

book poses while remaining wholly, sweetly individual. And here too, there's a precisely judged layering of cool and hot, objective procedure and heartrending result, which underscores the power of imagery—however convoluted the method of bringing it into being—as a container and transmitter of all things human.

—Michael Wilson

Kathy Butterly

JAMES COHAN

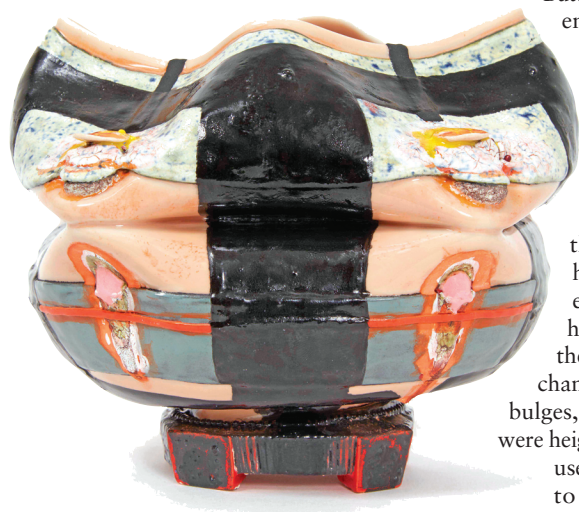
At Ken Price's 2013 retrospective at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, my companions and I (all full-grown adults) dared each other to reach a finger inside the black openings of his colorful glazed vessels. The voids, so impossibly matte and inky, beckoned a touch to determine if they were real or just an illusion. The ceramics of Kathy

Butterly, who counts Price as an influence, are equally seductive to the eyes and hands. But where Price played with depth as a trick, Butterly uses it to expand the amount of painstaking detail in her sensuous pieces.

For "Thought Presence," Butterly tried moving away from the explicit bodily references of her previous works toward open-ended organic abstraction. Yet her delight in the corporeal, and in the more feminine aspects of decor, channeled itself through her ceramics' bulges, twists, and orifices, all of which were heightened by her vibrant glazes. She uses unspecified commercial vessels to create her plaster molds, into which she pours, then manipulates, wet clay. The resulting porcelain forms—all less than

twelve inches high—often bear a resemblance to fashion accessories such as vintage handbags and hats, albeit squished and contorted.

The objects' nooks, crannies, and spindly arms provide ample space for the artist's rich color treatments. Sometimes fired as many as thirty times, they bear layers of variously crackled and smooth finishes, ribbons of glaze, and passages both roughhewn and carefully wrought. "You have to work with the material; it is both luscious and forgiving," said the artist about porcelain. "If it cracks, I have to go with the result." Confetti-esque textures of mustard and vermilion adorned the top of *Flux* (all works 2018). The form calls to mind a crushed fez. It is a complex thing, with an olive-green base that supports a folded yellow middle connected to a white crown, smeared with celadon. It feels like a fantastical dessert from some supernatural patisserie. The sweetness continued with *Baked Sale*—a mouthwatering pastel concoction whose belly is blown out, striped with black, and enhanced by a high-gloss interior of kinky pink and skeins of cobalt blue. I stood on tiptoe to look inside and was rewarded with a juicy blob of paint at the center, like a freshly chewed wad of Dubble Bubble gum in *Very Cherry*. *Lip Service*, with its hunter-green semimatte glaze, resembled the silhouette of a 1960s bucket bag. Its folds pucker as a frowning mouth would. With the precision of a pastry chef, Butterly has carefully applied pearl-like drops of paint along its edges. Its stately character makes its goldenrod insides, also swirled with cobalt, all the more surprising. The artist continually plays with balance and proportion, adding slim bases



Kathy Butterly, *Baked Sale*, 2018, clay, glaze, 4% x 5% x 5%.

to many of the pieces that called to mind chic, squared-off sandals or miniature cake stands.

A side room displayed works on paper for which the artist poured layers of vibrant nail polish on the pages of her own exhibition catalogues, producing a psychedelically marbled effect. Like space-age volcanoes, or preliminary versions of Lynda Benglis's neon pour paintings, they attest to her expertise in color and texture. (It also helps that she studied painting as an undergraduate, before a visit from ceramicist Viola Frey changed everything.) In *Work Pearls*, a delicate strand of multicolored beads was affixed to the page; on several other pieces, she collaged strips of paper to mimic her vessels' nonfunctional handles. Everything in the photos was obscured except for her trademark architectural bases. For some sculptors, such works would read as mere sketches. In Butterly's hands, they reveal the pleasure of gestures, when mind and body work together to make magic.

—Wendy Vogel

Gertrude Abercrombie

KARMA

Gertrude Abercrombie (1909–1977) painted gloomy nightscapes and forlorn domestic scenes that revealed her internal state more than the outside world. She also made portraits, landscapes, and still lifes often influenced by the Midwestern environments of Aledo, Illinois, where she spent much of her childhood. The seventy works in this show, made between 1930 and 1971—dolorous vignettes in hushed blues, greens, and shadowy grays—utterly beguiled.

Abercrombie moved to Chicago with her parents in 1916 and lived there until the end of her life. She was primarily self-taught, although she briefly attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the American Academy of Art before taking commercial work in fashion retail illustration. Her artistic emergence in the early 1930s during the Great Depression—a socioeconomic mirror to her saturnine aesthetic—blossomed under the auspices of US federal work programs such as the Public Works of Art Project and the Works Progress Administration, as well as local arts organizations. A rapacious egotist, she was her own muse, as benevolent and grand as she was insecure and jealous. The self-coronated "Queen of Chicago" hosted regular gatherings for artists, literary figures, and jazz musicians. Her many friends and



Gertrude Abercrombie, *Birds, Eggs, and Dominoes with Pyramid*, 1963, oil on board, painted wooden frame, 11 x 13".