



KATHY ERTEMAN

KEAN UNIVERSITY

Kathy Erteman: Monoprints and Clay

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All works of art by Kathy Erteman
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Cover: **Conflict**, 2009. Mixed media on Mulberry paper, 14 x 14 in.

Opposite: **Image Reverse**, 2008. Slip underglaze and glaze on whiteware, 16 x 50 x ¼ in.



KATHY ERTEMAN
MONOPRINTS AND CLAY

Karl and Helen Burger Gallery
KEAN UNIVERSITY

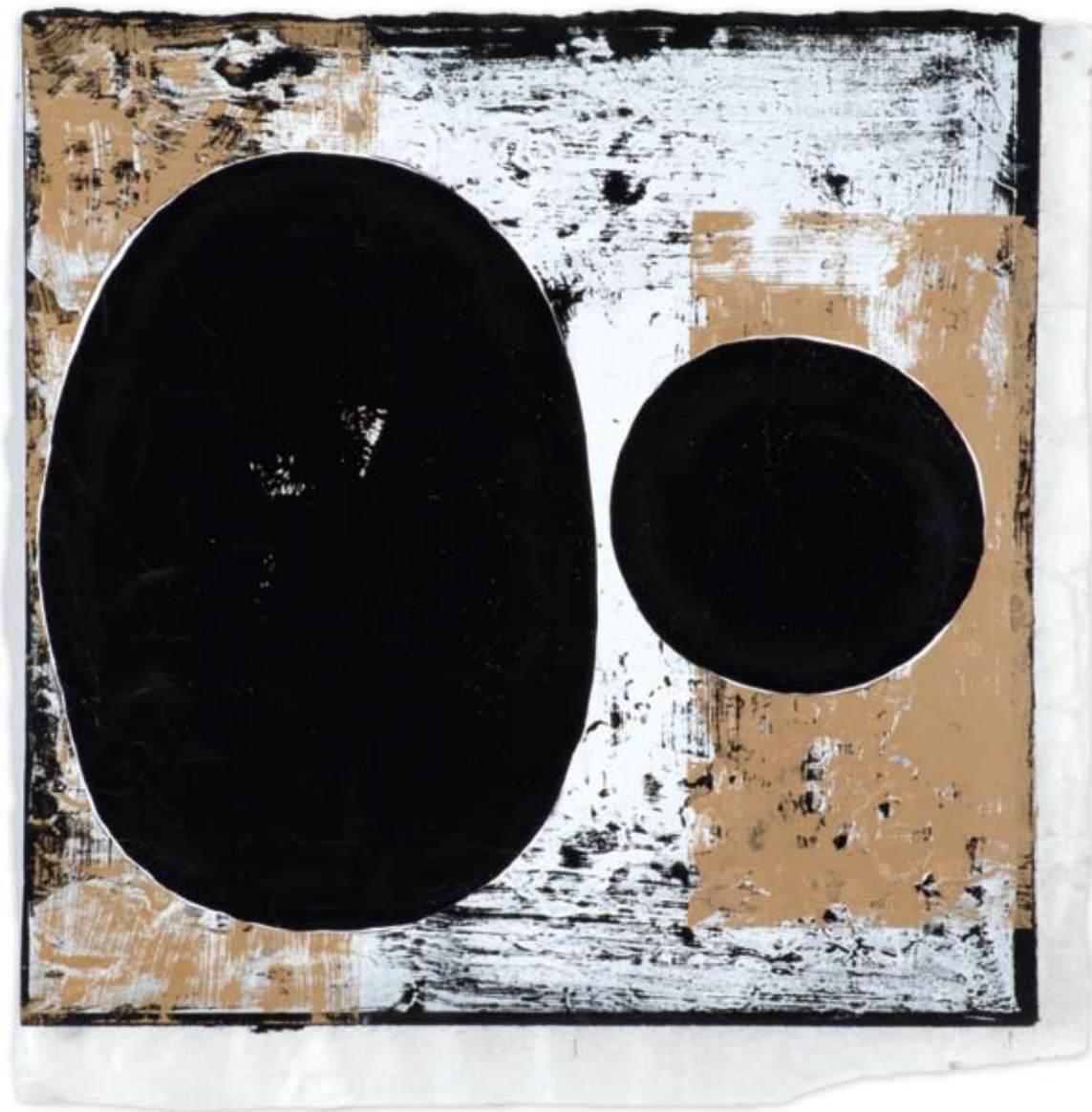


Monoprint Cylinder #2, 2009. Slip underglaze and glaze on whiteware, 6 (diam.) x 23 in.

KATHY ERTEMAN
MONOPRINTS AND CLAY

November 3 - December 17, 2009

Karl and Helen Burger Gallery
KEAN UNIVERSITY



Mentor, 2005. Mixed media on Mulberry paper, 13 x 13 in.

Introduction

Kathy Erteman creates art with a sense of confidence and style that has evolved over a lifetime of creative experiences, diverse influences, and a great deal of world travel. Her parents were Dutch and Austrian refugees who moved to California to escape the Nazi occupation. In the 1960s and 1970s, she came of age in Los Angeles, when design and studio art were rapidly merging with the world of fine art. In the 1980s, she had already made a name for herself with her well-known black and white studio ceramics.

As demand for her work increased, Erteman would travel to factories in Thailand and Peru to oversee production of her designs. Over three decades, she has designed for such companies as Tiffany, Dansk, and Crate & Barrel. Her artwork is included in the permanent collections of the Smithsonian Institution, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and the Taipei Museum of Fine Arts. Recently she lectured at the United Nations headquarters in New York City and worked as a design consultant to ceramic artisans in Tibet through the United States Agency for International Development.

At mid-career Kathy Erteman freely works in two and three dimensions. Her art includes architectural installations, encaustic painting, printmaking, and even an occasional ceramic funerary urn. Within this wide range of expression, she consistently makes reference to her cultural and artistic influences: Bauhaus design, Minimalist sculpture, and Japanese print-making. In 1994 she moved from Northern California to Manhattan, where she continues to live and work. The current one-person exhibition entitled *Kathy Erteman: Monoprints and Clay* is featured at Kean University's Karl and Helen Burger Gallery from November 3 through December 17, 2009. Paintings on ceramic tile, monoprints, and vessel installations from 2005 through 2009 are the focus of the show.

