



Elisa D'Arrigo, *janus*, 2023. Glazed ceramic, 6 x 7.5 x 5.5 in. Photo: Courtesy Elizabeth Harris Gallery

Elisa D'Arrigo

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Elizabeth Harris Gallery

Delightfully bodied and splendidly decked out in glazes of many colors, the 20 new ceramic works in Elisa D'Arrigo's current exhibition (on view through October 21, 2023) make their presence emphatically felt despite the modesty of their measurements. Partly, it's because their shapes (the show is titled "Taking Shapes," although I might take out the final "s") are so intriguingly, marvelously eccentric, each

one with its own singular, unbuttoned personality. The forms are suggestive but noncommittal in their references; you can see in them what you want, from buttocks to bellies, to legs and other body parts—mouths, genitalia, or not, human, or not, eroticized, or not—as well as all kinds of (non-functional) vessels. These works are the result of process, a kind of thinking while doodling in three dimensions, which gives them an improv aura and an astonishing physical robustness that establishes an immediate rapport with the viewer. (D'Arrigo's skills, after a four-decade-long career, are such that she can do whatever she wants—from her characteristic large-scale sculpture to ceramics, her first love—with superb results.)

To do justice to these hand-shaped, one-off, beguilingly awkward, playfully coquettish objects (with titles such as *a leg up*, *sidestepper*, *making a move*, *spots on*), they need to be seen live—shapeshifting fluidity is crucial to their appeal. It turns out, somewhat surprisingly, that they do not photograph well and are far more seductive in person. Of course, they are objects in the round, and no single representation would be sufficient, but more specifically, there is no best profile or angle for them, their allure truly a composite that requires their physical presence.

D'Arrigo's palette, and what she does with it, also needs to be viewed in person to be fully appreciated. This, too, is a matter of dynamic interactions, which at times are nearly pointillistic, the dabs of (complementary) colors reacting to form a kind of enlivening sparkle. D'Arrigo's increasingly gorgeous glazes are her specialty, and the surfaces of her ceramic sculptures are as arrestingly composed as any textured abstract painting—planed, marbleized, mosaicized, veined, grooved, pitted, dotted, raised, snatching at the ambient light as it darts across. Such glazes are integral to the forms and not merely icing (not to disdain icing), although some works do look as if they've been dipped in honey or candied, like *red glyph*, with its transparent red, or *spots on*, topped with countless rainbow-hued sprinkles.

The scale and forms of these works might be called domestic, but haven't we had enough of the monumental and what that usually signifies? Clay has too often been relegated to the downstairs of the art hierarchy, but, thanks to pioneering feminist artists, fellow travelers, and the acknowledgment of other cultures, it has become much more prized, as have other, once denigrated, so-called minor arts and materials. These compact *belle laide* objects, both fragile and tough, their force concentrated, pack a disproportionate aesthetic punch, confidently reveling in their own charm, contributing their special magic to the current conversation about the state of art today.