

June 28, 2013

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS

“Vessels”

THE HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY OF NEW YORK
148 West 37th Street, 13th Floor
May 7–July 3

Betty Woodman’s ceramic sculpture *On the Way to Mexico*, 2012, presides over the entrance “Vessels” as both gatekeeper to this group exhibition and harbinger for the display beyond. The fiery glazed red-and-orange front of the piece feels a world away from its back, a unified, muted surface where a thick cream-colored line meanders its way slowly around a black background shot through with fleshy pink. Moving around the work is akin to crossing a border, leaving one aesthetic realm for another.

This transmogrification is, on a base level, a metonym for the process of creating a vessel from clay, as well as an archetype for the kind of ceramic pieces on display. These are vessels from the hands of artists who long ago abandoned functionality for form: A flurry of extra handles sprout all over Beverly Semmes’s fire engine–red *Smoke*, 2012, and wings of Matisse-like color and clay are sutured to Woodman’s *Vase Upon Vase: Bella* and *Vase Upon Vase: Joy* (both 2011). Francesca DiMattio’s pieces are perhaps the most formally driven, as functional vases are broken and fused to other vessels with riotously textured materials to create new, almost impossible forms. *Putti Vase*, 2013, for instance, is a discordance of premade ceramic pieces, lumped and burned together in a clamor of colorful protrusions, while the vase in question in *Staffordshire Vase*, 2013, is fused to another piece of porcelain among a litany of baby-blue forms, writhing from the ether into life.

Perhaps the most extreme cycle of transformation occurs in the juxtaposition of Brie Ruais’s two works. Her video, *Nobody Puts Baby in the Corner (Big Push in a New Space)*, March 26, 2012, 10:15 PM–10:58 PM, 2012, shows the artist slamming her body into hundreds of pounds of clay as she slowly pushes it up the crease of a wall. An earlier product of this process, *Unfolding (Liquid Color)*, 2011, is hung nearby—a starburst of the artist’s body weight in clay, spread out, flecked with blue, yellow, and green, and cut into sections hung infinitely close together. One might imagine the universe beginning, and maybe ending, in such a way.

— *Chloé Rossetti*



Francesca DiMattio, *Staffordshire Vase*, 2013, underglaze, gold luster, and enamel on porcelain, 20 1/4 x 15 1/4 x 8 3/4."