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CERAMICS AND PRESERVATION IN THE BAY

by Woody De Othello

The Bay Area has had somewhat of a magnetic pull on me. Primarily because of my interest in ceramics and figurative works, the historic draw weighs heavy. Artists such as Rob Arneson, Viola Frey, and Peter Voulkos helped to formulate my early understanding of the potential of what clay could become, and opened my eyes to the various approaches and applications of the medium. I felt the influence of the Mission School artists as an undergrad, encountering Barry McGee's work at the Margulies Collection in Miami. I remember being completely enamored with the cartoony illustrative appearance of his work. This sparked an interest to delve deeper into other Bay Area artists and allowed me to discover folks such as Chris Johanson, Margaret Kilgallen and Ruby Neri.

This pull that the Bay Area had on me was solidified at the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts (NCECA) conferences held in Houston and Milwaukee in 2013 and 2014. It was there that I became aware of the ceramics program at the California College of the Arts (CCA), taking note of the outstanding work being produced by graduate and undergraduate students Victoria Jang and Yeon Joo Lee. Another pull to the Bay was the obsession I had with Berkeley-based rapper Lil B, whose demeanor and anomaly to hip hop encapsulates the aura of the free speech movement, an open-mindedness and freedom that I have learned is synonymous with the Bay Area. I knew that I wanted to be a part of this energy, and pursuing a graduate degree at CCA was the way I inserted myself into the scene here. In choosing CCA for graduate studies I received an extension of the history tied to the California Clay Movement, studying under Nathan Lynch, who was a student of Ken Price and Ron Nagle, and working with Arthur Gonzalez, who studied under Robert Arneson and Manuel Neri while at UC Davis. The reputation and legacy is still vibrant on the historic Oakland campus where the arts and crafts formerly attached to the CCA name remain poignant. Especially in the Noni Eccles Treadwell Ceramic Arts Center, the design of which was guided by Viola Frey, one can literally see remnants of previous years as the "kiln gods" still hover over numerous gas kilns and a huge graveyard of sculptures left behind make up the motif that consumes the entire south-facing window on both the top and bottom floors of the building.

Flash forward two years since my move to the Bay, and I cannot say for sure if the Bay Area art scene has anything distinctive about it as, I've only lived in Miami prior. But what I can say about the Bay Area is that there are many places and people for support and there's a persistent mentality despite the monetary challenges we all face living here. The spaces range from underground spaces managed by artists that include UFO Gallery, City Limits, Nook Gallery, Quality, Aggregate Space Gallery, CTRL+SHFT, and R/SF projects, to more commercial spaces that have national and international draw such as Ratio 3, Jessica Silverman Gallery, Et Al, Capital Gallery, Altman Siegel Gallery, Alter Space, Guerrero Gallery, Johansson Projects, and so much more. The breadth of discourse here and openness to

engagement from different perspectives is what I can attest to. There is a strong social engagement in the works and exhibitions being produced, which is tied to the radical legacy of the Bay Area. It's political, it's progressive, and it's queer.

I am not sure what the future holds for the Bay Area. It is increasingly a challenge to make ends meet, as well as a struggle for artists to be able to afford both rent and a studio, with enough time between jobs to create. Despite this, I do feel it is an exciting time to be in the Bay. It's active, vibrant, and constantly reassuring to be surrounded by people who are finding a way to survive here.