On behalf of Kean University, I thank Kathy Erteman for her efforts in the planning of this comprehensive exhibition, as well as for lending all the works being shown. For the installation of this show, we are grateful to our graduate assistants Christopher Clark and Kelly Murphy. Special thanks go to Kean University President Dawood Farahi, Vice President Mark Lender, and Holly Logue, Acting Dean of the College of Visual and Performing Arts. We appreciate their support for the growing exhibition program and for this opportunity to investigate the work of Kathy Erteman.

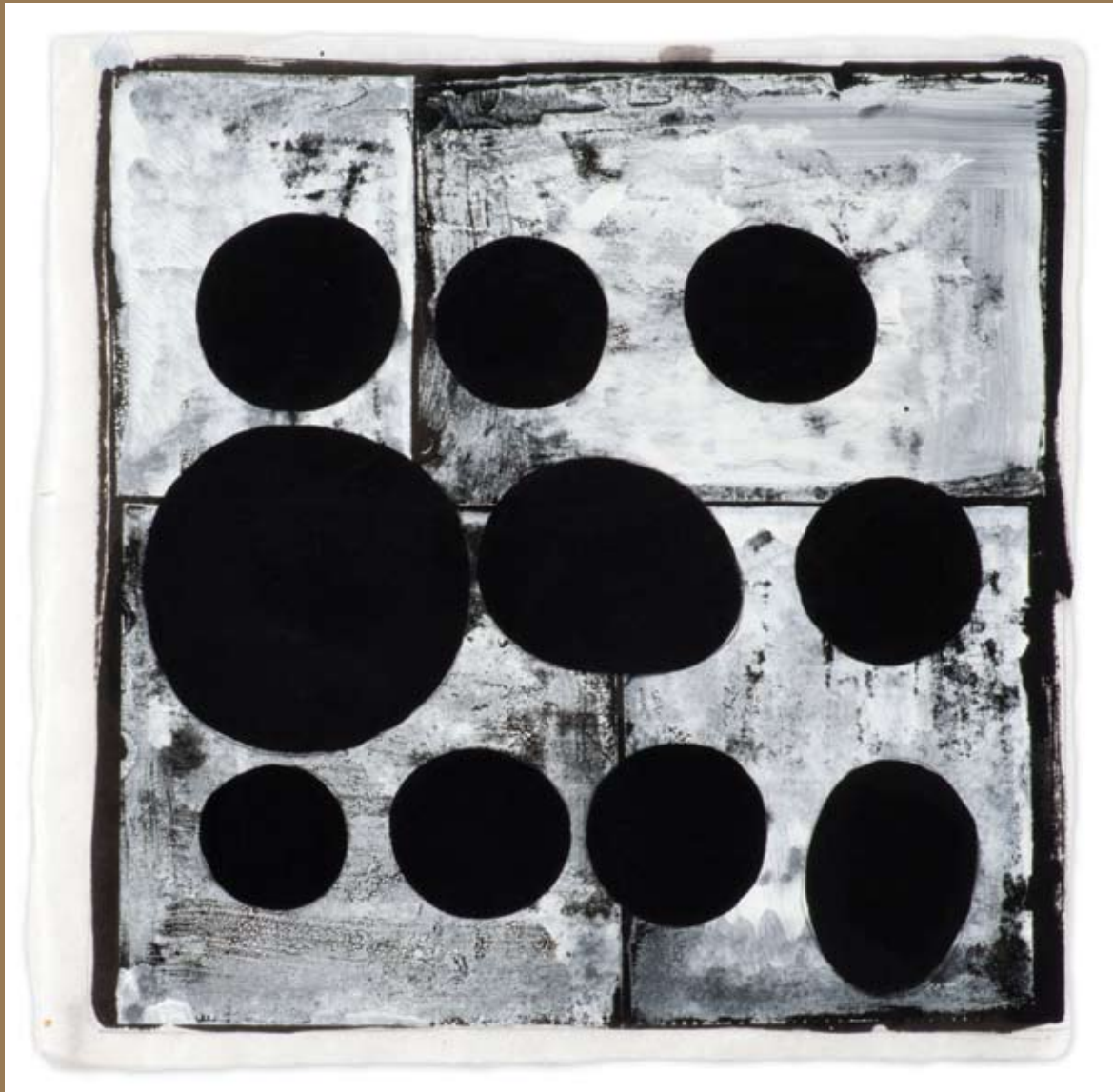
Neil Tetkowski
Director of University Galleries



Golden Light on 18th, 2009. Mixed media on Mulberry paper, 15 x 15 in.

Opposite: ***Family Portrait #1***, 2005. Mixed media on Mulberry paper, 12 x 12 in.

WORKS ON PAPER





Influence, 2005. Mixed media on Mulberry paper, 12 x 12 in.

KATHY ERTEMAN

By John Perreault

Certain tendencies can be discerned throughout the world of contemporary ceramics; humor, super-decorativeness, and now mixed-media clay come immediately to mind. But where is elegance? Where is restraint? These unjustly neglected qualities are embodied in the subtle, steadfast work of Kathy Erteman, in which restraint has a strength all its own.

What should one call a “school” of ceramics that crosses under or over all schools, that has no campus and no compass? Its primary characteristic is understatement. It owes more to northern Europe than to southern Europe. It is more Nordic than it is Italianate. It is, all in all, aggressively modest.

For several decades, Erteman’s vessels have quietly inserted themselves into this tradition. One thinks of Hans Coper and Lucie Rie; one thinks of the Natzlers and even the more dramatic work of Elsa Rady. This tradition—and perhaps tradition is a better term than school—comes with a sense of responsibility. Art works must be made for the home, not the palace.

Therefore, one does not have to justify Erteman’s feeling for affordable editions, handmade and even mass-produced dinnerware. Such productions go with the socially conscious territory of Apollonian ceramics. The goal of Erteman’s dinnerware is to provide a platform for food. The goal of her artware is the kind of contemplation that only the most rarified of ceramics can provide.

Restraint, however, does not necessarily preclude evolution or development. Known for her utilization of black-and-white surface treatments, Erteman has recently unveiled her forays into subdued color in a series of monochromatic wall squares, which come in sets.



