

June 21, 2013

The New York Times

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NEW YORK, FRIDAY, JUNE 21, 2013

Art in Review

'Vessels'

*Horticultural Society of New York
148 West 37th Street, Manhattan
Through July 3*

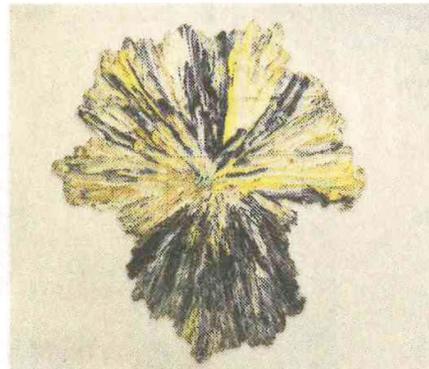
Nothing in "Vessels," at the Horticultural Society of New York's quiet little gallery in the garment district, looks as if it could actually hold a plant. That's a compliment, as far as the show's five ceramics artists are concerned; they make sculptures, not mere receptacles.

Two glazed earthenware pieces by the ceramist Betty Woodman, who is also exhibiting at Salon 94, have a funky, give-and-take relationship with their painted wooden pedestals. Both are titled "Vase Upon Vase." Nearby, the red, tubular strands of Beverly Semmes's "Smoke" suggest a hookah with too many pipes.

The younger artists Nicole Cherubini and Francesca DiMatteo are just as canny in their use of hollow volumes. Ms. Cherubini flattens clay over cardboard boxes, in homage to Rauschenberg's trompe-l'oeil sculptures of the early 1970s, and mounts them as minimal wall reliefs. Ms. DiMatteo makes festive but impractical-looking containers that look like pieced-together fragments of porcelain.

The standout is an emerging artist, Brie Ruais, who uses clay as aggressively as Richard Serra once used lead; in her short video-performance "Nobody Puts Baby in the Corner (Big Push in a New Space)," she kicks and punches a big blob of it against the wall. Also by Ms. Ruais is "Unfolding (Liquid Color)," a giant, multicolored starburst made by redistributing a piece of pigmented clay equal in weight to the artist's body. Both works flesh out Chris Murtha's argument that "the history of ceramics is too often perceived as a struggle between art and craft, but more so it has been a battle with objecthood."

KAREN ROSENBERG



COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND NICOLE KLAGSBURN GALLERY, N.Y.

The 2011 "Unfolding (Liquid Color)" by Brie Ruais.