

Woody De Othello: "Forget Teacups – This New Show Pushes Ceramics in a Bold New Direction"

By Camille Okhio

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Genevieve Hanson; Courtesy of the artist and Jeffrey Deitch, New York

A dynamic new exhibition at New York's Jeffrey Deitch gallery showcases clay's delightfully amorphous present and future.

Clay Pop," a new show of ceramic works, bursts more than a few bubbles around what we think of when we think of pottery. As the first survey of its kind at New York's [Jeffrey Deitch](#) gallery, it broaches topics around craft and design, and what it means for a material, so often found in china cabinets and on well-appointed tables, to be considered "fine."

The nearly 40 artists Deitch managing director [Alia Williams](#) curated into the show— [Katie Stout](#), Woody de Othello, and Sterling Ruby among others—use the kiln not only to expand the boundaries of the medium but also as a collective hearth, sharing ideas, techniques, critiques, and support. “Many of the artists actually know each other,” Williams tells ELLE DECOR. “Some have shared studios and done residencies together and are part of this incredible community I didn’t realize existed until I started exploring the show.”



Genesis Belanger, *Good Guy*, 2021. Guillaume Ziccarelli; Courtesy of the Artist and Perrotin

The roster ranges widely in experience and age, from Sally Saul, Melvino Garretti, Amir Yokoyama, and Magdalena Suarez Frimkess, who are in their 70s and 80s, to Alake Shilling, Kahlil Robert Irving, and Sharif Farrag, who are all in their 20s. Many of the older artists in the show have acted as mentors and guides to the younger generation working in clay, particularly in Southern California, where there is a long history of ceramic craft.

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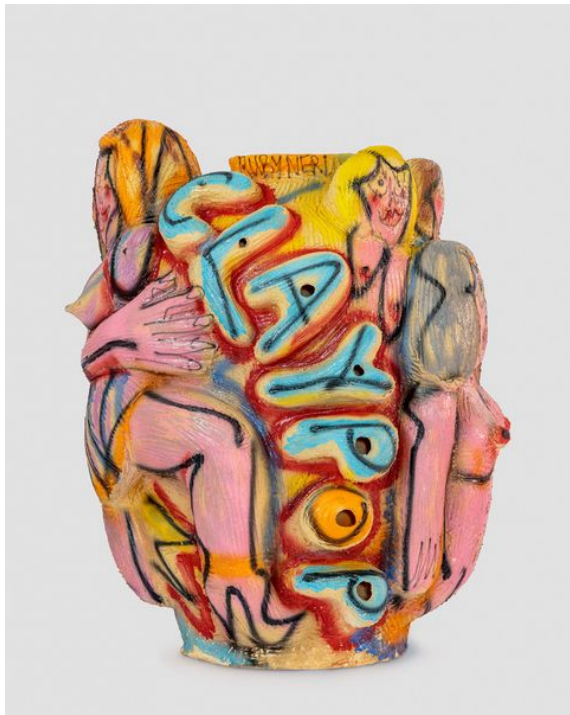


Katie Stout, *Untitled*, 2021. Genevieve Hanson; Courtesy of the artist and Jeffrey Deitch, New York

A few pieces in the show are functional, like Stout's full-sized playground in the gallery's mezzanine, comprising a slide, a bouncy ride, and a mini jungle gym—all made of clay. Others, like Garretti's work, emphasize the figurative and incorporate faces (carrying surprised or fearful expressions)—a departure from some of his past Brutalist-tinged work. [Ruby Neri](#), whose piece *Clay Pop* was made in response to the show's title and appears on its flyer, also plays with the human form in vessels and vases made up of intertwined female figures. Alongside these artists' pieces are masks, books, sentinels, and totems—guardians of a claypocalypse.

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(Left): Ruby Neri, *Clay Pop*, 2021. Joshua White; Courtesy of the artist and Salon 94, New York



(Right): Melvino Garretti, *It's Only a Matter of Time... I Haven't Whipped Any Ass Around Here*, 2020. Paul Salveson; Courtesy of the artist and Park Gallery, Los Angeles

Conceptually, "Clay Pop" makes a strong argument for the recent renaissance in clay. The material is in a moment of transition, expanding to include not only the craft traditions that have been respected globally for centuries but also more inventive interpretations that toe the line between fine art and high design. Much of the work Williams selected pushes the medium in a technical sense. Brian Rochefort, for instance, combines a dizzying array of glazes that bubble, crack, and congeal all on a single form. Anyone marginally familiar with the firing process of ceramics could tell you that the successful combination of so many varying textures is a near-impossible feat. "Just glazes themselves are like a science experiment," notes Williams.

Though the works vary largely in scale and scope, all hang well together thanks to the thoughtful exhibition design by the New York- and Los Angeles-based design firm [Charlap Hyman & Herrero](#). The works are displayed in an expansive multilevel wonderland, with lilac walls covered in painterly eggplant-hued brushstrokes. The firm's playful approach did much to highlight the freedom of the exhibition's brief.



Brian Rochefort, *Predator*, 2021. Marten Elder; Courtesy of the artist and Massimo De Carlo

Taken as a whole, "Clay Pop" commands fresh eyes. "I would love for visitors to just come in with an open mind," says Williams. "What we wanted to do with the show was to change the narrative around clay as this historic material that artists are not particularly excited about." The result is exciting, experimental, and perfectly in line with the exhilarating direction of the medium on view.