Veiled, 2009. Mixed media on Mulberry paper, 14 x 14 in.

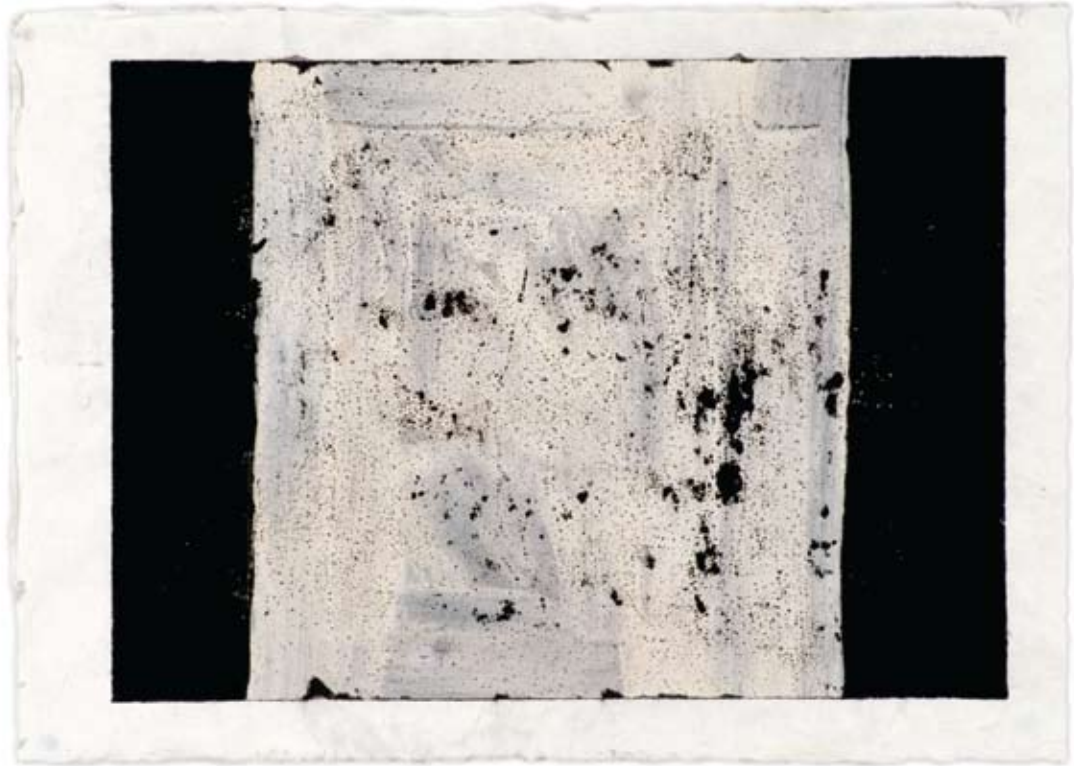


Resolve, 2009. Mixed media on Mulberry paper, 14 x 14 in.

The seemingly solid and sometimes quite thick squares are actually hollow, which allows them to be hung directly on the wall. The artist's four-square arrangements must be meticulously followed. These wall pieces are not variables: they are not tiles and they are not paintings. They are elegant ceramic variations on the minimalist grid, one part Agnes Martin, one part Sol LeWitt, but with an investigation of color that is strictly Erteman. But there is more than the wall pieces going on here.



Empty Lot, 2005. Mixed media on Mulberry paper, 13 x 13 in.



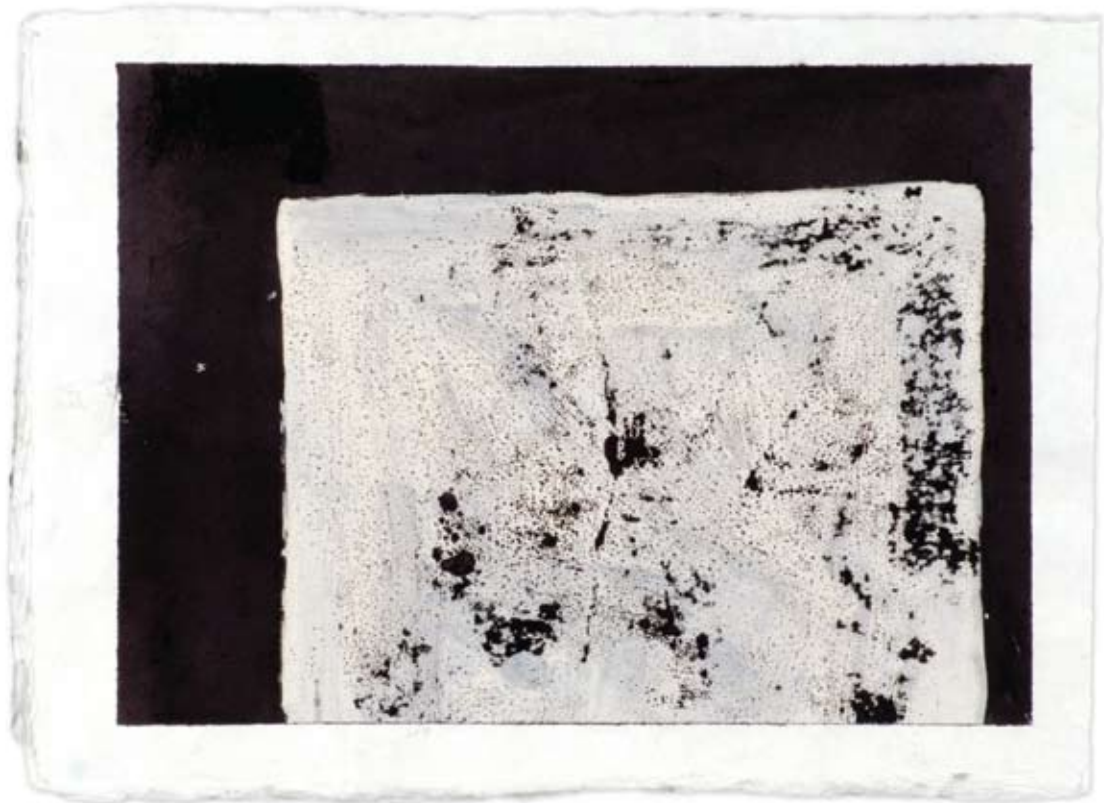
Study with Glaze #2, 2007. Mixed media on Mulberry paper, 18 x 24 in.

