

M³: Monument, Message, Materialism

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My primary inspiration is message and narrative. Ideas start with a word or list of words and grow from there. Poetry, politics, billboards, advertisements, propaganda, graphic design, comics (political and otherwise) and web pages are all influences. Narrative is paramount, and functional ceramics is a backbone or musculature which supports work which is literal, political and personal. I have been as influenced by plastic Tide containers as I have the Japanese tea bowl, as engaged by sacred, contemplative memorials and banal, loud advertisements or slogans. My goal is to create work that is visually, intellectually, and tactily stimulating, to give message physical presence which matches its cerebral and emotional one, and to bring contemplation and politics into the domestic sphere.

I generally work in clay, though I make use of other materials when appropriate: steel, wood, and magnets are used to change and control the way pieces can be arranged, they accentuate the narrative qualities of the work, and they enable bowls, cups, plates and boxes – generally read as strictly domestic objects – to have a dual life as paintings or billboards. I use porcelain for its association with industrial china and sanitation (as in ‘something harmless and clean’), its durability, color response, and sensuousness. Plinths, stands, and tiles are constructed out of earthenware, as it is textural, dark and readily expresses notions of weight and mass. Porcelain and earthenware have historical markers and cultural signifiers which easily engender these associations.

The replication and repetition of form directly correlates to the vernacular objects of our industrial society: stacks of perfect plates in a restaurant, rooms full of identical glasses and pitchers, and aisles and aisles of plastic ware in Target and Wal-Mart. Most forms are derived almost directly from everyday plastic objects. My use of repetition mimics the onslaught of advertisements and messages that we receive daily (it replicates it as a phenomenon), but also contradicts it, as it is a handmade object with human variability that would be difficult to create industrially. Connected to this are two important ideas: the non-confrontational nature of the industrial object, and the connection to sanitation that porcelain has – whether in fine china, or in the restroom. My messages intend to be neither passive nor sanitary, but part of their meaning derives from that expectation, desire, and history.

The idea of the monument or memorial partitions off a cultural space which is considered sacred and/or contemplative. I have in mind national war memorials, but I am particularly interested in those memorials which remind us not of our great victories – of our collective conquest over the enemy – but our great mistakes, and our collective fallibility. These border on being ‘anti-memorials’: for example the Vietnam Memorial in Washington D.C., and the plethora (and continued creation) of monuments which

memorialize the Holocaust in Germany. At play here is a discussion about memory: historical, national, and personal. Monuments and memorials are intended to be physical expressions of an unforgettable, immutable history, and yet, all research shows that their meanings change radically over time.

The work in this show is a combination of memorials, monuments, reliquaries, kitchen ware, slogans, politics, and functional ceramics. I use the intimacy of the domestic ceramic object – used most often at the kitchen table or bathroom – to point out latent individual and cultural contradictions. These objects are both sacred and profane – high art and kitsch. They are the consumable items that they claim to critique: they are both metaphors for and containers of materialism. Ultimately, I am trying to create contemplative and seductive work that carries messages which are alternatively meaningful, powerful, and revelatory.