

# Art in America

## Nicole Cherubini

NEW YORK,  
at TRACY WILLIAMS

by Faye Hirsch



Nicole Cherubini:  
*Astralogy*, 2013,  
mixed mediums, 55 by  
46 by 9½ inches; at  
Tracy Williams.

For years, Nicole Cherubini has been blurring the boundaries between craft and fine art, decor and sculpture, and expanding those of her main medium, clay. Like many a potter, the New York-based artist inflects her vessels and reliefs with an adventurous, painterly use of glazes, an aggressive manipulation of surfaces and a varied approach to building forms. Her distinction, however, lies in her manipulation of the way we view her work, as she fashions a meta-commentary on display and context in the

form of platforms, frames and armatures made of wood, fiberboard, acrylic paint, found objects and other non-ceramic materials.

Cherubini's recent expansive, 14-piece exhibition, "in and out of weeks"—no doubt a reference to the temporality of making—included large amphorae, smaller wall reliefs and three big, complicated assemblages, the latter a departure from her earlier endeavors and the most interesting work in the show. The structures look like pseudo-modernist shelving gone awry. Open, geometric components constructed of painted

wood are assembled into gravity-defying composites that seem precarious resting places for the vessels they nest. The main, lozenge-shaped element in *Astralogy* (all works 2013), for example, houses a stack of objects—wooden box, paint can, ceramic pot, etc.—in a careful vertical that seems challenged by the reckless trajectory of the adjacent compartments—a cantilevered triangle and square that take off at an angle. *Astralogy's* palette—predominantly blue, explored in paint and glazes—gives it a light, airy feeling, perhaps in keeping with the celestial-sounding title. One long side of the lozenge is doubled by an outer wall bearing a single streak of bright yellow paint. Such details make you want to spend time with the works, which change in profile as you walk around them. And you must peer closely to determine the medium of the various parts, in so doing discovering many small surprises. You can't, in other words, take the work for granted—unlike the mere furniture and pots in your own apartment.

The amphorae are signature Cherubini—awkwardly built ceramic vessels, mainly in bright colors, with generous flourishes, and variously displayed, some without bases and others on flat painted wood platforms. Most striking among them was the all-white *Bright New Crescent Moon*, its surface activated with tiers of bulges and its lid something like a jaunty cockade. The pot was placed on a high wooden pedestal bearing a white slab, as if the piece were awaiting an inscription.

Subtleties abound in four small wall reliefs, which likewise reward close attention. *At the Jubilee* resembles a cardboard collage, its textured elements in fact corrugated ceramics in white and cheery bright orange. Progressing forward in planes from a light tangerine-colored backing panel, *The Dew* modulates through a white rectangular slab painted with a brownish square to a looped white circle, and culminates at the very front in a hooked, bright blue braid. Such touches feel sudden, imparting to the works a freshness that permeated the show as a whole.