



elisa d'arrigo



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taking shapes

september 9 - october 21, 2023

cover: *making a move 6* (view 1), 2023
7 x 6.5 x 4 inches

opposite page: *janus* (detail), 2023
6 x 7.5 x 5.5 inches

elizabeth harris gallery
529 w20 st ny 10011
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ehgallery.com

all works are glazed ceramic



making a move 6 (view 3), 2023, 7 x 6.5 x 4 inches

Taking Shapes

There is a fundamental paradox at work in Elisa Darrigo's ceramic objects - while they are unmistakably beautiful, they break every standard for what is considered "beautiful". They are small, shambolic, eccentric objects lacking symmetry; they are not overtly colorful and don't attempt to please. They are humble, not loudly announcing nor applauding their own appearance; understated and private, the viewer must come to them. Rather than exhibiting the mechanical surfaces of a wheel-thrown or machine-made object, her forms bear the imprint of her hands and in that way reveal the processes of their making. If there is any other artist with whom her work could be compared only George Ohr, the "mad potter of Biloxi", comes to mind. His small 'puzzle mugs' demonstrate the same sensibility - simultaneously humorous and serious, their extraordinary eccentric surfaces and coloration are reminiscent of Darrigo's, exposing a shared aesthetic.

Her work speaks of the passage of time through the repetitions of her touch. Because of the subtle changes her touch produces every gesture is significant; ultimately each piece is uniquely different and surprising. Her body of work is characterized by many small improvisations; each piece has its own personality and something of the anthropomorphic about it. Every slight variation in shape, every appendage, every lean and lurch is distinctive. They speak of muscles and organs; they hunch, seemingly frozen in mid-stride. They project a sense of glacially slow movement that mirrors her careful manipulation of the clay.

These small, intense things create a menagerie of the little and imaginary, of objects that evoke wonder and its twin, curiosity. Small scale is the inverse of the monumental; both dimensions command of attention and involve an acute attention to detail. Her choice to work in this anti-monumental arena creates access to a primal fantasy world populated by awkward objects that can be picked up in one hand and held there for examination. These small, humble things are powerful and ferocious - as the cliché goes, they punch above their weight.



from there to here 3 (view 1), 2023, 8 x 9 x 7 inches

They hold their own as well because, entirely on their own terms, they're astonishingly beautiful and seductive. Many artists don't want to speak about beauty - at best, it's a vaporous term. In Darrigo's work beauty is a side effect - but she's given that beauty a job. In these small pieces, beauty makes you look twice; it's there as a mystery comprised of doubt, belief and invention that, in sum, create visual magnetism. The astonishing glazes add to that attraction and are the uncanny result of melting different colorations through multiple firings.

As she says; "I glaze the works with a strong sense of what the results might be. There is an interplay between control and the unexpected. I usually try to do something with the glazing of each piece I haven't tried before. What feels more unpredictable is how what I am trying with glaze will work on a *particular* piece - how and whether it will nudge the personality of the piece along. What may seem like a good idea in my head, may turn out to really really not be - and then I try to come up with strategies to "rescue" the work..that's what ultimately moves things along."

The glazes are a natural outgrowth of her forms and an inseparable skin rather than a decoration. It's the glazes, not so much the forms, that raise the issue of beauty. The mottled and varied colors, the mosaic-like textures are not in themselves beautiful. If anything the marvel of these pieces lie in an oscillation between the beautiful and the grotesque. It's that oscillation, that instability, the movement between these poles that grabs the attention, giving the work an aura that is poetic, riveting and memorable.

- Kay Whitney, Los Angeles, 2023

Kay Whitney is a sculptor and writer living in Los Angeles. She is the author of numerous catalogs and has written for both national and international publications.



opposite page: *from there to here 3* (view 2), 2023, 8 x 9 x 7 inches
from there to here 3 (view 3), 2023, 8 x 9 x 7 inches





opposite page: *red glyph* (view 1), 2022, 6.5 x 7.5 x 5 inches
red glyph (view 2), 2022, 6.5 x 7.5 x 5 inches



