WHAT IS IN FRONT OF YOU?

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WHAT IS IN FRONT OF YOU?

by

Susan A. Dewsnap

A THESIS

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WHAT IS IN FRONT OF YOU?
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Pots are familiar forms, approachable and understood. They are opened, looked into, lifted and held and this is when their hidden virtues of suggestively vast interior, weight and gravity are revealed. I continue to be intrigued by the questions that pots provoke: those of making, possibilities of use and by the endless manifest forms in which they appear throughout various cultures of the world.

My recent work has been an investigation into the dynamics of how the drawing on the surface and the shape of a piece can be intimately connected, that one cannot exist without the other. I aspire to create a deep, rich and visually complicated space by reducing my color choices to nearly black and white. There is a graphic quality that draws one in, yet when viewed up close there are subtleties of color and line that cannot be seen from a distance. The high contrast creates an ambiguous space, shapes flip and what is closest recedes, the form emerges and dissolves beneath the surface. How you can see and not see this simple form is not a trick of perception, or to be clever, but to create awareness – to draw you into something that was familiar and now becomes unfamiliar.

Currently I look to painting as much as to ceramic history, as my work draws from art history as an eternal source and presence. I consider each pot as presenting a particular issue or problem to be solved and brought to fruition where interior meets exterior. I make simple forms that push out while the surface squeezes in, wraps and stretches around or over the wall of a ceramic object, or traverses the flat plane of a plate. By embracing and reaching outside of decorative practices, as well as working toward a more reductive three-dimensional form, I am trying to merge structure and surface to evoke a response beyond the familiar. This surface should have depth, space, tension, rhythm and chaos, one that has as much to do with the hand as the hand that made the
pot. The painting on the piece can both reinforce and dissolve the form so that you must move around the pot or attempt to look into or through the surface.

In the ceramic pieces that describe an enclosed interior, the inside is perhaps simply a dark space, but it is also a void that creates the gesture of the pot -- its expanse and swell opens outward and can be physically felt. Alternatively the surface pulls you in; it is layered, complex and demands time. The black contrasts with white, an empty space that breathes with the interior and is left open to interpretation. The form itself is round or has a back and front -- it cannot be taken in all at once. The work occupies time; time spent looking which transports these pieces to fulfill an act, where they become objects of contemplation.

I want an experience beyond what is in front on me, one that questions the role of the familiar object. Can the medium be reinterpreted to change or challenge the personal awareness one has with these objects? How does the simple form of a pot or object contribute to the search for something beyond itself? I continue to be engaged and mystified by handmade objects, by the wonder that they can arouse. For me, objects have always had the potential to evoke a range of feelings, through their shape or color, their relation to other objects around them, how they feel in the hand or by their sheer physical or visual presence. I am trying to get people to look at and think about pots which may also entail making ceramic pieces that suggest but are not pots.
Susan Dewsnup
Image List

1 – Wide Jar, Stoneware, soda fired, 8” x 12”
2 – Gallery View
3 – White Jar with Circle, Stoneware, soda fired
4 – Detail of White Jar with Circle
5 – Plate, Stoneware, soda fired 2” x 8”
6 – Black and White Jar, Stoneware, soda fired
7 – Tondo, Ceramic Refractory, soda fired
8 – Green and White Jar, Soda fired
9 - Plate, Stoneware, soda fired, 9” x 2”
10 – Glazed Tile, Ceramic Refractory, soda fired
11 – Tall Jar, Stoneware, soda fired, 17” x 12”
12 – Plate, Stoneware, soda fired, 9” x 2”
13 – Vase Form, Stoneware, soda fired, 12” x 7”
14 – Glazed Tile, Ceramic Refractory, soda fired