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Transcendent Materiality

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TRANSCENDENT MATERIALITY

By

Lauren Mabry

A THESIS

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TRANSCENDENT MATERIALITY

Lauren Mabry, M.F.A

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Adviser: Peter Pinnell

I make painterly, abstract, ceramic objects. My obsession with surface and materiality compels me to investigate the relationship between images and objects through the inherent qualities of ceramic material. Primarily my work communicates directly, through its formal and aesthetic qualities, but it may also be understood in relationship to abstract painting, minimal work, and process art. I exploit the intrinsic qualities of ceramic material producing works that are warm, seductive, and surprising. Ultimately, my work is a synthesis of intuitive, expressive surfaces and elemental forms.

In this body of work there are two main forms: cylinders and curved planes- as well as fragmented versions of both. Since I consider each work as a painting that has form, I limit the complexity of the underlying, structural forms in order for them to serve as a dimensional, pared down, canvas. The linear edges and basic, stable forms contrast the vibrant activity and complex depth of the surfaces.

The cylinders are circular paintings. When viewed in profile the cylindrical object becomes a flattened, rectangular plane. When approached the interior of the vessel is revealed, exposing the dimension of the object and the physical space it consumes. This dual perception creates a conceptual overlap between object and image. I am compelled to paint the insides of my cylinders with slips and glaze in part because it creates an awareness of this dichotomy but also because it creates new compositional viewpoints, and invites prolonged interaction with the

viewer. I use form to reiterate the visual and psychological depth of the surface, which emphasizes the power and presence of objects.

The curved planes are more closely related to traditional paintings. However, the relatively flat, one-sided planes extend out from the wall in a large mass, activating the surrounding space. Their weight and physical presence underlines the fact that they are objects as well as images. There is physical and visual access to more than one side of the piece.

Some of my forms are fragmented or cut, which activates a sense that the piece came from a larger, more expansive form. When there is accidental breakage I respond by capitalizing on it. The decision to further break, cut, and chip pieces provides formal resolution. Fragmentation of the work obscures the viewer's ability to conclude how the work was made—even to somebody with in depth knowledge of ceramic process. I utilize the fragile and inherent instabilities of ceramic, which are often considered failures, to furthermore demonstrate my understanding of materiality and its conceptual function because I intentionally integrate the failure of the material into aesthetically resolved work.

Tactility is deeply important to my entire process. After forming the piece, I lay a ground of white slip over the red earthenware clay. I relinquish conscious control of my mark making in the early stages of layering colored slips and stains. As I paint, often with my fingers, my intuitive decisions stem from a loose, rhythmic, internal spark. Next the work goes through one initial firing before I continue to layer more glazes and pigments. Preparing to apply colors is as much a part of my process as physically carrying out the act. I stare at the work for long periods of time, estimating and envisioning how the surfaces will melt, drip, and transform in the firing in hopes of a successful composition. Lastly, I apply the final layer of glaze, which obscures the

surface beyond recognition. The result after the final glaze firing is never in my complete control. It is a combination of what I envisioned and what actually happened.

The absence of representation in my work allows the marks, brush strokes and color to communicate. I create energy through formal dualities. Drips, swipes, and splashes of colorful glazes contend with one another for the viewer's attention. For example, aggressive and passive elements are adjacent to one another. Bold hues intermingle with quiet tints and shades. The surfaces sometimes look weathered and aged, but at the same time colorfully lush and wet. There is a sense of immediacy to the mark making and at moments a sense of play. These completed surfaces look effortless, but in fact they are the result of my deep understanding of the physical and chemical behavior of ceramic materials.

My aim is to create work that is scintillating and dramatic. The phenomenon of ceramic surface is always surprising me with new potential that becomes my motivation. I want to engage my viewers with visually striking work, which also contain more subtle layers of meaning. Ultimately, my work is a synthesis of intuitive, expressive surfaces and elemental forms. In a successful work, the intrinsic qualities of the material are transcendent. By using materiality in an unexpected way, I want my viewers to experience something that goes beyond the physical pieces. My aim is to use ceramic surface and form to create a new synergistic whole.



Above: Gallery views of *Transcendent Materiality*



Above Left: *Curved Plane*, 2012. Earthenware, slips, glaze (support: steel, oak, epoxy) 25”h x 56”w x 15”d

Above Right: *Sliced Place*, 2012. Earthenware, slips, glaze. 6”h x 5”w x 2”d



Above: *Curved Plane*, 2012. Earthenware, slips, glaze (support: steel, oak epoxy) 24”h x 51”w x 18”



Above Left: *Cylinder*, 2011. Earthenware, slips, glaze. 12”h x 12”w x 12”d

Above Right: *Cylinder*, 2011. Earthenware, slips, glaze. 12”h x 11”w x 11”d



Above Left: *Cylinder*, 2012. Earthenware, slips, glaze. 10”h x 12”w x 12”d

Above Right: *Cylinder*, 2012. Earthenware, slips, glaze. 9 3/4”h x 11”w x 11”d



Above: *Fragmented Cylinder*, 2012. Earthenware, slips, glaze. 20''h x 22''w x 24''l



Above Left: *Green Shade*, 2011. Earthenware, slips, glaze (support: wood, epoxy) 13''h x 19''w x 2''d



Above Right: *Sliced Plane*, 2012. Earthenware, slips, glaze. 10''h x 17''w x 2''d