

3RD Dimension The PMSA Magazine & Newsletter

Labours of Love an Interview with Nicole Cherubini

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Jack Tan, artist and visiting lecturer at Roehampton University, who is also pursuing a PhD in the department of Drama Theatre and Performance, interviews Nicole Cherubini for **3rd Dimension**.

Born in Boston in 1970, Nicole Cherubini currently lives and works in Brooklyn, New York where I visited her in her riverside studio. With a BFA in Ceramics from the Rhode Island School of Design and MFA in Visual Arts from New York University, Nicole's work is an interplay between surface and form, volume and line. I interviewed her on a sunny Brooklyn afternoon.

J: So tell me about what you are doing right now.

N: I just did a show in the Fall at Tracy Williams Ltd. in New York (Main Image). I had been doing a lot of research about Utopian societies, I have always been very attracted to them. There is so much work that is made about these communities and I have never been able to figure out why I thought this work

was feeling kind of 'off' to me. So spent two years investigating why and what I was so intrigued with.

J: Do you mean the 70s Utopian societies?

N: Some 60s and 70s. The research also brought me back to the turn of the century, looking at Anthroposophical communities and the Shakers too. The thing that I kept coming back to wasn't so much the ideals of the community but the function of it: how these groups of people could actually survive together and the labour that went into function. There's the sense of everything being important and equal as a group. I came to the idea of creating a non-hierarchical space, especially in a sculptural form. I was thinking about materials in this way and trying to choose them for their best use value, their intrinsic strength. I was thinking a lot about this in my last show and I am still thinking in this framework, to some extent. There is a text by Rudolf Steiner about bees and how these bees structure themselves in the hive. He was looking at the labour of the bees. He said that worker bees are sexless they are female but there is no reproduction. It is the act of going out into the world and taking the sexuality from the plants and flowers and then bringing it back into the hive. He talks about sexuality and love. So the hive becomes a space full of love not made from the bees' own sexuality, but a sexuality of the world, that is brought back into the community to create this absolutely luscious creation called honey, as well as a completely functioning community.

J: It is really interesting to think about sexuality in relation to labour: that work can be thought of as a work of Eros. In this sense, Eros and labour seem to create lusciousness.

N: It is interesting to look at our culture right now because labour and sexuality have been devoided and put at extremes to each other. But there is that physicalness in working with the materials in the act of working that is based in the body. Then of course there is Beauty connected with both.

J: It is sensuous? But what intrigues me here is the idea that sensuality and work has to happen in community. So it is a kind of 'labour of love' that is cooperative?

N: Yes, and also when it becomes community oriented, a part of everyday existence, humanity. There is also almost a performative quality that goes with Labour.

J: Like you are performing making you mean?

N: Yes, One thing I love about clay is how it relates to the performative. And that out of all materials, it is the one that actually records every moment, freezes it

actually, with the presence of the makers's hand. So there is something to it that is beyond the performance, not a relic of it, maybe?

J: You mean it remembers your gesture.

N: Yes, that goes back to the idea that clay has memory.

J: But I was thinking that as an artist, you work alone in this studio. How do you bridge that desire for community. Or is the work a proposition that we should be more communal?

N: I always think we should be more communal! I would only hope my work has the ability to suggest that. It is constantly about exploring the space that I exist in as a mother, member of society and/or female, within the work that I am making.

J: Well, the hive creates together doesn't it. I like this idea of the 'hive mind', one that creates organically without conscious or egoistic striving. Do any of the bees even know what they are doing? They just put their heads down and do their own thing ...

J: Right, the baby bees get created. The beehive structure gets created. The honey gets created. So do you think that artists are like that as well? I am looking at these hexagonal objects on your wall over there and to me the hexagon is a shape that calls out to touch another hexagon (fig.1). When you look at it, you can see all the other hexagons even if they are not there a very present absence. And at the sides of the shape, there is the offer of a touch. It is different from a square which seems to be always self-sufficient. But I also want to talk about how you figure things out with form and material, with vessel shape and abstract shapes. Why are you using these forms? In the past you also used boxes which are a counterpoint to these forms.



1. Nicole Cherubini, 2014, Earthenware, terracotta, glaze, pine, mdf, acrylic paint, spray paint, 96" x 36" x 4" (photo: Jack Tan)

N: Well I am really intrigued with the space that clay inhabits between two dimensionality and three dimensionality. You are constantly building with it in three dimensions, yet simultaneously, you are forced to deal with the surface, the colour, the texture. It is a kind of middle ground that I love.

I always think about the twelve inches between a wall and the floor, it is an unknown or unused space. When you try and put a piece of furniture up against your wall, there is the baseboard, a pipe, a window, etc. There is always that kind of awkwardness there as well as a connection. I think that weird physical space is what clay inhabits.

J: How do you think that connects to your sculptures?

N: I am always trying to work out how to make a sculpture a line: dealing with a form that as you move around it, sometimes it disappears into a straight line, sometimes is a mammoth form. A play on depth and plane, of sorts (fig.2).



2. Nicole Cherubini *On the Mountain*, 2013, pine, mdf, earthenware, acrylic, spray paint, glaze and plywood, 79" x 57.5" x 24"
(photo: Nicole Cherubini)

J: So you like to play with the way in which a sculpture can disappear ...

N: ... yes and/or how is can become see-through? A screen to see through? It is one of the things that I think sculpture has that painting doesn't: no matter what, it always has some relationship with everything else in the room. Always trying to force the viewer to acknowledge the difference.

J: Is this a particular curiosity in a transparency of sculpture: in an idea that sculpture can also not be monolithic? See-throughness and thinness is not normally what you associate with sculpture. Sculpture is typically thought of as big, bold, solid. It presences in a different way. Is there an interest in thinking about how thinness and see-throughness can have presence?

N: Yes, definitely. How a sculpture can have presence in that way without it being ephemera?

Main image: Installation view, *In and Out of Weeks*, 2013, Tracy Williams Ltd., New York City, NY, USA, courtesy of the artist and Tracy Williams Ltd. (photo: Jean Vong)