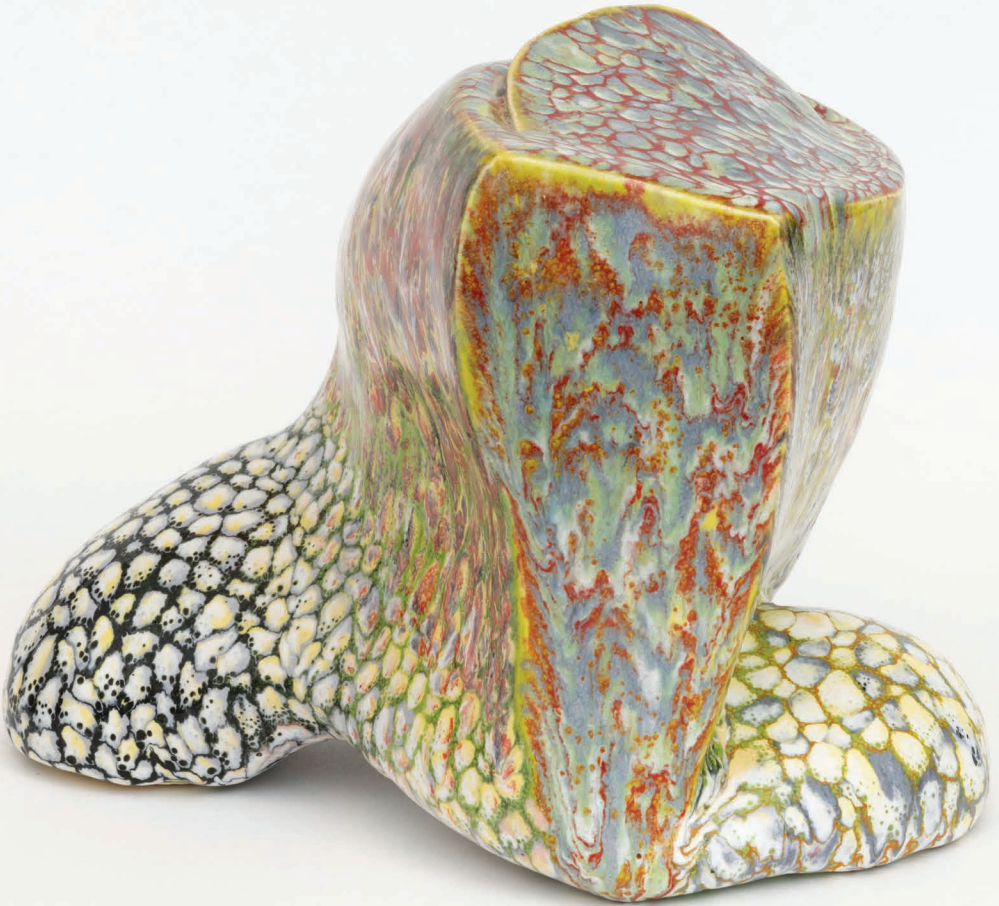


opposite page: *both sides now 4* (view 1), 2021, 8 x 8 x 6 inches
both sides now 4 (view 2), 2021, 8 x 8 x 6 inches





