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HYPERALLERGIC

Fragile Monuments to the Jar's Ancient Form

By Robert Moeller on January 11, 2016



Foreground: Nicole Cherubini "Goldenrod" (2015), earthenware, glaze, medium-density fiberboard (MDF), magic sculpt, 67 x 19 x 22 inches; background: Nicole Cherubini "Althean" (2015), earthenware, glaze, medium-density fiberboard (MDF), magic sculpt, 5 min epoxy, 75 x 19 x 22 inches (all images courtesy Samsøñ)

BOSTON — What's so interesting about [Nicole Cherubini](#)'s sculptural work, recently on view in [golden specific](#) at Samsøñ, might simply be just how impossible it is to (mentally) house it anywhere specifically. There are the vessels themselves, ornately turned out, and the decorative flourishes, stretched and twisting across

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each piece, both perfect and imperfect. The decorative here is strategic, part of an exercise, really. The subtle beauty of each piece is both deliberate and misleading, and the sculptures function as fulcrums for a larger conversation. Formal ideas are undermined and enriched by the use of plastic buckets that play off notions of a more modern turn against the ancient traditions of pot-making. In Cherubini's work, a dialogue is always taking place.



Installation view of 'golden specific' at Samsøñ

Under this canopy of ideas are the objects themselves. "Bucket #1 The Red One" sits on a low stool which supports a red plastic bucket, which in turn balances a spray-painted earthenware pot. The cascading effect is a stratifying display that marks both moments in time and art history. Here, the paint replaces glaze while the bucket and stool stand in for a pedestal. The meditative aspects of the work are balanced on top of each other to form a singular object that feels like it could come apart at any moment. The fragility is cautionary and intended, a deliberate rendering of life's various instabilities and the passage of time. A handle is attached to the red bucket and it feels more like a fire alarm rather than any usable attachment.



Installation view of 'golden specific' at Samsøñ (click to enlarge)

“The Way of the White Clouds (White Structure with Blue)” references the materials that Cherubini uses. The pedestal, in this case, is stacked boxes of clay neatly shaped to form a supporting column. A blue vase sits atop the boxes looking starkly vulnerable and frail. On one hand, the piece intends to locate both process and result, and yet its austerity pulls it off in another direction. The vase looks oddly out of place, like the Mars Rover sitting awkwardly on some barren (and distant) outcropping. It is this quality that gives Cherubini’s work such power. A small, elongated vase (like an umbrella stand) is placed just next to the pedestal and signals a vacancy of sorts. Unglazed and plain, it sits far below the blue vase and radiates with placidity, not structural or intrinsic, but merely a hanger-on. A counterpoint to something else left unsaid or some ambition left unfulfilled, its placement below everything makes the rest of the piece feel higher, and perhaps, more alone.

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The installation of the work, which was counterintuitively (but perfectly) scattered through the stark white gallery space, added to the unbalanced feeling. One needed to navigate carefully through the sculptures, always mindful of what might have been just behind you. The effect was a bit unnerving, as if wandering through a casually laid-out obstacle course defined by a series of fragile objects.

What Cherubini does so expertly is to take an ancient, necessary, and basic form and approach it like a novelist would. There are stories here, many perhaps unresolved or difficult to interpret and layers of data, whether art historical or personal, that are woven together. And the elegance and simplicity of the work is fused with a rougher-edged knowledge of just how things are put together and how easily they can fall apart, or worse, simply fade away.



Nicole Cherubini, "Earth Pot #9, 3 Fates" (2015), earthenware, glaze, bronze, medium-density fiberboard (MDF), 58 x 25 x 27 inches

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Nicole Cherubini: golden specific ran at Samsøñ (450 Harrison Ave, Boston) October 30, 2015–January 9, 2016. Nicole Cherubini: ‘The Love Tapes’, A Retrospective opens Saturday, January 16 at Retrospective Gallery (711 Warren St, Hudson, New York).