Noting that inks and paints can be transferred using clay, Erteman has been investigating the monoprint, first on cylindrical vessels and then, by opening up the cylinders, on flat, rectangular tablets, which are most often shown in simple groupings. Using the monoprint technique, she has developed a rich vocabulary of circles and ellipses. She associates the configurations with unselfconscious social arrangements that may be observed on the street or at informal gatherings. Her use of monoprint techniques on clay surfaces references the classical uses of accident in ceramic decoration and the give and take between application and surface. Ceramics and the monoprint are such a comfortable fit that it is astounding no one has thought of it before. Other techniques, such as transfer prints, decals, and screen-printing, have been used in the production of commercial dinnerware and parodied in art ceramics, but never, so far as I know, in the humble one-off monoprint.

Erteman has usually worked with tightly thrown or molded vessel forms, so that the monoprint images provide a foil to the precision, or vice versa. Erteman is also obviously attracted to the low-tech, highly tactile quality of the process. The rectangular tablets and



Guide, 2005. Mixed media on Mulberry paper, 13 x 13 in.

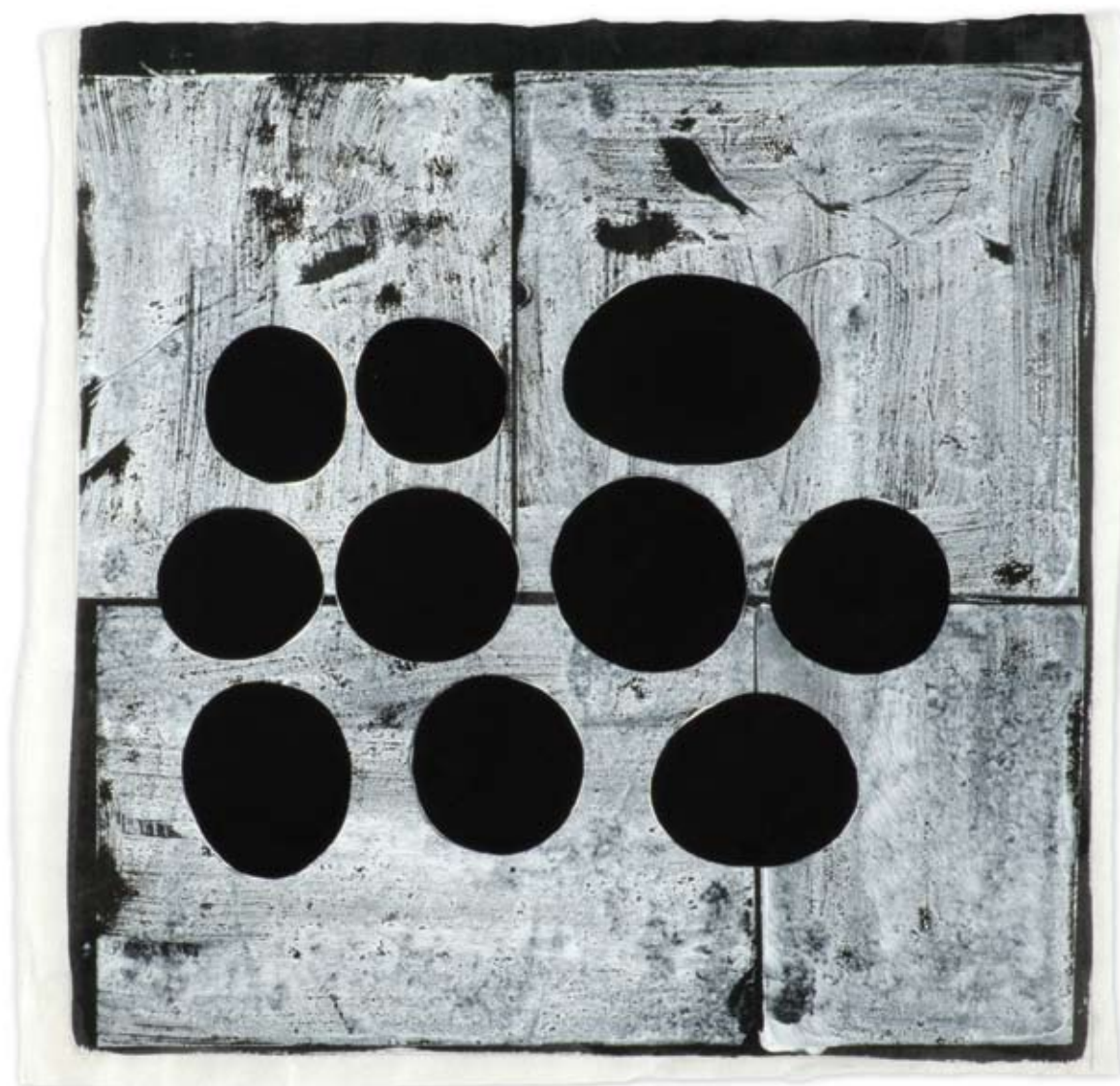


Study with Glaze #1, 2007. Mixed media on Mulberry paper, 18 x 24 in.