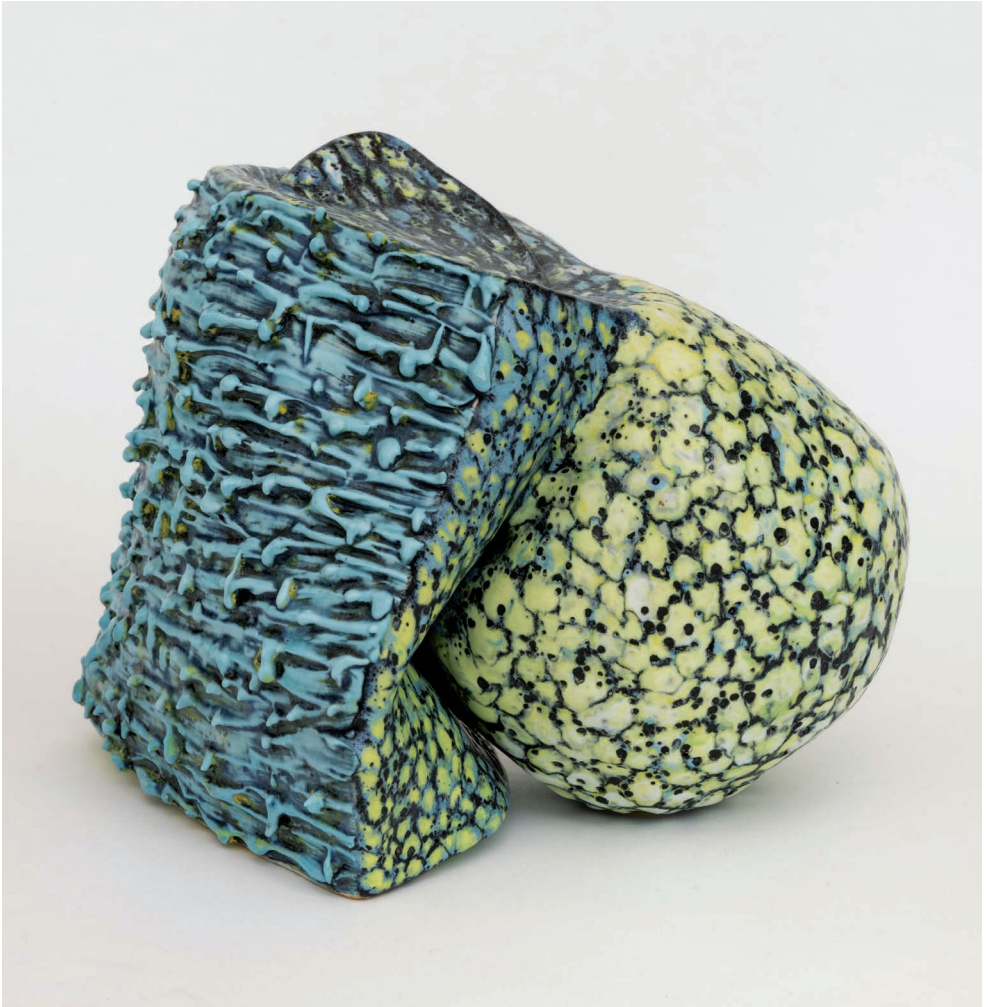
opposite page: *sidestepper 2* (view 1), 2023, 6.5 x 9 x 7 inches
sidestepper 2 (view 2), 2023, 6.5 x 9 x 7 inches





opposite page: *a leg up 2* (view 1), 2023, 8 x 8.5 x 7 inches
a leg up 2 (view 2), 2023, 8 x 8.5 x 7 inches





opposite page: *alongside* (view 1), 2022, 6.5 x 7 x 6.5 inches
alongside (view 2), 2022, 6.5 x 7 x 6.5 inches





headlong 1, 2023, 6 x 10 x 4 inches



dothead 3, 2019-21, 6.5 x 7 x 5 inches, collection elizabeth harris



on the spot 2, 2022, 7 x 8 x 4 inches



receptacle 2, 2022, 8.5 x 8.5 x 7.5 inches



from there to here 2, 2022, 6 x 7 x 6.5 inches



headlong 2, 2023, 7.5 x 8 x 4 inches



janus, 2023, 6 x 7.5 x 5.5 inches



bended 2, 2022, 6.5 x 6.5 x 5.5 inches



spots on, 2023, 6 x 9.5 x 6 inches



blobsmacked, 2022, 6 x 6 x 5 inches



sidestepper 3, 2023, 5.5 x 8 x 6 inches

Elisa D'Arrigo started out as a ceramic artist but for thirty years made larger scale sculpture, working in various materials including hand-stitched, laminated cloth. She returned to ceramics in 2010.

"Taking Shapes" is D'Arrigo's 12th solo exhibition at Elizabeth Harris Gallery. Her work has been in numerous solo, two-person and group exhibitions including, most recently (2021-23): Pamela Salisbury Gallery (Hudson, NY), FiveMyles (Brooklyn, NY), Patricia Sweetow Gallery (Los Angeles, CA), Michael David Gallery (Brooklyn, NY), and The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, NY).

Her work is held in private and public collections including The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, NY), The Everson Museum of Art (Syracuse, NY), The Mead Art Museum (Amherst, NY), The High Museum of Art (Atlanta, GA), The Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art (New Paltz, NY), The Mint Museum (Charlotte, NC), and The Weatherspoon Art Museum (Greensboro, NC).

Reviews, interviews and articles have appeared in The New York Times, Art in America, Hyperallergic, Two Coats of Paint, ArtNews, Sculpture, Ceramics: Art + Perception, Partisan Review, ArtPapers, ArtSpiel, Romanov Grave, Too Much Art, and The New York Observer, among others. Residencies include the Civitella Ranieri Foundation (Umbertide, Italy), Yaddo (Saratoga Springs, NY), The MacDowell Colony (Peterborough, NH), and Dieu Donn  Papermill (New York City). She has received grants from NYFA and The Ariana Foundation for the Arts.

