



Flora and Fauna

Brinton Museum, Big Horn, Wyoming, USA

Nancy M. Servis

The exhibition entitled Flora and Fauna was on view recently at the Brinton Museum in Big Horn, Wyoming, USA. This gallery displayed the diverse work of twenty accomplished ceramic artists from throughout the United States. They were: Christopher Adams, Susan Beiner, Joe Bova, Ariel Bowman, Anna Holcombe Calluori, Alanna Derocchi, Kim Dickey, Julia Galloway, Ronnie Gould, Glenn Grishkoff, Martha Grover, Rain Harris, Susan Harris, Jeri Hollister, Jonathan Kaplan, Gail Kendall, Kristen Kieffer, Linda Lighton, Ron Meyers and Linda Michalek. The sculptural, installation and vessel work exemplified ceramic pluralism, featuring

naturalistic themes, some of which depicted geographically appropriate content reflective of the American West.

While group exhibitions are common, a show's inner strength succeeds through informed object selection and perceptive placement. Exhibition curator and resident, Elaine Olafson Henry is a practicing ceramic artist and editor of the international periodical, *Ceramics: Art & Perception*. Her insight as a maker and experienced art journalist are reflected in her choice of artists and scope of their mature work. In an era when many display venues exist, and where curatorial acumen is not always applied, this was a rewarding exhibition to

view. An informed selection of content-rich work thoughtfully installed provided insight into the nature of contemporary ceramic art in the United States.

The broad entrance hall to the exhibit gallery contextualised the show's breadth by featuring works by Julia Galloway from Montana, Linda Lighton from Missouri and Susan Harris from Utah. This successful introduction featured Lighton's suspended light installation, *Luminous*, 2010-2013, that depicts her idea of light from within and bliss before to death. The partially opened illuminated clay fuchsias hung downward with an unfolding elegance creating a glowing oasis. Across from this ethereal piece was Julia Galloway's vivacious wall installation, *Wall of Cups with Songbirds*, with select bird-calls triggered by passers-by. The rhythmic vitality of this installation featured 100 of her thrown tumblers sporadically positioned across a wall of arabesques painted in blues and greens. Each cup illustrated an American bird species (referencing the large watercolour bird portraits by the 19th American wildlife artist, John James Audubon) on singular shelves summarily depicting a sensorial and tactile world. Two of Susan Harris's mysterious vessels echoing ancient oriental and Etruscan bronze ritual pieces completed the introductory scope of the show. This trio prepared viewers to see innovative pottery, utilitarian wares, and poignant abstractions that were re-contextualised into fine artistic statements.

The success of this show was the rich dynamic fostered by each artist's distinctive style. Anna Calluori Holcombe from Florida included "Natura Viva VIII #1-4", 2013. While not the biggest or most featured piece, it succeeds due to her understanding and use of historic and contemporary decals while exploring the interplay between two and three dimensionality. Her informed understanding of 3-D printing and spatiality supports this assured work. While using commercially produced porcelain plates, the quartet achieves balance

top
Rain Harris, *Lush*, 2013, porcelain, decals, silk flowers and resin, 35.6 x 43.2 x 28 cm

left
Glenn Grishkoff, *Horse Brush Bouquet*, wheel-thrown and coil built clay; raku fired, cone 06; brush handles, coarse garnet dust, wood fire clay, coarse sand, horse tails, horse mane, moose hair, deer tail hair, 19.1 x 35.6 x 21.6 cm



through contemporary design and spatial excellence. Calluori-Holcombe's work attains effortless object presence through the expert use of materials with modern technology.

Glenn Grishkoff's piece, "Horse Brush Bouquet" reflects the spirit with which this Southern California artist pursues his creative work. It is a homage to fauna featuring a rendered horse on a raku bowl. It also presents a bouquet of brushes as a floral offering, adding conceptual nuance to the work. An important component for Grishkoff is his role as brush artist, a practice originating from his student days at Claremont College in Southern California. There he studied with the father of American raku, Paul Solder who advocated making one's tools. Through brush iconography, Grishkoff also honours his Russian-born father who was raised in China. The artist's childhood experience of watching him grind Sumi ink percolates through his contemporary work. Ceremonial performance combined with creative lineage is a key element to Glenn Grishkoff's enlivened work.

Animated expression is present also in the engaging work of Ron Meyers' wall-mounted functional-ware piece, "Goat Platter". Informal and painterly, the work by this Georgia artist is unassuming yet unavoidable due to its gestural persona. Common animals are featured on his vessel-ware in a raw, tactile manner that integrates with three-dimensional form. Such works appear at ease but are the result of a lifetime of studio practice, positioning Meyers as one of America's favoured ceramic artists.

The work of Rain Harris from Missouri provides an alternative view regarding ceramic use. While some artists refrain from mixed media, Harris savours the opportunity to construct sculptures and installations intermingling ceramics with materials like resin. "Lush", 2013 illustrates her unorthodox direction. Here, the floral arabesque is stated through the form's shape and the lustre surface designs that are combined with resin-coated silk flowers. The incongruity of materials creates a new hybrid, "pushing," the artist explains, "a decorative eclecticism to the point of excessive minimalism." Her combination of materials fosters an enticing unease.

Flora and Fauna was not a complex topic. It featured, however, many works by mature artists from throughout the United States that pushed its boundaries of expectation beyond simple representation. Together the nearly 45 works in this exhibition, along with a 46-page catalogue with illustrations, provided a satisfying context to explore the show's theme. If only this show could have travelled to additional venues so as to unveil further the varied interpretations of the naturalistic themes by those with rich artistic capacity.



Nancy M Servis is an essayist, curator and ceramics historian who resides in Northern California, USA. She was the 2014 Jentel Critic at the Archie Bray Foundation, Montana completing her residency at the Jentel Foundation, Banner, Wyoming. As Research Fellow at the American Museum of Ceramic Art in Pomona, California, Servis is continuing her oral history interviews with ceramics artists and practitioners in preparation for her upcoming book on ceramics in Northern California.

top **Linda Lighton**, Luminous, 2010-2013, sizes variable.

middle **Anna Calluori Holcombe**, Natura Viva VIII #1-4, 2013, commercial porcelain plate, laser decals, sheet colour decals, vintage decals, gold lustre, 15 x 15 cm/ea.

below **Julia Galloway**, Wall of Cups with Songbirds, (detail), 100 porcelain wheel-thrown cups, soda fired, on pastel-drawn wall, approx. 61 cm long