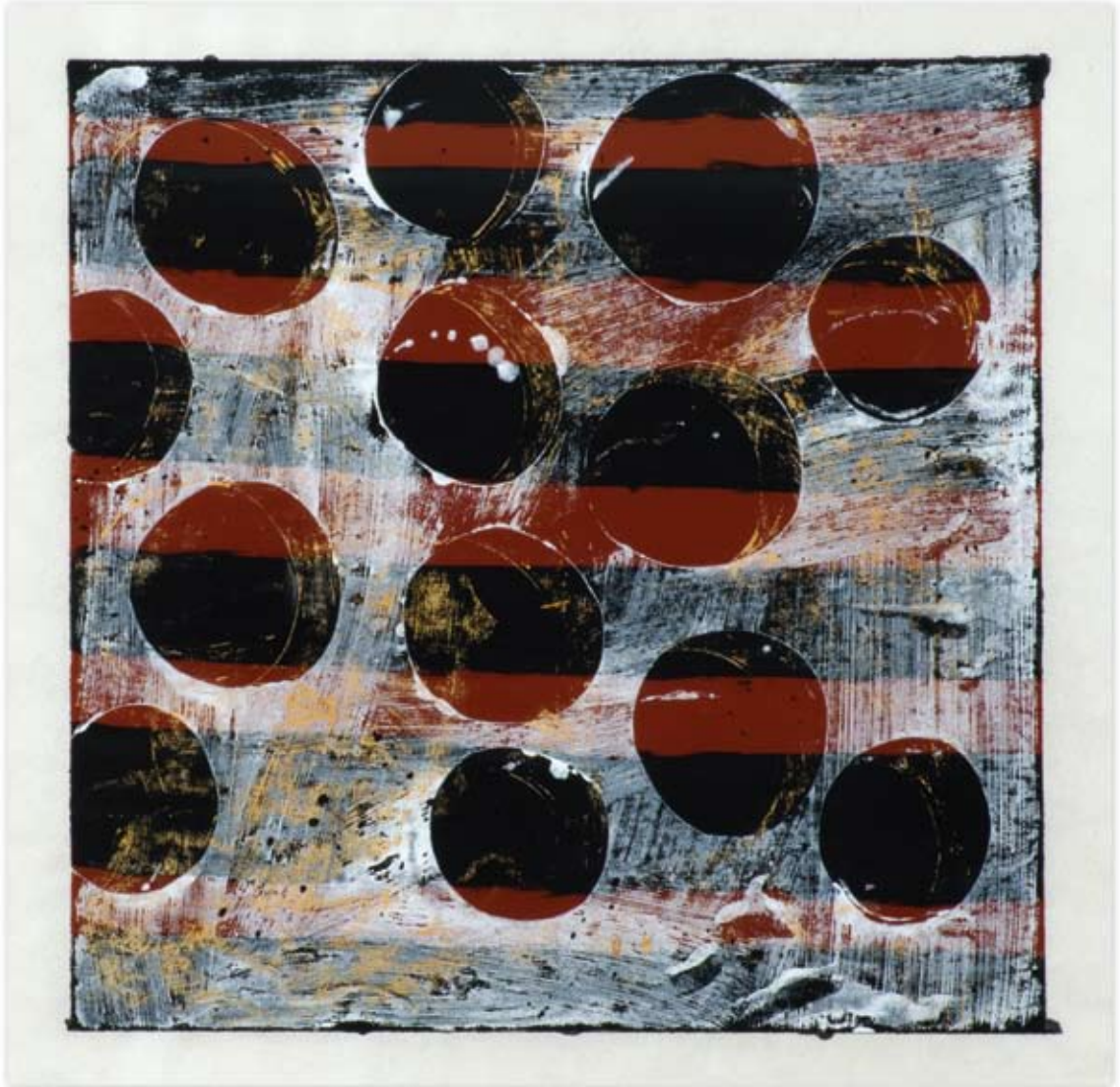
the wall squares highlight flat surfaces, as well as the kind of compositional closure that vessels deny, marking a new stage in Erteman's career. As if migrating from the wall squares, these blushes and stains of subdued color are now slowly making an appearance in the monoprint tablets.

The cerebral wall squares and the lyrical monoprint tablets carry forward Erteman's commitment to clay and to a classic, conscientious modesty, as they allow room for artistic growth. One is not surprised that the same kinds of emotions that prevail in her earlier work are also celebrated in these new endeavors. ■

John Perreault is an art critic, poet, and artist who writes regularly at www.artsjournal.com/artopia. He has written about contemporary art for *Art News*, *Artforum*, *American Craft Magazine*, and numerous other publications. He was a Senior Curator at the American Craft Museum and is a past president of the New York Section of the International Association of Art Critics.



Family Portrait #2, 2005. Mixed media on Mulberry paper, 12 x 12 in.



Untitled, 2009. Mixed media on Mulberry paper, 15 x 15 in.

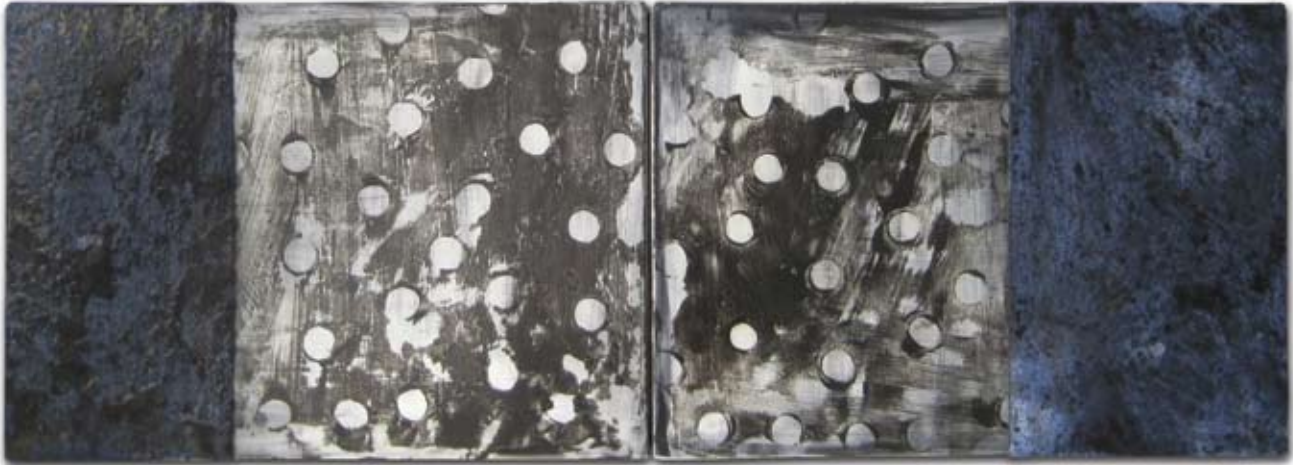


Loner, 2007. Slip underglaze and glaze on whiteware, 18 x 16 x ¼ in.

Opposite: **Guanzhi**, 2009. Slip underglaze and glaze on whiteware, 16 x 72 x ¼ in.

WORKS IN CERAMICS





Blue Monoprint Tablets, 2007. Slip underglaze and glaze on whiteware, 11 x 33 x 1 in.

