



Al Wei Wei Takes a Nap by Pat Johnson

SURFACE TREATMENT

What: *10th Annual South Texas Ceramic Showdown: Constants & Variables*
Where: VAM Gallery, Bldg. F, 3201 W. Pecan Blvd.
When: Through July 25, Tues., Wed., Thurs. 8am-3pm
Where: STC Library Upstairs Art Gallery, Pecan Street campus
When: Through July 25, Mon-Thurs: 9am-10pm
Info: 956-872-3488 or <http://lag.southtexascollege.edu>

Constants & Variables

Ceramics by Jim Bob Salazar and Pat Johnson is the professional guest's exhibit of the *10th Annual South Texas Ceramic Showdown: Constants & Variables*. Located in the upstairs STC Library Art Gallery, their exhibit of earthenware ceramics is definitely worth a visit. Both master potters, Salazar and Johnson's works are contradictory in their mode of expression, but true to the overall theme. The student exhibit is across campus in the VAM Gallery, and while it might seem inconvenient to have separate venues, the separation allows worthwhile concentration for each display.

Salazar brings a mechanical precision of execution to his ceramics, and Johnson brings an intimate, laid-back charm to hers. Both ceramists exhibit wall tiles that confront the other's esthetic. Salazar's series, "Ceramics in the Electronic Age," is informed by the impersonal electronic world. Contrasting in world-view philosophies, Johnson's tile groups embrace female domesticity and moments in the natural world. Salazar applies stamping techniques that create a bold and exacting repetition of marks; Johnson's humor and delicate line drawings flow and evoke Americana charm.

"A lot of the work you see has my own image," explained Johnson about her representational direction. "I have become the protagonist in the story; I'm a story teller and I felt like the best way was to use myself in the narrative." This is particular evident in the large wall-tile multiple, which depicts Johnson in her kitchen. However, Johnson's clay modeling skills are impressive; she nimbly produces realistic images on a modest scale and effectively incorporates her spot-on sense of humor. The intimately scaled ceramic sculpture of the famous conceptual ceramist, "Al Wei Wei takes a Nap," combines homage, gentle humor, and perfectly executed traditional Chinese patterns. I particularly enjoyed the tiny milk carton, which notes him as missing. Johnson uses

humor to grab the viewer's attention, with serious statements concerning social, environmental, and corporate responsibilities soon becoming evident.

Salazar just loves clay and eschews representational motifs in favor of pure design. Coming to ceramics through a commercial art discipline with a reverence for the Frank Lloyd Wright style, Salazar's ceramics bring the viewer's focus to the clearly defined character of wheel-thrown and stamped clay. "My interest lies mainly with the throwing aspect of ceramics. I throw pots because I have to. And I decorate them because I have to," he confessed. His "Red Key Platter" is a masterpiece of controlled execution; pressing shapes into the damp clay to create patterns, his clarity of design is stunning.

The collaborative student exhibit offers a few bright works by advanced students and faculty, but they are surrounded with lesser accomplishments. More structured guidance may have benefited this part of the exhibit. The guidelines are broad and work best for those who understand not only the possibilities, but also the functional purpose of collaboration in ceramics.

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