

L

O
I

Lora Reynolds
Gallery

1126 West Sixth Street
Austin Texas 78703

512 215 4965
info@lorareynolds.com

lorareynolds.com
@lorareynoldsgallery

I
A

R

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

TONY MARSH

On the Clouds of Magellan
10.12.24 - 1.11.25

Lora Reynolds is pleased to announce *On the Clouds of Magellan*, an exhibition of new ceramic vessels and wall sculptures by Tony Marsh—the artist’s third presentation at the gallery.

When Marsh threw his first ceramic vessel in a high-school art class in 1972, a little pot about the size of his fist, “I thought it was a miracle. Holding it in my hands, I didn’t expect it to be so warm. It was almost like an infant. It changed me. I walked into the studio, saw that thing, and knew I never wanted to do anything else.” And just as he foresaw, making ceramic vessels has provided Marsh with more than 50 years of endless new territory to explore. Every time he opens the kiln, he hopes to see something he has never seen before—and often he does.

For those familiar with Marsh’s work, one piece in this show—only one—will be clearly identifiable as a Cauldron or Crucible, the bodies of work to which he has dedicated the past 15 years. (A cylinder with straight sides from 2021, glazed in a crackly robin-egg blue over a black undercoat and interior, with large gnarled growths that protrude from the sides and drip upwards.) Marsh produced the rest of the work over the past 12 months, and is so fresh, he does not yet know what it will be called.

He made several of these new sculptures with the human torso as a vague reference point—an intent discernible in their scale, proportion, rounded shoulders, and smooth texture—whereas previous work has almost always had a purely geometric origin. Smoothness, too, is a new direction for Marsh, who for the past decade has focused on conjuring surface textures more easily described as sharp, jagged, rough, or shattered. The smooth sculptures appear to be scratched, gouged, or sanded—all of which are subtractive actions, rather than the additive processes that characterize other recent work. For years, Marsh has built his surfaces by attaching solid chunks of glaze to his vessels (“Nobody *builds* with glaze,” he says. “You’re supposed to build with *clay* and cover it with a skin of glaze.”)—but for the works constructed this way in this show, the chunks are so large, so numerous, so metastasized, they seem to be trying to pull their vertical host to the ground.

In contrast, some of Marsh’s ceramics have flattened out into rectangles that either operate as bases for vessels or stand-alone objects that have sprung onto walls. These, too, alternate between smooth and rough surfaces, organic protuberances and geometric ones, monochromatic and polychromatic, matte and shiny, bubbling and crackling and dribbling. Marsh has never made anything that hangs on a wall or anything that could not be called a vessel—these days, it seems even the most basic and steadfast tenets of his work are up for reconsideration.

But perhaps the most radical departure in this new work is its relationship to the artist’s personal life, his family, and his emotional state during the time of its making. Until now, the work has largely existed in the material realm, in reference to geology and earth science, and as Marsh says, “between the cracks of history” (i.e., hopefully unlike any vessel anyone has ever made from any point in time anywhere in the world). Until now, the work often felt alien, otherworldly, nonhuman.

The first clue of this phase shift is the exhibition’s title, which Marsh took from a poem written by his father, Donald Marsh. The poem is lost now, but the artist remembers his father channeling the Portuguese explorer’s hunger for exploration and discovery, and imagining the feeling of confronting the unknown that must have attended Magellan throughout his expedition that became the first-ever circumnavigation of the globe. Every day, Marsh brings a similar hunger, curiosity, and fearlessness to uncharted waters in the studio—“I always feel like I’m bumping around in the dark,

experimenting. Just seeing what happens. My work continually surprises me—making it is deeply, deeply satisfying.”

Toward the end of her life, Marsh’s mother, Mary Burr, had a profound impact on her son’s work. She was a classically trained, professional dancer until she was 40. When she retired, she picked up drawing and painting—figures, primarily—and spent the next 50 years refining her new craft with the same precision as she once approached dance. In the last couple of years before she died, as her mind was changing, she could no longer paint with the same facility she had for so long—but she was still driven to work. She revisited her old canvases—hundreds of them—applying abstract shapes, bursting with color, on top of her immaculate figures. Every time he came to visit, Marsh brought her tubes and tubes of more paint—glitter, even—and was awed by her ruthless determination, her ability to improvise within the evolving boundaries of her perception, her daring approach to novelty, her refusal to sentimentalize the past, and her full-throated embrace of the joy of color. For the first several decades of Marsh’s career, “Color made me nervous,” he says. “It is so hard to quantify. It’s mercurial. I didn’t know what it would mean. I was afraid of its superficiality. Color is wild and weird and hard to pin down. It’s emotional.” Beginning around 2013 or 2014—right around the time he was watching his mother’s work evolve—was when Marsh’s ceramics began to erupt with color. As the years pass, he has continued following this thread of trust his mother inspired: of his own instincts, of the materials he loves working with, and of the transfer of emotional energy from himself into his work and from his work back to him.

The past year has been difficult for Marsh. A sense of struggle is palpable throughout the new work, of moments of darkness and ecstatic relief. During its making, Marsh has learned clay and emotions are not so different. It seems his methodology for approaching physical problems in the studio (as when he tries to mend a vessel split down the middle after firing) can be just as productive in his personal life. He only needs to follow his nature—to be present, to listen, to pay close attention, to *accept* as deeply and truly as possible, and when problems need to be solved, to do so gracefully, delicately, and by preserving the autonomy of the entity at hand (whether a person or a sculpture). His way with people has been honed by decades of clarifying his relationship to clay. He is no longer afraid of color, or of acknowledging the emotional origins of some of his work. Everything is connected; everyone is one. The future is unknowable—but Marsh is enthralled to meet it.

Tony Marsh, born in 1954 in New York, lives and works in Long Beach. Early in his career, he undertook a three-year apprenticeship in Mashiko with the late Tatsuzo Shimaoka, a master potter who was named a Living National Treasure of Japan. In 2022 the Long Beach Museum of Art put on a 50-year survey of Marsh's sculpture and published an accompanying catalogue. Marsh's work is in the collections of the Contemporary Museum of Honolulu, Cranbrook Art Museum (Detroit), de Young Museum (San Francisco), Everson Museum (Syracuse), Hammer Museum (Los Angeles), Laguna Beach Art Museum, Long Beach Museum of Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), Minneapolis Institute for the Arts, Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris, Museum of Art and Design (New York), Museum of Contemporary International Ceramic Art (South Korea), Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Newark Museum, Oakland Museum of California, Orange County Museum of Art, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Jose Museum of Art, and Taipei Ceramics Museum.