

DIANE MAYO

Raku

Opening November 29 and on view through January 19, 2009, The Drawing Room is pleased to present *Diane Mayo: Raku* which will run concurrently with *Laurie Lambrecht Inside Roy Lichtenstein's Studio*.^{*} A longtime resident of Montauk, Diane Mayo has been firing raku vessels in her garden for many years. Created over the last eight years, this lively collection of Mayo's colorful, cylindrical striped pots huddle in a family of shapes. While the tall, slightly funky postures of each handled form recall water jugs carried through the ages, Mayo's rolled slab continuous surface vessels are fields for a serious contemporary investigation of color and the magical consequences of raku firing. This painterly body of ceramic sculpture takes the striped Nigerian weavings that inspired them in a fresh and innovative direction.

Diane Mayo's joyful raku vessels emerge from a long process in which each stage contributes significantly to the overall depth and texture of the color and personality of the final form. Hand built from rolled slabs, each vessel is bisque fired in an electric kiln before it is glazed. Mayo chooses to work with clay high in Kyanite, which enables her works to tolerate both the rapid rise in temperature in the open raku flames, and the subsequent thermal shock they undergo when they are removed from the fire.

With glazing characterized by subtle patchwork compositions achieved with formulas she has tested for years, Mayo's sculptural process expands to encompass that of an experienced painter. Brushing on the glaze with an evident gesture, she overlaps edges, layering some glazes to achieve her highly nuanced palette. Glazes such as cobalt melt quickly in the kiln, while others like the manganese or opaque white, also used in majolica, mature slowly. Mayo's ability to balance and plan the chemistry behind these decisions and marry each form to the appropriate painting emerges from years in a studio that is a room of tests. With the knowledge of which glazes cover thickly and which are sheer, shiny or dull under firing, her glazing process is now a fine art. Her friend and neighbor Edward Albee observed, "I see you have it down to a quasi science."

After Mayo applies glaze to her forms, the outdoor ritual of the raku process takes over. Because a raku kiln is fired with open gas flames and achieves high heat quickly, the chemicals in the glaze compounds come up sooner, reaching the desired color in forty minutes rather than the eight hour minimum an electric kiln firing requires. The exciting advantages of the raku process are the characteristic crackle effect – a product of the thermal shock that occurs when pots are removed from the fire – and luster – which occurs when the oxygen is pulled out of the glaze, darkening the exposed clay, and softening the color of the glaze.

Entranced with the raku process, Mayo clusters her tower-like pots creating groupings reminiscent of Tuscan hill towns, and in their animated abstraction, Paul Klee paintings and Gee's Bend quilts. With this body of work Mayo brings clay sculpture into the 21st century while honoring the vessels of the past. Mayo's work has been exhibited broadly in solo and group shows in the United States and Germany.

* A separate press release is available for the Laurie Lambrecht exhibition.