

Portfolio: Joan Walton's Textured Ceramics

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by Pat Rogers

It's difficult to know where to look first: the colorful interiors that gleam or the aggressively textural exteriors in nuanced monotoes found in Joan Walton's fine art ceramics. Moving between the two doesn't seem to solve the dilemma as each distinct area commands time and attention. Taken together, the works present an unusual pairing that contributes to a unique and intriguing whole.

Walton's art is the subject of two recent solo shows: one in the Hamptons at Celadon Gallery in Bridgehampton and another in New York City at Atlantic Gallery in Chelsea. In her sculptural vessels, Walton explores conceptual contrasts as well as the visual contrasts manifested in her art. In a recent talk in Bridgehampton, Walton described her connection to the natural world, the flora and fauna of Montauk and the way these elements inspire her fine art ceramics and caused a breakthrough in her process.

Later, in a phone interview with Pat Rogers of Hamptons Art Hub, Walton described the origin of the intense texture in her ceramics, the idea of taking chances as an artist, and how following her process led her to incorporate natural elements into her ceramic vessels and sculptures.

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Ceramic sculpture by Joan Walton. Courtesy of the artist.

Pat Rogers: What is your inspiration for your art?

Joan Walton: A lifetime of observation and engagement with remnants and the growth process of flora and fauna. My work flows from walks on the shoreline and the forestation that runs into trees. I pull a little of both in my ceramics. The plants and debris left behind also draws my eye. I find the forms very beautiful.

PR: Why ceramics versus another medium?

JW: I love being a maker as oppose to being a painter. I love the tactility of my medium and the process mimics my subject matter in an abstract way.



Ceramic sculpture by Joan Walton. Courtesy of the artist.

PR: How did this series begin?

JW: It started in 1998. I had no experience with clay. I started as a potter, taking classes and workshops for six or seven years before moving to the work that I do now. It just evolved. At some point, I gave myself permission to be an artist. This is how the current work started; I moved further away from functionality.



Ceramic sculpture by Joan Walton. Courtesy of the artist.

PR: Can you say something about your process?

JW: It's very labor-intensive. I work on several pieces simultaneously in a pinch and build method. The sculptures are fired in several different kilns. The method is also nest-build. I build from the ground up...I start with soft clay and build very organically in this way.

The interior is built with scraps and worked to the point where it's smooth. It's then glazed with its own glazes. It's fired usually twice [bisque stage and to firm the glaze]. I love the inside with the soft clay and I work it to grow the piece.

For the outside, I paint several layers with clay suspension with fine Greek pot dust. When it's fired, it crazes and crackles. About half is wood fired with the other half gas fired.



Ceramic sculpture by Joan Walton. Courtesy of the artist.

PR: How does this body of work impact you as an artist?

JW: There was something about the change that I suddenly felt that I became an artist and was not concerned with functionality. It was an unconscious epiphany that I could just leave functionality behind. It's an ongoing dialogue on what is craft and what is art. I think art is a state of mind and craft is a skill. You have to have a great deal of art in craft.

This work just makes me grateful that I found my interest and am able to maintain my passion and connect it with the rest of my life. It allows me to express myself and impacts me as a person. It impacts my entire life.



Ceramic sculpture by Joan Walton. Courtesy of the artist.

PR: Do you have a favorite piece?

JW: No, I don't have a favorite piece. I initially like some pieces more than others based on my expectations of what I will see when it comes out of the kiln. But that often changes over time or as I live with the work. A piece that I have overlooked for a long time can become one that is a favorite. I love the meaning found with each and the completion of form with art.



Ceramic sculpture by Joan Walton. Courtesy of the artist.

BASIC FACTS: “Joan Walton: Figrant/Fragment” is on view at Atlantic Gallery from June 6 to 24, 2017. The gallery is located 547 West 27th Street, Suite 540, New York, NY 10001. www.atlanticgallery.org.

Joan Walton’s work was the subject of a “Featured Member Show” exhibition at Celadon Gallery from May 20 to June 18, 2017. The gallery is located at 128 Bridgehampton-Sag Harbor Turnpike, Bridgehampton, NY 11930. The gallery presents ceramic works by members along with changing curated exhibitions. www.hamptonsclyart.org.

Joan Walton’s art has been exhibited nationally and internationally. She is based in Montauk and New York City. To see more of her art, visit www.joanwalton.net.

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