



PHYLLIS GREEN
LOS ANGELES

Phyllis Green's exhibition *Splendid Entities: 25 Years of Objects* could be described as a garden of ceramic delights [Ben Maltz Gallery at Otis College of Art and Design; January 18—March 19, 2011]. Green is a feminist and a formalist with an uncanny sense of materials. Her sculptures seduce and titillate. They reference art history, archaeology, and her own personal experiences and travels.

The exhibition spans twenty-five years and offers insight into Green's embrace of and experiments with different materials and modes of presentation. Each series of work demonstrates her refusal to be pinned down and tied to a specific way of working with her primary medium: clay. The earliest pieces from the mid 1980s, wall reliefs and pedestal-mounted sculptures, combine wood and concrete polymer, balancing tree branch-like appendages cantilevered off pedestals like dancers flying through the air. In these trompe-l'oeil works, Green was interested in the relationship between the natural and manmade worlds. *Shadow Dance*, 1996, juxtaposes three branches—one white, one black, the other natural—perfectly balanced as they flow from the top of the pedestal. As these organic forms began to intersect, Green deepened the sexual references, allowing shapes to move in and out of orifices as she played with expectations and impossibilities in both form and materials. In *Pod*, 1990, a concrete form that suggests an oversized club is suspended from the ceiling, hanging through a collar. The object's weightiness is incongruously juxtaposed with the bone-colored ring that encircles its narrow handle.

The works in Green's *Turkish Bath* series, 1993-1996, are based on a namesake painting by Ingres. In this series, she defies modernist doctrine, making purposely frilly works with delicate materials that celebrate femininity, decadence, desire, and seduction. These modestly-sized works are often presented on colored shelves or ornate pillows, calling attention to their preciousness. The tabletop ceramic sculpture *Reptilia Rosa*, 1996, is glazed to look like marble. Its coiled form is punctured by holes

and dotted with red roses adorned with flocking. The ceramic vessel sits atop a red and black velvet and silk pillow trimmed with green piping. The work is seductive and repulsive simultaneously. These dichotomies—soft/hard, in/out, male/female—drive many of Green's pieces.

Green has consistently made pieces that reference the works of other artists. The large sculpture *L12 (Duchamp Party)*, 2001, is an homage to Marcel Duchamp's readymade *Bottle Rack*, 1914. Green enlarged Duchamp's sculpture to human proportions, replacing its spikes with platforms onto which she placed twelve generic mounds. These objects resemble wigs or heads as carved striations cover their entire surface, evoking hair. These mounds stand in for the wine bottles that might have been put on the original rack. Green's intervention calls attention to the handmade multiples while taking the readymade sculpture back to its commercial origin as an object of display.

In viewing twenty-five years of work, it becomes evident that the innovative Green is not afraid to experiment with materials and push her process in new directions. While best known for her ceramic work, her sound and video projects demonstrate her range. The most successful pieces, however, are the ones that bring together form and content. *Odd Old Things in the Gallery at 4 am*, 2010, the newest work on view, presents clay figures that resemble trolls. These blob-like sculptures wear tutus inspired by Degas' dancers, and are glazed with a rust-colored patina to suggest age. Lit, wax-dripping candles protrude from many of their orifices. The sculpture is also based on Giacometti's light and airy sculpture *The Palace at 4 a.m.*, 1932. In Green's version, the figures have turned heavy, yet refuse to abandon their dancer's costume. Ultimately, the exhibition points to Green's ironic wit, cunning, and ability to seamlessly draw from multiple sources to create personal and often humorous artworks that are simultaneously meditations on aging, desire, and femininity.

—Jody Zellen