

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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TONI ROSS

Contained. Unbound.



Untitled (TRE 570), 2014, brushed white slip stoneware and rope, 5 ¾ x 5 ½ x 5 ½ in



Narrow Vessel I, II, III, IV, 2013, brushed white slip stoneware, height: 38 to 44 in

From May 23 through June 23, The Drawing Room is pleased to present an installation juxtaposing majestic stoneware sculpture by Toni Ross with silver gelatin photographs of ancient sites by Jean Pagliuso. A separate press release is available for **Jean Pagliuso: Fragile Remains II**. The inspiration for this exhibition evolved a few years after the artists arranged a spontaneous trip to Egypt in 2010. Their travels in Egypt, and later in Burma, fostered a friendship enriched by artistic and intellectual exchanges rooted in their mutual fascination with ancient sanctuaries and ceremonial artifacts. The gallery's combined presentation of their work considers the impact their travel experiences had on their individual practices, and in particular on the aesthetic affinities in their work.

Toni Ross has long felt the pull of human history expressed through the fragile, utilitarian objects that preserve the identity of culture. Since her year in Rome in 1983 as a young painter, ancient Greek, Roman and Etruscan forms have captured her imagination. Returning to America she settled in East Hampton where for several years she was mentored in painting and drawing by Elaine de Kooning. It is not surprising that she also trained as a pastry chef before turning full time in 1997 to her work in clay.

Originally inspired by the rich tradition of Japanese ceramics, Ross was engaged by the tension between form, surface and function. Her immersion in the complex chemistry of glazes and the

possibilities for painterly surfaces in the high-fire techniques she explored over a decade laid the groundwork for the sculptural direction she has pursued. Exploring Shino ware for its rust and creamy white palette and its rugged tolerance for sanding and re-firing, in 2007 Ross closed the rim on her ovoid vases transforming them into pure sculptural form with one gesture. While her functional work has been distinguished by nuanced, traditional glazes, her hand-built stoneware forms have a gritty, dry slip glazing – an impasto thickened with sand and often ground down with electric grinders. Her sculpture reflects the soft gray light of Wainscott beaches as well as the ancient desert architecture she traveled so far to experience.

For Ross, visits to Cairo's museums, the pyramids at Luxor and, a year later to the fields of 9th century Buddhist stupas in Burma enlightened her practice and reaffirmed the abstract direction her work had already taken. Discovering the universal traditions in world religions that confer metaphorical content to a physical object intensified her approach to making cubes and vessels. The Egyptian soul boxes, created for the afterlife, resonated with her longtime interest in making slab cubes with distressed stoneware walls, scarred by her drawing over the slip or shino surfaces. Ross recalls that encountering the Pharaoh's clay pillow preserved in his tomb reminded her of ceramic cubes she had made decades earlier, and added, "Clay is a decisively ancient material. This alone profoundly connects one to the past."

The serene eloquence of Ross' recent clay towers and the mysterious quiet of her cubic structures reveal her essential inspiration from ceremonial containers. Timeless in their presence, Ross' dramatically tapered forms are built by coil construction, a technique used through the ages to create utilitarian and ritual vessels. Abrading the clay form with waves of textures and carving fissured openings before firing, Ross then enhances the surface with brushed slips that envelop the surface in chalky whites and smoky blacks. In their statuesque postures tapering to 4 feet high, the slender vessels evoke figural columns, especially when gathered with others. One particularly stunning vessel stands alone at 48 inches in height. With its cinched waist, it conveys the presence of an early female deity. Nearby, another cylindrical form broadens at the top into a voluptuous bulge and opens with a gold leaf rim. Stark and elegant, these modern amphoras reveal the gradual reach of their genesis with grounded calm.

Quintet in White, 2011 is a family of five vessels two feet high in luminous gray and white shino. The sand gray surfaces seem to contain their psychic content, while emphasizing their tribal resemblance. Three have the profile of tiny Egyptian perfume bottles while the last two share profiles of Cycladic idols. On this large scale, however, Ross magnifies the modernity of the early form and achieves a striking monumentality in groupings that, to her, conjure families.

Born and raised in New York City, Toni Ross attended Wesleyan University where she studied fine arts and film. Driven by her love of art and art history, she traveled extensively through Italy, settling in Rome for a year. Her work is represented in many public and private collections across the country. Toni Ross lives and works in Wainscott, New York.

www.drawingroom-gallery.com

Gallery hours: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday 10-5; Sunday 11-5

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