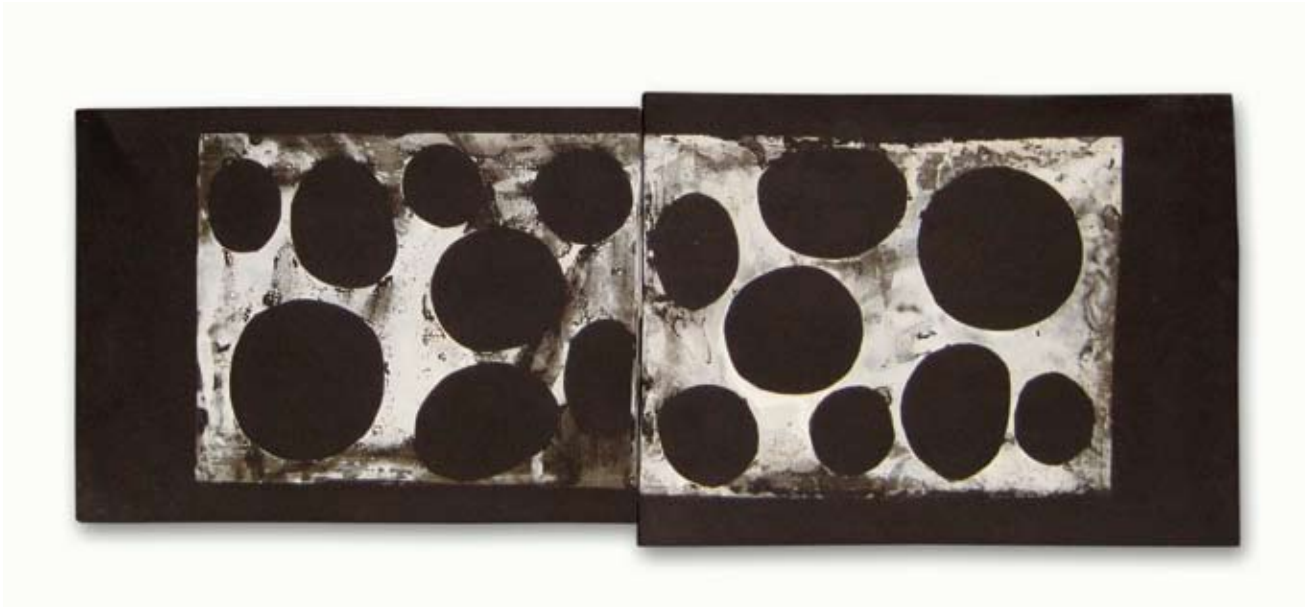
THE PHYSICAL AND THE VISUAL

By Janet Koplos

We are all the products of our experiences. Kathy Erteman's distinctive place in contemporary American ceramics may in part be attributed to the influences of her background: she was born to European immigrants displaced from Vienna and Amsterdam by World War II. The strong design traditions in both those cities may have given her a first vocabulary. In Southern California, where she grew up, modernist design and architecture were all around her, both the European strain—exemplified in the exquisite ceramics of the émigrés Gertrud and Otto Natzler, whose work and lifestyle she admired—and in the new ideas characteristic of that time and place. One of those was the Finish Fetish style, in which painters, sculptors, and ceramists showed an interest in the particularities of surface, often glossy perfection or intense color. Feminism, along with Erteman's experience helping with Judy Chicago's collaborative *Dinner Party* project, was another. This combination of ideas and influences is specific to Erteman's life and frees her from any danger of following someone else's manner. Thus she cannot be pigeonholed, and her work in every category has achieved an admirable integrity.

Erteman's ceramics, like all great works in that medium, insist on their own physicality when they are seen in person. Even ceramic sculpture—work not intended for use—emphasizes tactility and often relates to the human body through its volume, if not through its actual size (although frequently it *is* through size, as it reflects the measurement of the maker's hand or arm's length). Erteman has made many objects for use, and though that is less central to her current work, a viewer looking at her vessels may still feel the urge to pick them up and test their weight, to run a finger along a rim, to rest a palm against a slick patch of glaze or a





Naar Boven 2006. Slip underglaze and glaze on whiteware, 11 x 28 x ¼ in.

crusty-looking expanse of a dryer, mottled surface. All her work, even the new panel series that holds a middle ground between drawing and painting and the ceramic tradition of tile, occupies three-dimensional space and thus feels familiar to the viewer, who similarly exists in space. When the work itself doesn't have much depth, she hangs it from a bar so that it projects slightly from the wall and seems thick.

Viewing the photographic representations in this catalogue offers an entirely different pleasure in the consideration of Erteman's works. One can for a moment disregard their satisfying physicality to concentrate exclusively on their visual qualities. These purely visual aspects are certainly not the total, but photographs do offer the opportunity to consider some qualities more purely, in isolation, before turning back to enjoy the experience of the actual work as a whole.

Flipping through the images of ceramics on these pages can evoke the compacted feeling of watching fast-paced movie previews: one association is quickly crowded out by another. As I jumped from one image to the next in viewing the full selection of work in the show, I was reminded of Minimalist sculpture, machine belts, Japanese food dishes, *Chine-collé* prints, handmade paper, monochrome painting, tree trunks, third-world basketry, peeling advertising posters, tropical leaves, De Stijl compositions, architectural columns, rusting steel,

Opposite: **Metro**, 2008. Slip underglaze and glaze on whiteware, 38 x 10 x ¼ in.



Granite Boat Vessel, 2008. Slip underglaze and glaze on whiteware, 5 x 24 x 11 in.

Aaron Siskind photographs, boats, trays of food. Certainly one of the strongest aspects of Erteman's work is the subtle surface character she develops (also present in her works on paper, which will be discussed below). This is true despite—or perhaps because of—her limited use of color. In works such as *Arc* she organizes a very vague overall black-and-white treatment, in some parts milky-looking and elsewhere appearing abraded; she interrupts that looseness with sharp-edged squarish patches, which are widely spaced in the composition. These areas suggest a different reality. It is as if we are looking at a satellite view of clouds (the milky parts) with inset photographs of rock faces (the abraded parts).

