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Contemporary Clay: Group exhibition with Kathy Butterly, Nicole Cherubini, Julia Chiang, Naoki Koide, Jeff Koons, Klara Kristalova, Erin McCutcheon, John O'Reilly, Joyce Robins, Arlene Shechet, Shinique Smith, Paul Swenbeck, Ai Wei Wei.

June 29 – August 20, 2011

NEW YORK - RH Gallery is pleased to present Contemporary Clay, a group exhibition of recent sculpture in clay by a diverse group of contemporary artists. Clay inherently contains a presence that is both fragile and powerful. Contained within this tension are multiple cultural histories. Clay's malleability and sensitivity to touch further defines its identity yet each artist in this exhibition uses clay in a uniquely expressive way. Contemporary Clay is filled with rich histories, playful interludes and visceral forms.

Arlene Shechet references the historical form of the Moon Jar in her new works *Oh Gold, Blushing Moon* and *Floating Ring Wet Pearl Moon*. Shechet's interpretation and transformation of this fabled form invites layers of both formal and philosophical questions. Traditionally, the Moon Jar was a vessel, unlike Arlene's. Hers are globes, heads, celestial abstractions and a pedestal upon which another sculpture perches.

Kathy Butterly's abstract sculptures cull sources from Asian, Victorian, modern and contemporary cultural relics. Her tiny vessels are packed with various forms, textures and references – each one is a world unto its own.

Nicole Cherubini's practice is also filled with cultural relics and multiple histories. Her series of boxes unfold like abstract thought bubbles reflecting Cherubini's continued study of process and structure. These sculptures manage to simultaneously reference Rauschenberg's cardboard pieces and Gluts while also recalling Eva Hesse's organic forms.

Folktales and fairy tales enter into the work of **Paul Swenbeck, Klara Kristalova** and **Naoki Koide**.

Swenbeck's *Kobold*, references the Kobold elves that live deep inside the earth, apparently causing mischief in mines. Cobalt is named for these elves as their presence is blamed for the contamination of minerals with a blue ore.

Swenbeck's oeuvre is always an exploration of the unknown, the invisible and the mystical. Kristalova's *Twice as Happy* embodies the ethos of her work. On the one hand, it echoes the wonder of youth and the magic of fairy tales and on the other, subverts this playfulness into a dark commentary on contemporary culture and human nature. Taking as a starting point a kind of naïve aesthetic, Kristalova transforms quotidian subjects into haunting visions. Naoki Koide also employs a youthful, childlike expression in his work. In *Pine*, Koide anthropomorphizes a tree transforming it into a mystical character.

Other works in this exhibition are made by artists whose practices are cross disciplinary. Their ceramic works reflect a continuation of series or concepts initiated in other media. The **Shinique Smith** multiple, *Little Nugget*, is a gold Buddha-like figure based on her *Glutton* sculptures, which were wrapped clothing and sprayed in gold acrylic paint. *Glutton* consisted of bailed scrap fabric and comments on excess consumption and the global trade in castoffs from the West, especially in used clothing. **Ai Wei Wei's** edition *Kui Hua Zi*, which translates as "sunflower seeds" - is a continuation of Ai's practice of fusing Western and Eastern sensibilities, history, and contemporary political metaphor. The sunflower seeds are a symbol for a sustainable way of life, and are made in porcelain, a material invented in China 1,200 years ago. The porcelain sunflower seeds represent the one and the many; and the modern with the ancient. **Jeff Koons** blends the concerns and methods of pop, conceptual, and appropriation art with popular culture to create his own unique iconography. His *Puppy* is a classic example of Koons' particular imagery. **Erin McCutcheon** used clay to make works resulting from an exploration of our collective and individual memories and ideas about airplanes.

The characteristics of the material of clay play an important role in the exhibition. **John O'Reilly's** work explores a wide range of issues from comparative vertebrate anatomy to sociology, psychology, genealogy and familial development. Through a focused sculptural practice, O'Reilly digs into specific moments that define the character of his subjects. His *Untitled* bust is characterized by a particular facial expression between ecstasy and hysteria, but also by the cracks that developed by letting it sit unfired for several years. **Joyce Robins'** process is one born of intuition and led by studied visual memories. There is no narrative impulse; her forms reflect an experience of the world. Robins grew up on the ocean, watching the waves crash against the land. This experience formed her sense of time, decay and renewal. The holes and indentations in her work reference bubbles in the foam of a receding wave. They are about a dissolution or disappearance of material. **Julia Chiang's** recent series of ceramic chains seemingly restrain and protect a sacred space imagined by the artist. Chiang articulates our absurd desire for perfection by contradicting the form of an industrial chain using clay marked with Chiang's personal touch.

RH Gallery: 137 Duane Street New York, NY 10013 | Tuesday – Saturday: 11am-7pm
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