

Art Review: Creating Art Out Of Their Element

October 31, 2013 • by Gabrielle Selz

Clay as mineral paint, invisible form, and gilded vessel: this is the basic notion and starting point for the work of the three artists in the current show on view at Ricco/Maresca Gallery in New York City. Beyond this point of departure though, all similarity ends. "Out of Their Elements," an exhibition featuring the work of artists Toni Ross, Jill Bonovitz and Carole Seborovski, explores the question of what happens when artists move beyond their comfort zone and confront a new creative process.

"I often notice what remains, what is left behind," Toni Ross says in her artist's statement for the show. This idea, of examining and developing the imprint of residue, is at the heart of Ross's art.

In color and form, her works on paper—rectangular tablets in which she uses clay slip as a kind of paint—resemble the sheer cliffs of the excavated marble mines in Carrara, Italy. These were the great quarries that yielded the slabs of pale stone used to build the monuments of the Roman Empire and the sculptures of the Italian Renaissance. Ross's elegant, minimal configurations bring to mind that same barren, exposed and ancient white landscape, as if a layer of marble dust had settled over her images as well.

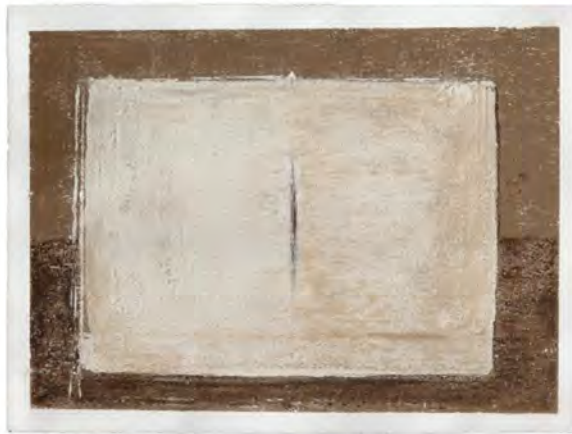
Ross is known for her poetic, ceramic sculptures of cubes, cylinders and tablets with their delicately abraded glazes. In her paper pieces she explores similar themes of textured surfaces applied to simple, stark shapes. Often these are configurations of two nearly identical rectangles that sit side-by-side like the open pages of some large, stone volume. Ross says of her drawings that they "seek a connection to some ancient collective past that is only known to me through the act of their creation."

Indeed, a universal and yet personal vocabulary pervades these pieces. In *Gentle Touch*, the two shapes barely graze each other, like a soft kiss in the middle of the picture plane. The result is a profoundly delicate, moving image.



"Gentle Touch" by Toni Ross, 2013. Black clay, porcelain, grog and graphite on paper, 22 x 30 inches. Courtesy Ricco/Maresca Gallery.

In another recent work, *Piece of My Heart*, the two images are now one and only a sensual slit, an opening like a crack in the wall, divides the solid white shape.

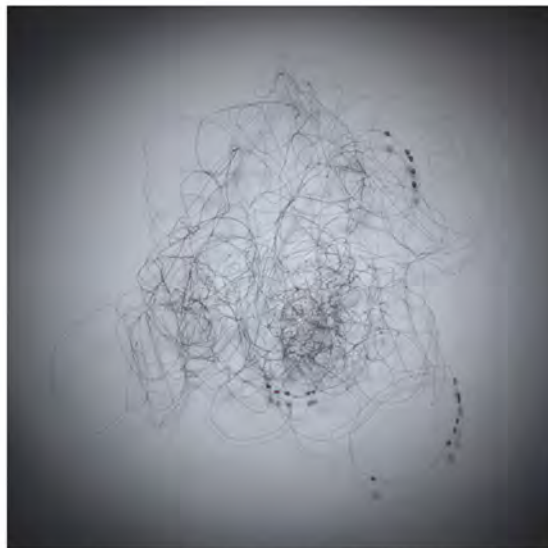


"Piece of My Heart" by Toni Ross, 2013. Black clay, porcelain, grog, oil pastel, graphite and collage on paper, 22 1/4 x 30 inches. Courtesy Ricco/Maresca Gallery.

These forms that touch and open have a vulnerable, emotional quality. As in Ross's ceramic sculptures, dichotomies abound. They inhabit both exterior and interior worlds; they are both fragile and strong. They sit compactly in space, but with permeable edges. Spare and powerful, these intimate pieces still maintain the quality of residing in a mysterious realm of their own.

Like Ross, Jill Bonovitz also works primarily in clay, a process she describes as flowing directly out of her hands into the material. Bonovitz creates wide, flat, ceramic containers, often drawing on and decorating the surfaces. As a result, her glazes bear irregular markings and scratches that are reminiscent of Cy Twombly. A few years ago, these marks became the impetus for her experimentation with wire, creating shapes that Bonovitz says explore the edges rather than the essence of objects.

Bonovitz calls these twisted and sculptural pieces penetrable vessels or vessel sculptures, referring to the whimsical, irregular, but hollow wire forms they enclose. Looping and open, bedecked with beads, berries, tape, string or bits of shell, they resemble loose baskets. Hung against the stark white walls of the gallery space, their shadows create highly calligraphic drawings.



"Untitled (Wire Composition)" by Jill Bonovitz, 2012-13. Painted wire with berries, 19 x 19 x 9 inches. Courtesy Ricco/Maresca Gallery.

Carole Seborovski's object-paintings and drawings of geometric forms are both abstract and precise. In the past, Seborovski has used enamel and materials such as clay and wax to produce highly complex, decorative, mathematical constructions. Now, she has given free rein to the more ornamental elements in her art. The undulating, votive forms of the clay sculptures on view at Ricco/Maresca are a wild fusion of the beguiling and the spiritual.

Colors that are by turns vibrant or sparkly; surfaces that are encrusted with puckered nipples and lustrous, porous sprouts; round, orb-like bodies: these clay forms resemble humorous fertility objects. Possessing titles like *Summer of Love*, *Bacchanal* and *Quagmire*, they are ceramic Earth Goddesses with a Rococo, punk twist.



"Out of Their Elements: Installation of Carole Seborovski sculptures" From Left in foreground: "Summer of Love", "Chimera", "Web of Magdalene", "Victorian Cultivation". Background: "Dominion". Courtesy Ricco/Maresca Gallery.

The progression of a new formal language can involve trial and error, hesitancy and bold innovation, so it's rare to see exhibitions that embrace this daunting journey. More exceptional still is the opportunity to witness artists in the process of search, discovery and experimentation, to peek over their shoulders and watch while they produce work that successfully embodies such bold visions.

BASIC FACTS: "Out of Their Elements: Jill Bonovitz, Toni Ross, Carole Seborovski" remains on view through Nov. 16 at Ricco/Maresca, 529 West 20th Street, 3rd Floor, New York, NY 10011.
www.riccomaresca.com.