

PLOT LINES

December 9, 2018 - January 20, 2019

Group exhibition featuring Andy Anderegg, Christine Han, and Jackie Rines
A-B Projects, Bendix Building, 1206 Maple Ave., Los Angeles, 90015

Reviewed by John P. Murphy

A pair of human-scale ceramic “curtains” frame the plate glass window to the recently relocated A-B Projects. They register as manifestos, these domestic trappings turned monumental totems: dripping, stained, cinched in the middle. By sculptor Jackie Rines they anchor *PLOT LINES*, the inaugural exhibition in A-B Projects’ new gallery space in downtown’s Bendix Building. Director and curator, Nicole Seisler, imagines contemporary ceramics in an expanded field, exhibiting work that uses, in her words, “ceramic history and traditions to bolster experimentation, critical commentary, and the metaphoric capabilities of materiality.”

PLOT LINES, featuring three LA-based writers and artists, fulfills that mandate by offering a fresh and slyly subversive take on the age-old antagonism between art and craft. Seisler redirects stale criticisms of craft as domestic, feminine, and bound by tradition by both embracing and unsettling those expectations. Ostensibly about “how we seek, locate, and manifest a sense of home within and around ourselves,” according to Seisler, *PLOT LINES* is itself an opening salvo in the campaign to tap the conceptual possibilities of contemporary ceramics. Windows, curtains, and bookshelves structure the exhibition, but the forms are unstable, ironic, entangled in inconclusive narratives. Rine’s aforementioned curtains twist and buckle, stacked in sections glued by putty, resonant with the artist’s past variations on the forms of couches, fireplaces, and chairs. Rarely have domestic objects appeared less innocuous than in Rine’s work; she charges the decorative with queasy humor and power. By contrast the cool and austere paintings of windows by Christine Han (echoing the windows in the gallery) evoke Eva Hesse’s window paintings from the late Sixties: windows as simultaneously open and imprisoning, expansive and claustrophobic.

Near to one of Han’s windows is an undulating bookshelf holding a row of publications, free for the taking. They are two short stories by Andy Anderegg, published as limited editions, “Where Did Whitney Go?” and “Go, Karen, Go.” The repeated word “go” in the titles hints at the thematic tension in the exhibition, as well as in the stories, between motion and stillness, staying and going, home as source of comfort as well as oppression, never quite secure or rooted. Homecomings and leave-takings underpin “Where Did Whitney Go,” which finds the protagonist adjusting to her new life in California just as her grandmother transitions to a nursing home. The domestic and mundane become sources of strength and resilience; Whitney stands her ground when a “tanned, leathery” man tries to steal her grandmother’s jewelry at an estate sale. In “Go, Karen, Go,” a 61-year old woman with fading interest in life spontaneously takes a trip to Finland to see the Northern Lights (“not guaranteed” the advertisement disclaims). On a dog-sled tour she marvels that the “dogs don’t seem confused, complicated by a past or future. They aren’t stopping now, and don’t stop until it’s time.”

The dogs, in motion, exist at a still point of pure present—is this the home that eludes us? The blissful state unburdened by past or future is perhaps an analogy to a craftsman fully absorbed in their medium, whether words, paint, or clay. In an igloo Karen listens to an audiobook about characters who are “starting life on a new planet...building everything they have from less than scratch.” Craft has traditionally been about home-building, about shaping and firing clay into bowls, pots, plates, and utensils for everyday use. The artists in *PLOT LINES* deliver unconventional variations on these old narratives, reminding us of clay as a force to shape and bind, but turning those associations to new account. Rine has included a touching nod to the Anderegg’s story by making a clay figurine of Karen who perches inconspicuously and precariously near the floor—a small fetish object easily overlooked but full of uncanny power once noticed. By working in the interplay between and across mediums, *PLOT LINES* suggests that home is more about community than place; an active, necessarily incomplete process—a narrative still being formed. In that sense, A-B Projects promises to be a welcome home for artists interested in expanding and complicating the ossified stories, whether cultural or curatorial, around craft and ceramics.

John P. Murphy, PhD, is Curatorial Fellow at the University of San Diego’s University Galleries.