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artillery

Jody Zellen, "Gallery Rounds: Brie Ruais," *Artillery*, January 6, 2021

Gallery Rounds: Brie Ruais

by Jody Zellen



"Spiraling Open and Closed Like an Aperture," installation view, (2020). Courtesy of Night Gallery.

Brie Ruais' stunning ceramic sculptures have a visceral quality. Though created in her Brooklyn studio, they stem from private, site-specific performances in the desert where the naked Ruais uses her entire body to shape clay into large geometric formations that meld with the desert terrain. The physicality of her process and the resulting pieces recall sculptures by other women

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working in the landscape or with female forms including Ana Mendieta, Hannah Wilke, Lynda Benglis, and Judy Chicago. Over the years, Ruais has returned to the Great Basin Desert in Nevada to create works on the desert floor that respond to the surrounding environment. She leaves these pieces in situ allowing them to fade away over time and their eventual disintegration as the years pass is well documented from overhead via drones. The aerial photographs, many of which are included in the exhibition, illustrate past and present interventions and this documentation provides context for her large-scale ceramic works.



Brie Ruais, *Closing in on Opening Up, Nevada Site 6, 127lbs (2020)*. Courtesy of Night Gallery.

Ruais channels the experience of working in the landscape back to her studio re-engaging the process by pushing and pulling masses of clay across her studio floor. It is interesting that works

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composed on the floor are later hung on the wall as the viewer's perspective matches hers while creating them. Her palette is rich, with colors that stem from nature — blues for the sky, yellows, and oranges for the sun, rusts, and browns for sand and hillsides. Ruais often begins with an amount of clay equal to her body weight and in *Closing in on Opening Up, Nevada Site 6, 127lbs,*

(2020), for example, she laboriously spreads the clay out from the center with her hands allowing the mound to break apart to form abstracted starbursts that recall the rays of the sun as well as blast waves from an explosion. Each of the twelve triangular sections moves out from a central void like a clock that can no longer keep time, transitioning from a light yellow to a darker brown and reflecting a path from sky to earth.

To create *Opposing Tides, Shaping Forces*, (2020), two people spread mounds of clay equal to their body weight across the floor, moving toward each other from opposite ends of the room. The finger marks from the constant kneading and wedging of the clay is evidence of the process, becoming a gestural, as well as textured surface. The finished shapes dart across the gallery wall like two wide flares or comets. *The things we build, the things we let fall apart, the things we destroy*, (2020) is a floor-based work where Ruais juxtaposes unfired shards of brick and white clay formed into a circular pattern with rocks gleaned from her desert travels piled to become a low stone wall extending across the gallery like mountains on the distant horizon.



Brie Ruais, *Opposing Tides, Shaping Forces*, (2020). Courtesy of Night Gallery.

Collectively, the pieces that comprise the installation “Spiraling Open and Closed Like an Aperture” reference the land as well as the sky. Seeing the photo documentation with the actual works allows viewers to imagine Ruais using the reach and strength of her body to create these simultaneously fragile and solid, monumental and intimate, large-scale three-dimensional works.