

SHANE CAMPBELL GALLERY

Newcity Art
January 2015

Jan
07

Review: Shio Kusaka/Shane Campbell Gallery



Shio Kusaka. Installation of ceramic pots currently on view at Shane Campbell Gallery.

RECOMMENDED Japanese-born, American-trained ceramicist Shio Kusaka appears to be standing in both worlds. Formally, she's one-hundred percent Japanese, making the cups and bowls of conventional Japanese pottery with a simple, gentle, flowing, balanced, slightly off-kilter, understated sense of design and craftsmanship. Every detail is rewarding—from the firm footing, through the delicate thin walls, up to the inviting, sharply drawn orifice. But conceptually, she's a contemporary American artist, hunting for that mysterious, ever-alluring boundary between tiresome banality and unique revelation. In this series of pots, she imitates the colors and surface textures of fruit: smooth and purple for grape, orange and mottled for citrus, red and pitted for strawberry. But not the kinds of fruit that grows on trees or vines. She has imitated the insipid surfaces of fruit-flavored candy or soda pop. In other words, not really fruit at all, but the kind of manufactured confections that characterize the modern, low-brow American diet. Yecch! Who would want to eat such things? And yet, ever since Pop Art discovered the supermarket, highly profitable but problematic foodstuffs have been depicted by contemporary American

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artists. What Shio Kusaka has accomplished is making it feel even more attractive than repulsive.



Shia Kusaka. Detail view of installation of pots currently on view at Shane Campbell Gallery.

Of course, she can, and has, applied her remarkable talents to making many other kinds of beautiful ceramics that are not repulsive at all. Previously, she has shown herself to be just as adept at painting surface designs as in modeling the shapes beneath them. But her involvement with the tropes of contemporary art has ironically allowed her to practice and master a very simple, straightforward kind of pot making, in contrast to the garish complexity and technical gymnastics that drives so much of contemporary ceramics.

The gallery has displayed this collection on a wooden platform, without finish, in the center of the room, much like the produce islands one might find in a supermarket. Just so, the collector might well place these pieces on a kitchen counter rather than within a more formal setting. Such a conflation of high-art with everyday life is as Japanese as the tea ceremony where this artist was first introduced to the objects that she came to make so well. (Chris Miller) Through January 24 at Shane Campbell Gallery, 673 North Milwaukee.

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