

The New York Times

ART & DESIGN

'Fire!'

OCT. 2, 2014

"Fire!" is an ebullient if overly familiar survey of sculptures and vessels in glazed ceramics and sometimes glass that has been organized by Michaela de Pury and her husband, Simon de Pury, the former chairman and chief auctioneer of Phillips de Pury & Company. It has dazzling variety: function, nonfunction, abstract representation, all kinds of color and also transparency.

The show covers several generations, beginning with John Mason, who helped establish ceramics as a modern art in Los Angeles in the late 1950s and is still going strong. It also includes Andrew Lord, who gave ceramics a second boost, starting in the 1980s, by borrowing from Process and body art and who contributes several works here. His "Sixteen Pieces Holding and Touching" from 1984-85, which has never been exhibited publicly, is an elegant enumeration of vessel types using white slip on black that evokes the tenderness of both making and using them.



Andrew Lord's "Sixteen Pieces Holding and Touching," in "Fire!," at Venus Over Manhattan.
Tom Powel Imaging/Venus Over Manhattan

There are artists whose main focus is ceramics, among them Shio Kusaka, Takuro Kuwata and Young-Jae Lee, all classicists in their own ways. Any eccentricity comes from artists who work in several media, like Sterling Ruby, Josh Smith, Dan McCarthy, Friedrich Kunath and Rosemarie Trockel.

But Ai Weiwei's superficial forays into ceramics add nothing but a marquee name, and other efforts are skillful but derivative, namely Flavie Audi's glass abstractions and Marten Medbo's bulbous conglomerates, which tame and regularize evocations of Louise Bourgeois and the great potter-sculptor Axel Salto.

Real surprises are rare, mainly the profuse coral-like wall reliefs and stalagmite sculptures lately made by Cameron Jamie, best known for raucous performance videos, and the massive, coil-built glass vases of Ritsue Mishima, which suggest René Lalique's heavy, milky Art Deco vessels radically loosened up.

And the show would have been better with more women, especially where clay is concerned. The representation of female artists — five out of 17 — is regrettable.