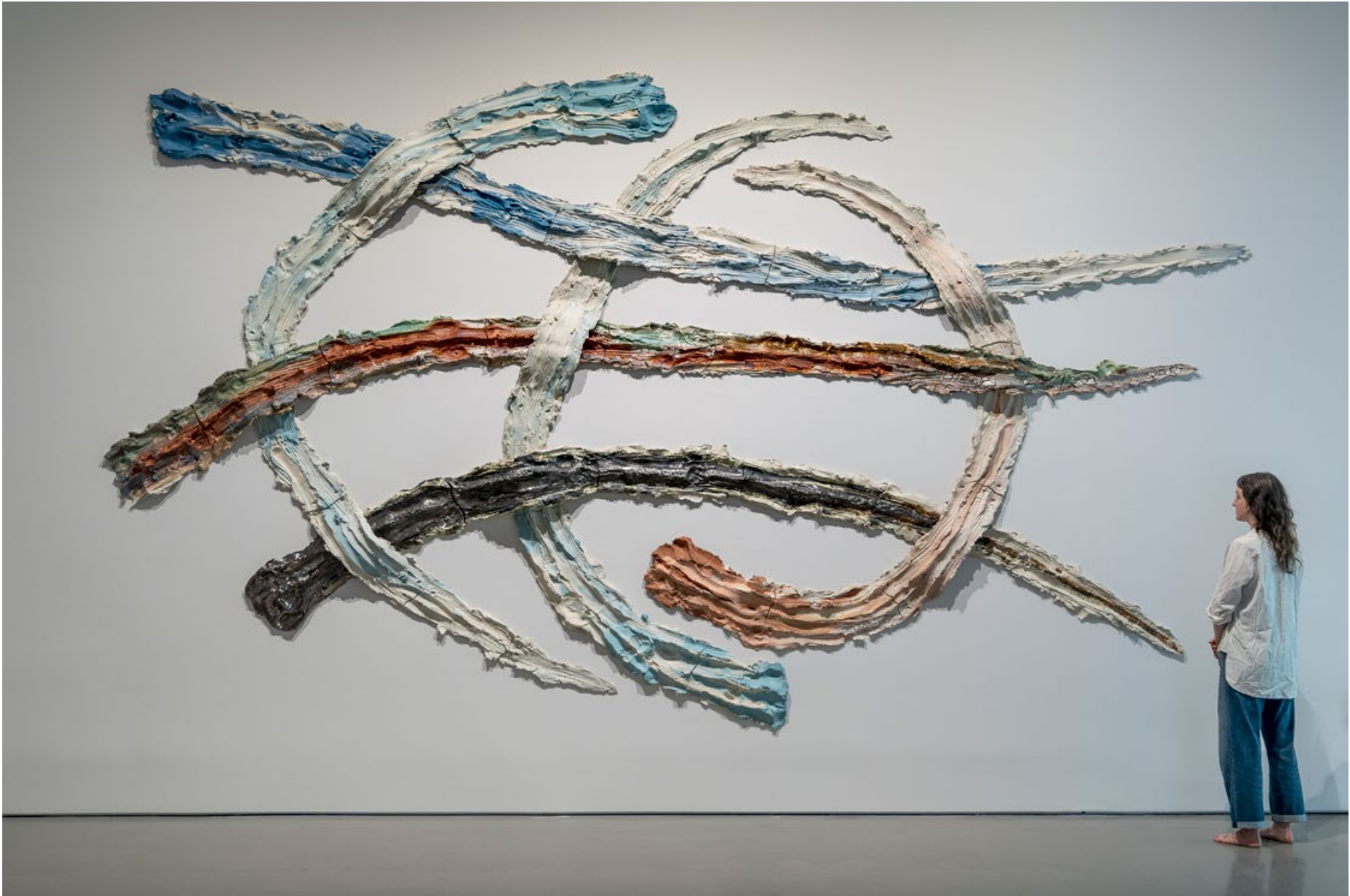


These large, expanding ceramic sculptures on the walls conjure a place where humans may witness the sublime power of nature.

(on left) *Turning and Turning in the Widening Gyre, two times* 135lbs  
2018  
130 x 67 x 3.5 inches  
Pigmented stoneware, transparent glaze, hardware  
Courtesy the Artist and Cooper Cole Gallery



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*Interweaving the Landscape* (6 times 130lbs) is composed of six forms, each 130lbs, that are woven together into a grid on the wall. The forms move independently of each other, but always acknowledge each other through their shared traversal of the same plane. The horizontal lines reference a landscape: it's sky and layered horizon; while the vertical curving lines reference features cutting through that landscape that hold and knit it together: rivers, trees, the sun.

*Interweaving the Landscape* (six times 130lbs)  
2020  
128 x 225 x 7 inches  
Pigmented and glazed stoneware, hardware



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Ruais cultivated this gesture of compression in response to the urban space surrounding her, in NYC, on an island pressed between land and sea. These are three entities (perhaps human, perhaps geological) transformed by forces that act upon them. Three thin expanses of clay on the floor were pushed in succession against the wall. Each consecutive rammed form was shaped by and nested into the previous one.

*Compressing Eastward, Three Times* 130lbs  
2021  
Glazed stoneware, hardware  
69 x 60 x 6.5 inches



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The video installation *Tidal Movement* poses timely concerns regarding the reorientation of human movement through the world in light of urgent environmental issues. Focused on the artist's performance, the video reveals her struggle to synchronize with the rhythm of the ocean's waves. While Ruais has frequently responded to the movement of the earth in her works, this is her first attempt to allow herself to be guided by water.

*Tidal Movement*  
2019  
3 Channel Video, 12 minutes



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Beginning where the sea meets the shore, Ruais hoped to locate a pattern in the tide in which to choreograph her movements, but quickly realized that the dance of the waves is as mutable as the shifting sands beneath her. Within minutes, after pushing the clay from a single mound up and down the shore, the clay dissolved almost entirely, and Ruais left the project to disintegrate into the sea.

*Tidal Movement*  
2019  
3 Channel Video, 12 minutes



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2019  
3 Channel Video, 12 minutes



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Assembled one stone at a time, Ruais constructed this wall using stones she collected from old mines, construction sites and roadsides during a road trip from Nevada to Los Angeles. The wall interrupts the exhibition space and bisects two raw clay sculptures the artist made on site: porcelain on one side and terracotta on the other. The barrier functions as a reminder of the impact of human development on the natural landscape. It also comments on the boundaries we create between each other and within ourselves.

*The things we build, the things we let fall apart, the things we destroy*

2020

unfired stoneware, rocks

Dimensions variable, 36 feet by 12 feet

Courtesy the artist and Night Gallery



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The exhibition reflects the inspiration that the artist finds in the varying environments she inhabits, the urban landscape of New York City bounded by the sea, and the open deserts of the Southwest. By provoking an encounter with them, the exhibition lends tension and beauty in the body's relationship to the elemental world.

*The things we build, the things we let fall apart, the things we destroy*  
2020  
unfired stoneware, rocks  
Dimensions variable, 36 feet by 12 feet  
Courtesy the artist and Night Gallery