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An Impression of Otherness: Brian Rochefort at Van Doren Waxter

by David Rhodes | Saturday, December 30th, 2017

Brian Rochefort: Hot Spots at Van Doren Waxter

November 3 to December 22, 2017

195 Chrystie Street, between Rivington and Stanton streets

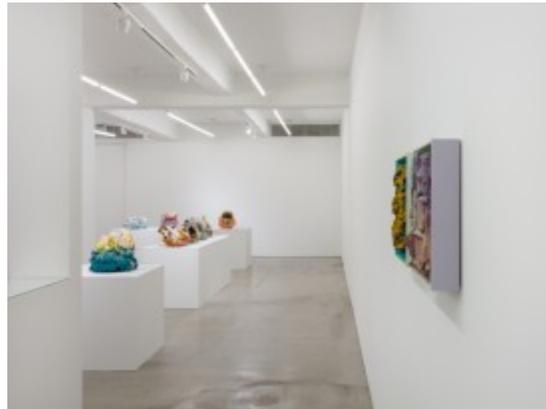
New York City, vandorenwaxter.com



Brian Rochefort, *Jozani*, 2017. Stoneware, earthenware, glaze, glass, 15 x 18 x 12 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Van Doren Waxter

Although Brian Rochefort was born in Rhode Island (1985) and studied ceramics at the Rhode Island School of Design, his ceramic sculptures relate strongly to a West Coast tradition—and he now indeed lives and works in Los Angeles. That tradition includes Peter Voulkos, Ron Nagle and Ken Price, and the latter two would seem of particular importance to Rochefort, though Voulkos' explorations into the deconstruction of functional ceramic objects certainly has bearings as well. Nagle and Price conjure extraordinary surfaces, colors and shapes, broaching both the animate and inanimate in unexpected inventive form, in ways that particularly resonate with Rochefort.

Of the 17 ceramic works presented here, 12 are referred to by Rochefort as “craters” and placed on three white pedestals. The remaining pieces are wall based “relief paintings” (again, according to the artist) and incorporate their painted frames through color relationships: think Bram Bogart’s physically present forms and Jules Olitski’s vaporous sprayed transparencies. The particularly vivid use of color and intricate complexities of organic surface and structure obvious in all these works appear distinctly other within an urban environment—however garish and battered they become. An impression of otherness is, indeed, confirmed on discovering that their inspiration has been gleaned from such unspoiled physical phenomena as volcanic ranges, tropical rainforests, barrier reefs and attendant flora and fauna, experienced by Rochefort on travels in Central and South America and Africa.



Installation shot of the exhibition under review: Brian Rochefort: Hot Spots at Van Doren Waxter, New York, November 3 to December 22, 2017

The process used to arrive at particular colors and forms is intuitive—clearly, Rochefort is responsive to results at each stage along the way to a completed piece. These include breaking up an initial vessel shaped object of unfired clay, dipping the parts into a mixture of clay and mud, and leaving them to dry and crack. Glazes are then added using methods more or less familiar to ceramic production—drips and splashes, airbrushed gradients of color and pools of melted glass. The firing of each piece is repeated after another new layer of glaze is added.

Jozani (2017), at 18 inches high, is typical of the irregularly conical “craters,” and consists of stoneware, earthenware, glaze and glass. A cluster of material around the top edge—circling the interior space—recalls volcanic activity or naturally transfiguring substances: reacting to each other, bubbling, breaking, separating irregularly, clotting, repulsing. This is not just associative of volcanos, it is what actually happened to the materials during the cumulative process of its making. The surface is cracked, both smooth and rough, matt and glistening. Loose patterns appear like pelts, or rocks in laver flows. The colors are warm—turmeric, terracotta, sand, yellow ocher, pale lemon, violet and white. *Jozani* is the name of a Tanzanian village. *SETI* (2017) is composed of the same materials but in different quantities and combinations, and with a different color range of blue, blue green, pink, yellow, brown, and white. This time, marine life comes to mind, coral reefs, the cosmos, and meteorites. Again, color, material and process each contribute to the

visual pleasure, haptic delight and imaginative connection of the piece. The title references the organization committed to a search for extraterrestrial forms of life.

The wall-based “relief paintings” engage visually with the possibilities of painting and its presentation or, less obviously, an architectural setting such as a parvis. *Relief Painting #4* (2017) is a slab of roughly textured ceramic gouged and modeled, colored dark yellow and placed within a frame. Turquoise in the base and internal sides and pale yellow in the facing edge generates continuity and play between the piece and its frame, rather than using the frame as a neutral device within which to isolate the work. The textured surface catches light in such a way as to make two tones. It looks encrusted or weathered, though this is not due to physical process this time, but is just a matter of appearance. Altogether, with both the “craters” and “relief paintings,” Rochefort has contributed to the expanded field of ceramic sculpture and painting, currently such a vital tendency in contemporary art.



Brian Rochefort, SETI, 2017, Stoneware, earthenware, glaze, glass, 17 x 14 x 13 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Van Doren Waxter