D'Arrigo was born and raised in the Bronx, NY. In 1971 she attended CIDOC in Cuernavaca, Mexico; she received a BFA in Ceramics from SUNY New Paltz in 1975. She lives and works in New York City.

Special thanks to:

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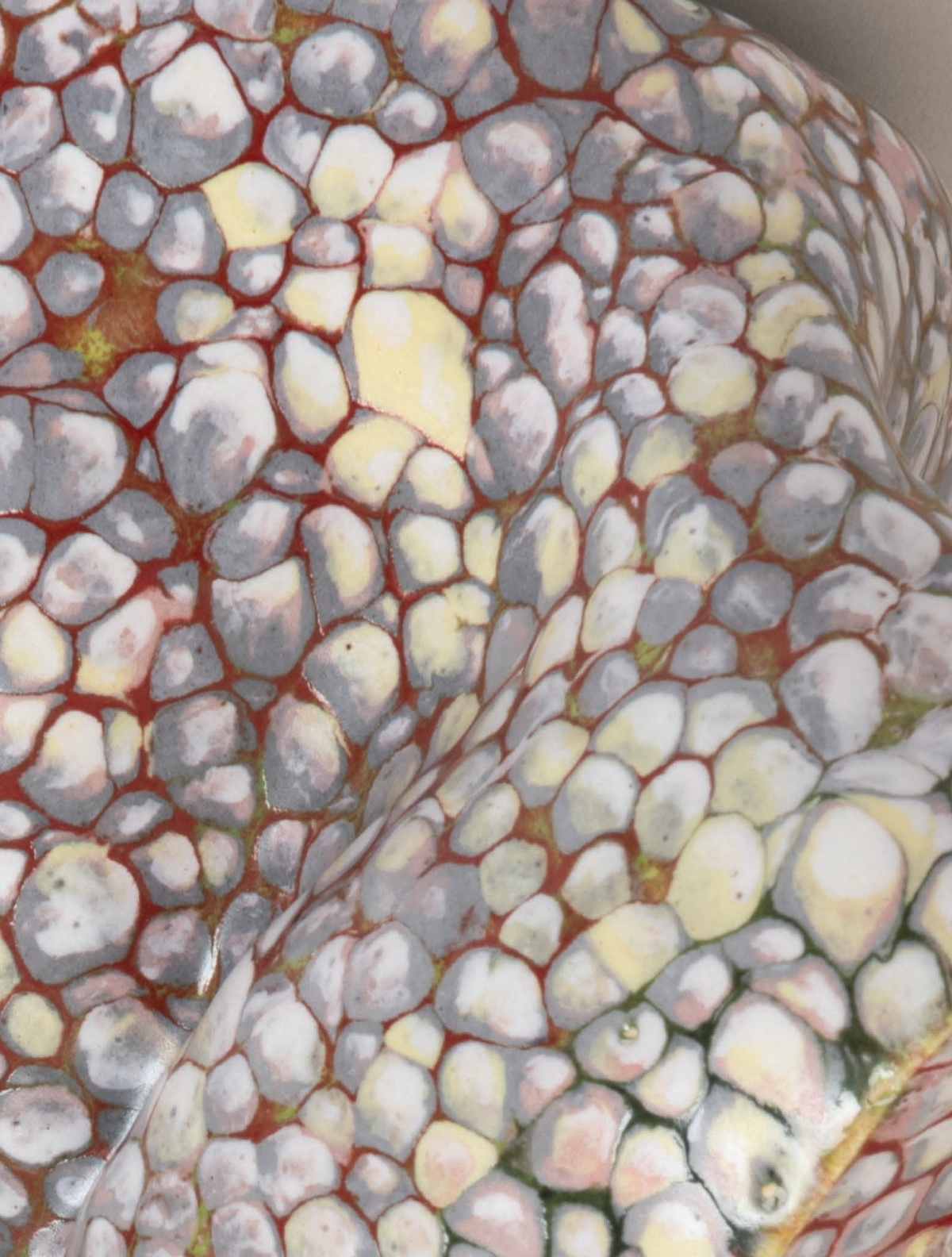
Elisa D'Arrigo

Kate Davis



opposite page: *janus*, 2023 (detail)
6 x 7.5 x 5.5 inches

back cover: *making a move 6* (view 2), 2023
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