

ONE PART CLAY: Ceramic Avant-garde & Mixed Media

My profound interest in ceramics began at the Charles Cowles Gallery when, after viewing a solo exhibition for Peter Voukos (1924-2002), I was invited to experience the work of George Ohr (1857-1918). This was my first hands-on opportunity in exploring the work of these pioneering and idealized masters of the ceramic art world. As curator of *One Part Clay* I was brought back to this important experience where I was surprised by the inventive and complex way in which these artists confronted the ceramic medium. Voukos and Ohr worked within the concept of the vessel, the traditional confined form of craft and decorative arts, all while implementing a brash modernist aesthetic. Voukos's ceramic sculptural work was visually raw and heavy in actual weight and presence. While Ohr's pots (which didn't seem very functional) were seemingly heavy but upon handling were extremely light and delicate. The physical characteristics and conceptual aspects of their work couldn't be placed neatly within the defined boundaries of craft and decorative arts; I believed that both artists were simply creating contemporary sculpture.

This early experience triggered both my passion and conflict in ceramic art. Conflict in that there was a divide between the notion of ceramic craft with reference to history and purity in tradition versus contemporary art which addressed issues of our current society.

Fortunately I was not alone; visual artists of my generation were well aware of this conundrum between craft and fine art. These contemporary artists concluded that their reality lacked the time and space for wasted labels and categorization. Instead their work incorporated the innate qualities, the formal and conceptual aspects of both camps. As a result the selected work in this exhibition is a visual reflection of the current dynamics of today's contemporary art world. It's therefore not at all shocking to hear the following from one of the leading historians of the ceramic art world:

"This exhibition excites us because we have been witnessing (and enjoying) the morphing of ceramics from a remarkably hermetic field into one that is beginning to flourish in the creative sunlight of mixed media." Garth Clark, Garth Clark Gallery

Collectively none of the artists included in *One Part Clay* identifies themselves as a "ceramic artist", some don't even use clay in the final product of their oeuvre. The diversity of materials and process used in creating the work in this exhibition complement the issues these artists are exploring. The included artists are **John Bryd, Nicole Cherubini, Chad Curtis, Doug Jeck, Michael O'Malley, Adelaide Paul, Reinaldo Sanguino, and the collective Heringa/Van Kalsbeek.**

John Bryd comments on the mechanical and robotic state of agriculture through his hormone infused taxidermy animal sculptures.

Nicole Cherubini's over accessorized and adorned coil sculptures clearly address the current blurred boundaries between social class and status in our society.

Chad Curtis's conceptual ceramic landscapes reference the transient nature of life, transient both in terms of one's locale and, also, one's existence.

Doug Jeck's innovative use of video as a tool in recording a performance where clay is used as an essential part of the piece; the concept of his work is achieved through the digital dimension of clay.

Michael O'Malley's work is surprisingly not ceramic, although at first sight the piece looks as if constructed using only clay, instead the work is created directly through the appropriation of clay molds.

Adelaide Paul employ's multiple materials not as content but rather as a means to clarify content, the piece invokes the domesticated (man-made) animal as a reflection of our own desires, hopes, and regrets as humans.

Reinaldo Sanguino's work explores our relationship with consumer consumption, his shining black ceramic crown atop high-end designer logos are a metaphor of our fragile desire for individuality.

Heringa/Van Kalsbeek collaboration straddles the fine line of controlling an accident, the ceramic process suites their work perfectly due to its innate unpredictability and material richness.

This exhibition is a product of our current state in a post-modern society where categorization is not the premise in developing an idea in the visual arts. Instead the combination of many sources is the essential tool in creating work that addresses our global society of the 21st century.

Mark Dean, Curator, *One Part Clay*, **DEAN PROJECT**

Current exhibition schedule:

SOFA NEW YORK 2006

Thursday June 1st– Monday, June 4th, 2006

Opening benefit reception Wednesday, May 31st, 5PM – 8PM

DEAN PROJECT June 17th– August 20th (by appointment only)

Garth Clark Gallery, Long Island City

September 16th– October 22nd, 2006

Hours: Saturdays & Sundays from noon– 4PM and by appointment

Opening reception Saturday, September 16th, 5PM – 7PM

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Platform Landscape Series (installation detail)

Chad Curtis