The surface of *Arc* can also be described without making these kinds of associations. In purely formal terms, it is a fluid, horizontally compressive composition of white on black punctuated by contrastingly rigid straight lines; the vertical lines seem to interrupt forcefully while the horizontal ones, paralleling the longer top and bottom edges of the surface, seem to point onward, as if the composition could extend forever. And when *Arc* is analyzed as a three-dimensional work, or seen in person so that its volume cannot be ignored, even in a moment of indulgence, the viewer notes that the angular patches occupy the ends of a long side of the form, so that they appear to wrap around rather than terminate, emphasizing that this work is not, in fact, two-dimensional. The contrasting, entirely black interior also visually pushes the mottled surface out into space, again underscoring dimensionality.



Arc Vessel, 2008. Slip underglaze and glaze on whiteware, 8 x 23 x 5 in.

This kind of examination of opposing effects can be applied to all the images of ceramic objects printed in this catalogue. Columnar works such as the three monoprint cylinders insist on the curvature of their surfaces, even in photographs. The faint shadows in the white background of the top two-thirds of these photos visually reinforce the curvature of these slip-cast forms. At the same time, however, flattening effects are produced by the matte black segments. The cylinders are elegant, smooth, and they evoke contemporary design, offering less sense of touch than some other works. Yet the motif used is unlike the perfection of mass-produced design works and recalls aged plaster. Ertegan plays one aspect against the other, so that viewers cannot capture the work at a glance but must spend time with it. Always her works present an apparent simplicity—uncomplicated forms and, as noted, limited color—which turns out to be full of subtle complications.

Ertegan's various tile-like pieces, which she makes in different sizes, as solo objects or in diptychs and triptychs, are easily compared as well to other two-dimensional genres, such as paintings or prints. However, they retain thickness—sometimes enough to suggest that they are hollow—and an appearance of weight. The irregular surface plane keeps them in the realm of the physical rather than offering the illusionary window into another space that painting and photography routinely provide. One piece, exceptionally, is half blue, but mostly Ertegan manipulates contrasts of value (light/dark) at the same time that she plays softness



Shallow Pod #1, 2008. Slip underglaze and glaze on whiteware, 7 x 26 x 3 in.

Shallow Pod #2, 2008. Slip underglaze and glaze on whiteware, 7 x 26 x 2 in.

Striped Pod, 2008. Slip underglaze and glaze on whiteware, 4 x 25 x 8 in.



Blade Vessel, 2006. Slip underglaze and glaze on whiteware, 5 x 18 x 3 in.

against precision to create an impression of shallow, ambiguous space. *Loner*, the largest single piece, again may recall a plaster wall infected by time. She applies a number of white egg shapes to the shadowy white-on-black ground, along with a single black egg shape. It is not clear where they exist in space, but they hold their uncertain depth and invite us to study the details of placement.

In photographs the white shapes read as faintly outlined in black; they seem to be “detached shapes” casting minuscule shadows. But that is not really the case. Erteman engages in layering, and she uses stencils to “reserve” a spot of undercolor while she brushes a different pigment over the area; or she applies a color to a slab of clay in which she has made holes and presses it to the surface of the panel to transfer the color—just like a monoprint executed in more conventional printmaking materials. Those seemingly detached shapes are in fact lower than the rest of the surface, and sometimes they show narrow outlines of a different, mostly obscured color. Perhaps they seem to advance because they are less inflected and therefore more emphatic. The effect is elusive, confusing, fascinating.



Guanzhi Two, 2009. Slip underglaze and glaze on whiteware, 18 x 80 x ¼ in.

This impact of “detached” elements, which she has been exploring for about four years, appears again in most of her paintings on paper. The most striking examples are the works called *Influence* and *Mentor*, in both of which two large rounded shapes visually operate well in front of the background. These works are given titles that could have emotional implications. In both works, one of the shapes is larger and dominant. In *Influence*, there is barely enough room for the small shape of contrasting color, which seems to be overwhelmed by an outside influence that does not match its own character. In *Mentor* the colors match and the large and small shapes occupy a sympathetic and comfortable propinquity, together but not colliding.

Other works on paper may correspond directly to the treatment of the ceramic surfaces: *Family Portrait* and *Portrait 2* consist of irregular circles, large in the former and of medium size in the latter, recalling the black dots on the ceramic diptych called *Naar Boven*. Something slightly different happens in *Golden Light on 18th*, in which a swarm of small black dots occupies a warm golden shape that is approximately circular (as they are), upon a horizontally furrowed black-and-white background. One imagines the dots as people swarming across an intersection perhaps, with the square frame standing in for a window. But such a literal interpretation cannot be sustained, because the dots seem unaffected by gravity in their orientation and organization. The formal analysis used on the ceramic compositions is more appropriate here: the black dots float in an undefined depth.

In these recent works, Erteman eschews the functional designs that previously occupied her but otherwise continues her practice of producing reductive and orderly shapes with



Plein, Gray/Black Vessel, 2008. Slip underglaze and glaze on whiteware, 7 x 25 x 7 in.

evocative surfaces. The specifics are quite different, the general character quite consistent. She is committed to abstraction and suggestion rather than depiction. Her palette is sober yet the works are not quite closed enough to be called austere: they are sometimes atmospheric, sometimes even sensuous. In this considered, evolved body of work, Erteman maps out a place for herself that for the most part escapes the common stylistic categories of ceramics but retains its particularities, even as she asks the formal questions of any abstract art. ■

Janet Koplos has written widely on art, architecture, and design and has long had a special interest in contemporary craft. Koplos is the guest editor of *American Craft Magazine*, and former senior editor at *Art in America* in New York City.



Figure Eight Vessel, 2006. Slip underglaze and glaze on whiteware, 5 x 21 x 2 in.

Green Vessel, 2009. Slip underglaze and glaze on whiteware, 25 x 7 x 5 in.

Steel and Rust Vessel, 2006. Slip underglaze and glaze on whiteware, 5 x 17 x 5 in.



Monoprint Cylinder #3, 2009. Slip underglaze and glaze on whiteware, 6 (diam.) x 23 in.



Monoprint Cylinder #1, 2009. Slip underglaze and glaze on whiteware, 6 (diam.) x 23 in.



Tumble, 2007. Slip underglaze and glaze on whiteware, 13 x 52 x ¼ in.

