

# Art in Review

## Robert Arneson

'Founding Funk: Sculpture and Drawing 1956-1966'

George Adams Gallery  
525 West 26th Street  
Chelsea  
Through May 15

Any attempt to reduce New York's ignorance of serious postwar art elsewhere should be applauded, especially a glimpse of the influential ceramic sculptor Robert Arneson (1930-92) working toward maturity. This applies even if, like me, you're not crazy about mature Arneson.

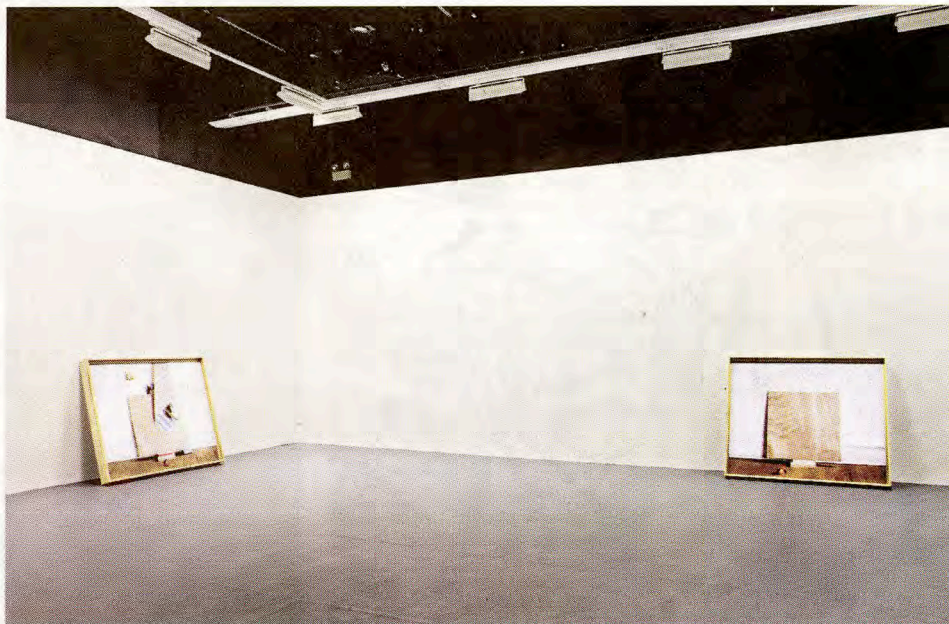
Before he got there, Arneson was adept at rough-surfaced stoneware pots and wine jugs influenced by 20th-century Japanese potters like Shoji Hamada. They became progressively sculptural, nonfunctional and humorously self-aware. Raku-like vases from 1959, thrown on the wheel, are carefully skewed to resemble eggs.

"Coiled Pot," also from 1961, exaggerates a traditional hand-building technique by not smoothing over its components. The resulting vessel is an unrepentantly gnarly tower of coils (sometimes spiraled) and over-emphatic finger gouges. It is wonderful, with a nasty laugh behind it.

In these works Arneson considers an array of options, always with a humorous edge, discarding most. "Large Black Organic Vase No. 2," a marvelously vandalized pot, looks as if a mad man might have hammered and chiseled it out of a bed of lava. From 1962, "Vase With Creatures" pays homage to Gauguin's ceramics, while two smoldering collages nod to the Abstract Expressionists with a glazed-ceramic roughness that is mostly paper and enamel. "Untitled (Trophy)," from around 1964, contains the germ of Adrian Saxe's entire career.

By then, Arneson had taken Pop Art to heart, and the jokes came fast and furious. "Klick" — a lusterware camera with eyeball — is a reprise of the toothy eye-glasses of Jasper Johns's acerbic sculpture "The Critic Sees." "Hydrox" is a giant cookie indebted to Claes Oldenburg.

Sanctioning representation,



ADAM REICH

Two of the pieces in the "Midday" series by Leslie Hewitt, color photographs of stacked and wall-mounted objects, that are part of her show of work from the last two years at the Kitchen.

these works revolutionized ceramics and swamped it in a deluge of visual puns and trompe l'oeil that remains unabated. They fix Arneson's place in history. What I think of them matters little.

ROBERTA SMITH

## Lucio Fontana

'Paintings 1956-68'

## Robert Beck and Donald Moffett

'Range'

Marianne Boesky Gallery  
118 East 64th Street  
Manhattan  
Through May 15

That the New York gallery world may be entering the phase of the ostentatious "project space" is signaled by the narrow, beautifully restored Victorian house on East 64th Street that Marianne Boesky has rented for exhibitions that juxtapose older art with work by artists she represents. Obviously, this may further sales, but the endeavor has

benefits, like the chance to see more of the Argentine-born Italian modernist Lucio Fontana, and in a setting that is itself worth a visit.

Outstanding among the Fontanas are two works from 1960 that consist of raw linen whose constellations of punctures, varying in diameter, have the prancing energy of Miró. Also good, and less familiar, is a 1961 canvas roughly slathered with a diagonal downpour of green and brown paint and completed with a single, clean, vertical cut. The vigorous paint is especially aggressive. No wonder later Fontanas, with clean cuts in clean, monochrome fields, often look overly elegant and inert, like the three examples here.

"Range" is a 1997 collaboration between the Conceptualist Robert Beck and the painter Donald Moffett; it combines Mr. Beck's preoccupation with mysterious crimes and Mr. Moffett's interest in painting as abstraction, decoration and material fact. Mr. Beck gave Mr. Moffett a pad of drawing paper through which he had fired a .22-caliber bullet. Mr. Moffett took each of the pad's 20 sheets and its back and front cov-

ers and encircled each gunpowder-ringed bullet hole with a delicate, tattoo-like symmetrical motif, variously floral or geometric, made of graphite, ink and fudge.

Poignantly beautiful, if a little precious, the results contrast male and female, hunting and cooking, destruction and creation, death and commemoration. They commune with and hold their own against the Fontanas surprisingly well.

ROBERTA SMITH

## Mark Ryden

'The Gay 90s: Old Tyme Art Show'

Paul Kasmin  
293 10th Avenue, at 27th Street  
Chelsea  
Through June 5

Fathered by figures like Big Daddy Roth and Robert Williams, a movement affectionately called Lowbrow by its adherents has been percolating out of the quasi-underground pop culture of Southern California since the 1970s. Lowbrow paintings typically feature illustrative technique and comically weird imagery.

Mark Ryden's style. Paid the skill of a musician, he has a dreamy, almost congruous quality to his work.

The large, portly figures, baby dolls, and pink, out, on clock, made of sages. In time out, ing a loud, serves a raw ham, cessed the

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