

BIG RED AND SHINY

Review: Nicole Cherubini, golden specific



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Golden Specific, Nicole Cherubini's [exhibition at Samson Projects](#), is meditative. The gallery's white box is punctuated with caramel, turquoise, and terre verte glazes, peach spray paint, and a red plastic bucket. Cherubini's sculptures color the room. The show includes six amphora-like constructions on pedestals. These urns feel important, like reliquaries for the phalanges of some saint. In *Way of the White Clouds (White Structure with Blue)*, a luminous aquamarine pot floats on an earthenware pedestal, while another matte white jug lurks around its base. *Way of the White Clouds* has narrative but no closure. The relationship between the two vases is hierarchical, but the implications of that distinction are satisfyingly unclear. *Golden Specific* offers the chance to muse over Cherubini's enigmatic forms; it should be viewed slowly.

Cherubini elevates the clay vessel, both figuratively and literally. The ewers alternately rest on piles of press-moulded earthenware boxes, an MDF platform, a rotating stand, and a plywood box. None touch the floor. Cherubini, like Brancusi, fuses sculpture with pedestal. For example, *Goldenrod* consists of four urns atop six clay boxes, all drowned in crème brûlée glaze, dripping down the sides. The color is a visual skin that holds the whole form

together. The combined jars/pedestal feels figurative, like a bust or a caryatid. It is tempting to view Cherubini's sculptures as individuals. In *Golden Specific*, the pedestals are often bodies that lift the pots to eye-level.

Cherubini's inclusion of jarringly contemporary techniques and materials keeps the work from being too precious. In her travels to Mexico and Iran, she photographed local pottery and then translated the images into digital three-dimensional models. Cherubini then used the renderings to mill moulds for slip casting the vases, such as in *Bucket #1, The Red One*. *Bucket #1* is a spray painted hot-peach vessel, on top of a white one, inside a white plastic five-gallon bucket, inside a red plastic five-gallon bucket, on top of a rotating modeling stand. Cherubini's work draws from hellenic amphorae, which were sometimes sacred, such as lethykoi used to hold anointing oil. As a result, the combination of plastic and clay in *Bucket #1* feels slightly mischievous. Cherubini can be playful, but she is essentially sincere. Her use of apparent materials, such as buckets and spray paint, doesn't subvert the Romanticism in her work.

Cherubini's sculpture exists in the space between traditional ceramics and abstraction. Glazing some sections but not all, fusing the sculpture with the base, and including found elements underscore the physical structure. Compared with Cherubini's blinged-out previous work, this current show is relatively restrained. Consider *G-Pot, Black with Leaf* from 2005, whose materials include: Ceramic, Fake Gold and Silver Jewelry, Chain, Luster, Amber, Pink and Green Rabbit Fur, Enamel, Plexiglas, Plywood, and Formica. In the current exhibition, *Bucket #2, The Green One* is an all-white column capped with a green urn. Cherubini still uses varied materials, but the streamlined form and the limited palette allow the *Bucket #2* to more clearly reference geometry. With Cherubini's current simplification, it is also easier to see the formal elegance of the work.

The sculptures in *Golden Specific* are emphatically contemporary but with significant history, like the punky offspring of a storied dynasty. Usually, we encounter these types of vases on these types of bases in museums, such as the porcelain urns that line the main staircase at the MFA. These works seem to beg for inclusion in an encyclopedic museum to sit alongside the terra cotta originals, the way that the Met placed El Anatsui's tapestry, *Between Heaven and Earth*, next to the Kente cloths. Locating Cherubini's work amongst the amphorae in the Greek and Roman collection would highlight her contrasting materials, as well as her evolution of the urn and the pedestal.

Cherubini's juxtaposition of simplicity and abundance imbues these abstracted forms with stillness. The sculptures have transcended their classical inspiration. Though colorful and whimsical, *Golden Specific* has an aura of quiet that deserves prolonged reflection.

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