

Karin Gulbran at China Art Objects

November 18, 2015
Text by Aaron Horst



Karin Gulbran, *Splendor in the Grass* (installation view) (2015). Image courtesy of the artist and China Art Objects Galleries.

Pottery occupies the realm of discrete objects moreso than sculpture, its umbrella genus. As objects, Karin Gulbran's pots in *Splendor in the Grass*, currently on view at China Art Objects, are marked by the ghost of functionality—recalling, perhaps, the sacred and often mysterious functions of ancient ritual containers.

The works in *Splendor in the Grass* are formed from strips cut from a rolled slab and worked up the three axes of desired shape. As a technical choice, hand-building is both intimate and self-consciously crude, adding an extra sheen of

earliest technique to the easy weight of pottery's historical form. The exterior of each piece picture cartoonish, bewildered land and sea animals, their three dimensions folded and creased along a roughly cylindrical two. The distorted picture plane seems both an homage to the time before perspective began to transform visual narratives, and a consequence of material limits.

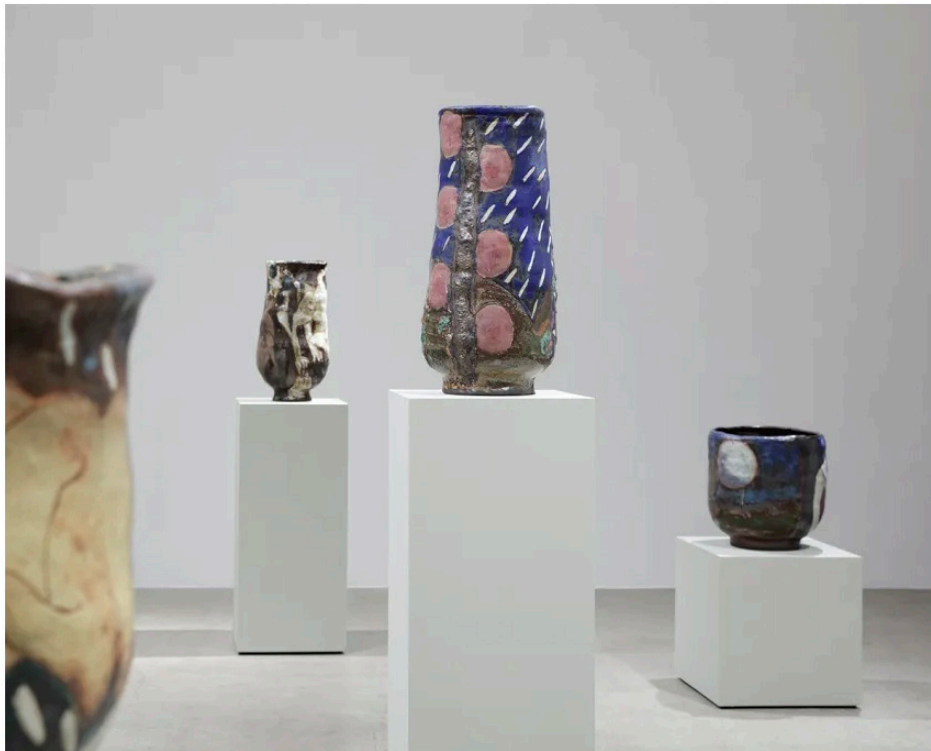
Gulbran's approach proposes a number of questions—primarily, how do we evaluate pottery within a contemporary art context? At what point does work in the lineage and language of pottery come to be evaluated as sculpture rather than sculptural? Is Gulbran's work a send-up, questioning the contemporary potential of an ancient form of narrative communication? Or is narrative the entire point, pottery merely a backdrop for its figuration?

Form in ceramics alludes to long-forgotten rites and customs, its figurations telling portions of tales distorted by history's long-arc game of Telephone. Grecian vessels, with their overlapping snapshots of myth and lore, had the compliment of oral tradition to give context to images fleshed out along their faces. Narrative, suspended and mysterious, waits for its oral counterpart which, perhaps, we, the viewer, are to fill in. But perhaps also, Gulbran's empty vessels aren't meant to be filled, freezing form in the moment between becoming and being.

Karin Gulbran: Splendor in the Grass runs November 7—December 19, 2015 at China Art Objects Galleries (6086 Comey Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90034).



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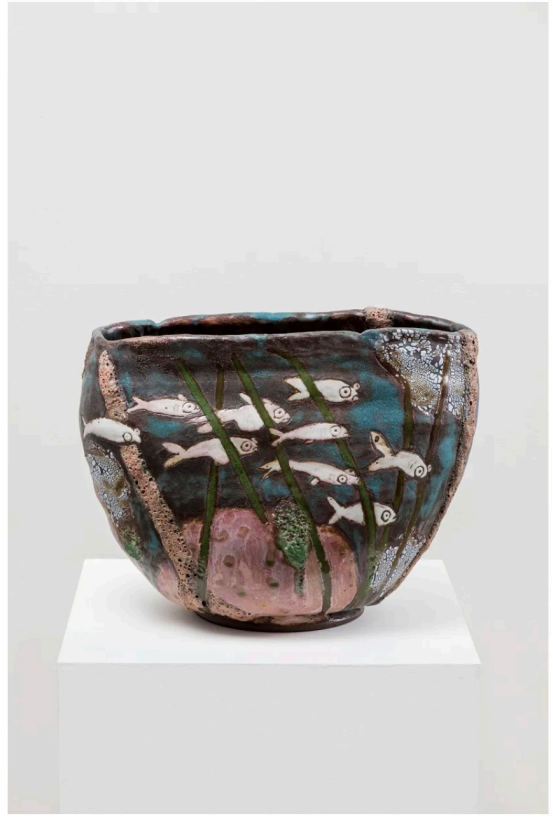
Karin Gulbran, *Family of Boar* (2015). Stoneware, 21 x 17.5 x 15 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and China Art Objects Galleries. Photo by Joshua White.



Karin Gulbran, *Cat Chasing a Rabbit* (2015). Stoneware, 17.5 x 17 x 15 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and China Art Objects Galleries. Photo by Joshua White.



Karin Gulbran, *Fallen Cat in Rain* (2015).
Stoneware, 17.5 x 17 x 14 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and China Art Objects Galleries.
Photo by Joshua White.



Karin Gulbran, *Sardines and Anchovies* (2015).
Stoneware, 15 x 20 x 12 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and China Art Objects Galleries.
Photo by Joshua White.



Karin Gulbran, *Fallen Cat in Rain* (2015).
Stoneware, 17.5 x 17 x 14 inches. Image courtesy of the artist and China Art Objects Galleries.
Photo by Joshua White.