

A MODULAR VISION – THE CERAMIC ART OF VERONICA BYUN

Korean-born and American-educated artist Veronica Juyoun Byun is a consummate “maker”, relating to her productive and inventive constructions in clay, always seeking newly informed patterns, designs and colors enhancing her symbolic configurations for the wall or the pedestal or the floor in some cases but most often for the wall as in “wall works”. Byun is the kind of artist for whom the adage, “art is work” is exemplified. Her large studio in Hoboken, New Jersey, across the Hudson River from Manhattan is the site of her creative endeavors and is filled with the varied progression of her sculptural ceramic projects.

Naturally and culturally addicted to colors and forms inherited from her background in Korea, she nonetheless is intensely imaginative and creative in making surprising and diverse designs and compositions derived either from natural phenomena or from mechanistic, geometric and futuristic devises. As for her international artistic influences in the present global era of extensive communications she doubtless had been exposed as a student to the “pattern and decoration” movement of the eighties and nineties and from modern western art in general with serial imagery, cubism, symbolism, geometric abstraction and even pop art as informed background for her creative ingenuity in composing ever more modular, large scale wall works which can ambitiously stretch out in unlimited formations or can contract to accommodate an appropriate space on a wall or any other kind of extended surface.

As for general influences in her artistic background the artists she can relate to the best include Frank Stella, as in his most enormous painterly wall constructions, to Mark Rothko for his emotionally charged color compositions, and to the resonating sculptures of Louise Nevelson and Richard Serra for their very formidable presence in their respective environments wherever their works are sited. As for other artists from the “ceramic world” to which her works may relate or allude to in various ways are the works of the Italian ceramist, Nino Caruso for their modular refinement and extravagance, to the wall works of the west coast icon, John Mason, to the colorful narrative tile environments of Joyce Kosloff and finally to the strong solid abstract sculptural qualities in the works of Anne Currier with whom Byun studied at Alfred University.

Titles for Byun’s diverse works such as “Opus in Rainbow”, “Misty Dawn”, “A Rivulet’s Journey”, and “Green Grass” suggest naturalistic themes while “Lotus Saint Prayer”, “Passion Series”, and “Exotica” may reflect or imply an interest in spirituality and “My Shoes” and “Memorial of Lady” obviously contain a certain pop art quality in their serial imagery of common objects. Also, “Passion Series #1 and Piles #2” and “Exotica” are composed of abstract “nests” of forms, charged with an array of colors, as if their components were dashed against the wall or floor and are suddenly blossoming in the artists own “garden of delight”.

Byun’s most recent works while still generally floral in nature suggest to me that although botanical in inspiration they are becoming more or less emblematic in their design and in their bold assertiveness as their colorful petals are projecting an authority verging on some highly symbolic implications.

A recently commissioned large scale work for the dining room of a passenger ship built for the Norwegian Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines is appropriately titled “Shimmering Sea at Sunset” and extends 13’ wide and 6’ high. Both floral and emblematic this mural-like work with its color scheme of pinks, greens, creamy white and silver trim around the edges of the leafy forms suggest the feeling of an Italian fresco. Byun’s successful completion of this major modular mural once again proves the decorative virtue of the ceramic medium in the hands of an intelligent and very capable artist who makes public art of the most enduring kind while embracing the international culture and broad influences of today’s best art.

Ronald Andrew Kuchta

Curator, Loveed Fine Arts
Former Editor, American Ceramics Magazine
Former Director, Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, NY