Kathy Erteman Biography

Kathy Erteman is a ceramic artist and designer based in New York City whose career spans three decades. Her work has been widely exhibited and is represented in important collections, such as the Smithsonian Institution, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and the Taipei Museum of Fine Arts. She has been commissioned to design for the ceramic industry by such prominent firms as Tiffany & Co. and Crate & Barrel. Her work has also been published in books and periodicals, including the *New York Times*, *Metropolitan Home*, and *Artforum*. In addition to her studio work, Erteman is known as an inspiring teacher and has taught at Parsons School of Design, the Brooklyn Museum, and the Bezalel Academy of Art in Jerusalem. She currently teaches at Greenwich House Pottery in New York City. Her many awards include a New York Foundation for the Arts fellowship and an eBay artist technology grant.

Kathy Erteman is the daughter of Austrian and Dutch refugees who immigrated to Los Angeles in the 1940s. The European sensibilities of her family and the progressive postwar energy of Southern California provided the early foundation of her artistic point of view. Modernist architecture and design, Abstract Expressionist painting, and the Minimalist



Shallow Pod #3, 2007. Slip underglaze and glaze on whiteware, 7 x 26 x 2 in.

Rectangle, 2007. Slip underglaze and glaze on whiteware, 1 x 21 x 9 in.

Black and White Pod, 2008. Slip underglaze and glaze on whiteware, 4 x 28 x 7 in.

sculpture movement were at the height of their influence during her youth. The celebrated ceramic works of Gertrud and Otto Natzler, Lucie Rie and Hans Coper, among others, were part of the restrained, graceful aesthetic she was exposed to at the time. While still in high school, Erteman joined a ceramic studio founded by Robert Brent, a pioneer of the contemporary electric potter's wheel. Here she began to work in clay, making singular modern forms reflecting both early twentieth-century European design and the renegade influence of Southern California. The exciting "no-rules" environment there during the late 1960s encouraged experimentation and blurred the lines between craft, popular culture, and fine art.

The brilliant and obsessively honed surfaces and use of industrial materials of Los Angeles Finish Fetish artists Craig Kauffman, Robert Irwin, Larry Bell, Ken Price, and James Turrell attracted her attention. This freewheeling approach to clay has remained a defining element of her work throughout her career.

As a young artist in Los Angeles, Erteman followed the work of artists associated with the Chouinard Art Institute—Adrian Saxe, Ralph Bacerra, and Elsa Rady. Their well-crafted and highly stylized vessels gave her license to go beyond the strict but unspoken rules of traditional pottery-making. This enabled her to incorporate such industrial methods as slip casting, jiggering, and plaster turning into her work and to develop her signature vessel forms.

Erteman received a BFA from California State University, Long Beach. After graduation she worked with the artist Judy Chicago on her groundbreaking feminist work *The Dinner Party*. In 1981 Erteman established a studio in Benicia, California, a Bay area town that was home to many celebrated artists working in clay, such as Robert Arneson, Manuel Neri, Sandy Simon, and Robert Brady. In 1994 she moved to New York City, where she currently lives and maintains a studio near Union Square. ■

Checklist

Kathy Erteman: Monoprints and Clay

Ceramic Wall Pieces

1. *Blue Monoprint Tablets*, 2007, 11 x 33 x 1 in.
2. *Guanzhi*, 2009, 16 x 72 x ¼ in.
3. *Guanzhi Two*, 2009, 18 x 80 x ¼ in.
4. *Image Reverse*, 2008, 16 x 50 x ¼ in.
5. *Loner*, 2007, 18 x 16 x ¼ in.
6. *Naar Boven*, 2006, 11 x 28 x ¼ in.
7. *Metro*, 2008, 38 x 10 x ¼ in.
8. *Tumble*, 2007, 13 x 52 x ¼ in.

Ceramic Vessels

9. *Arc Vessel*, 2008, 8 x 23 x 5 in.
10. *Blade Vessel*, 2006, 5 x 18 x 3 in.
11. *Figure Eight Vessel*, 2006, 5 x 21 x 2 in.
12. *Granite Boat Vessel*, 2008, 5 x 24 x 11 in.
13. *Plein, Gray/Black Vessel*, 2008, 7 x 25 x 7 in.
14. *Steel and Rust Vessel*, 2006, 5 x 17 x 5 in.
15. *Striped Pod*, 2008, 4 x 25 x 8 in.
16. *Rectangle*, 2007, 1 x 21 x 9 in.
17. *Shallow Pod #1*, 2008, 7 x 26 x 3 in.
18. *Shallow Pod #2*, 2008, 7 x 26 x 2 in.
19. *Shallow Pod #3*, 2007, 7 x 26 x 2 in.
20. *Monoprint Cylinder #1*, 2009, 6 (diam.) x 23 in.
21. *Monoprint Cylinder #2*, 2009, 6 (diam.) x 23 in.
22. *Monoprint Cylinder #3*, 2009, 6 (diam.) x 23 in.
23. *Black and White Pod*, 2008, 4 x 28 x 7 in.
24. *Green Vessel*, 2009, 25 x 7 x 5 in.

Works on Paper

25. *Mentor*, 2005, 13 x 13 in.
26. *Guide*, 2005, 13 x 13 in.
27. *Empty Lot*, 2005, 13 x 13 in.
28. *Family Portrait #1*, 2005, 12 x 12 in.
29. *Family Portrait #2*, 2005, 12 x 12 in.
30. *Influence*, 2005, 12 x 12 in.
31. *Study with Glaze #1*, 2007, 18 x 24 in.
32. *Study with Glaze #2*, 2007, 18 x 24 in.
33. *Untitled*, 2009, 15 x 15 in.
34. *Golden Light on 18th*, 2009, 15 x 15 in.
35. *Veiled*, 2009, 14 x 14 in.
36. *Conflict*, 2009, 14 x 14 in.
37. *Resolve*, 2009, 14 x 14 in.

Note: Measurements are represented in inches (height x width x depth). Unless otherwise noted, all ceramic surfaces are a combination of slip underglaze and glaze on whiteware. All works on paper are mixed media, gouache, casein paint, tempera, and etching ink on Mulberry paper. All works are collection of the artist.

Opposite: **Naar Boven** 2006. Slip underglaze and glaze on whiteware, 11 x 28 x ¼ in. (detail)





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