

Neil Tetkowski

*Myungsook Lee
Gallery
New York, NY*

Clay can be a very immediate medium, yielding to the maker's touch, responding to the flame of the kiln. Looking at Neil Tetkowski's newest work, one would say that these pieces illustrate that character. On view to refute that theory were his preparatory drawings. The charcoal and the pencil-and-wash drawings, which recall Arp's Biomorphism and the Surrealists, have been translated remarkably faithfully into the tactile medium of clay, belying the expressionistic appearance of the sculptures.

Tetkowski begins by throwing his forms, giving them a grace hard to duplicate any other way. The rounded edge is tapered and wavers so one can imagine the artist's hand shaping it. The clay is stretched and the gesture materializes in the mind. Clumps of clay are pinched together and that action can be imagined. It seems spontaneous, but all of it is there in the black-and-white drawings. The colors are not indicated, and while the peach blushes, the sky-to-lapis blues deepening to almost charcoal, and the ruddy clay all result from the effects of the firing on the oxides and engobes Tetkowski uses, he has been at this long enough to anticipate them. Accident has less of a role than might be expected; the act of creation is not spontaneous as it appears.

These works were done in the last year. In the earliest ones the artist continued his practice of embedding found metal objects—spikes, chains, screws, hooks—in the receptive clay. They emerge blackened by the heat and as a reminder of the conjunction of the industrial and the natural that characterizes our society, the manmade always subordinated to nature. In the most recent works, the natural, and the sexual, take over. In each of the relief sculptures, there is a circular form and a thick banding that embraces it and then stretches upward in a gesture of supplication. It is impossible to view these organic forms without thinking womb and vagina. It's odd imagery for such macho handling, for there is nothing delicate about these pieces, but maybe clay is the most appropriate medium to represent such raw feminine power.

Karen Chambers



*River Form with Spikes (1995), 20" x 25",
ceramic.*