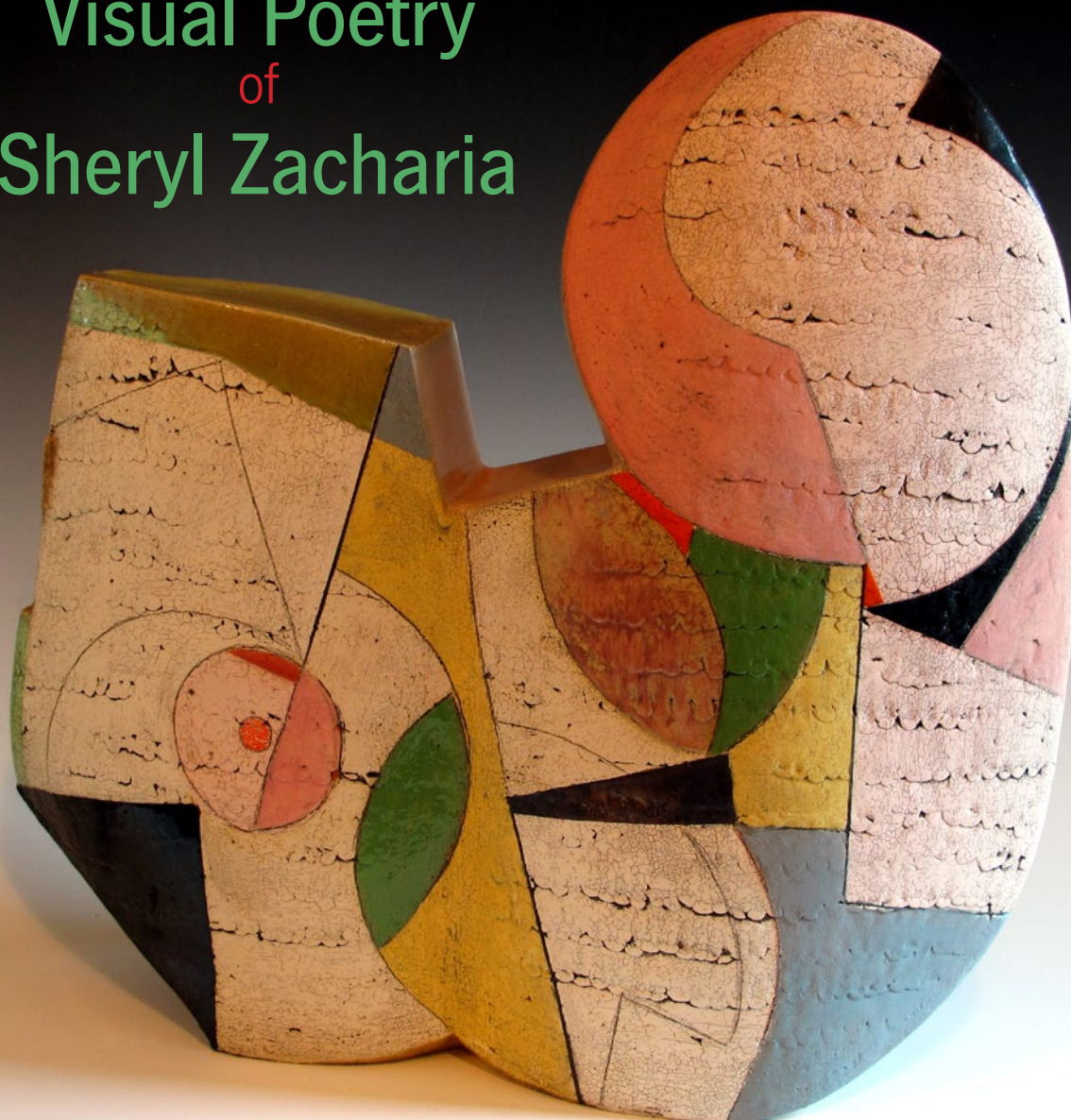


The Visual Poetry of Sheryl Zacharia



SHERYL ZACHARIA MAKES DELIGHTFULLY EXUBERANT ceramic vessels. Emblazoned with geometric forms and well-modulated colour passages, they reveal the eye of a painter and the lyricism of a dancer. To create her work, Zacharia draws on multiple ceramics techniques and artistic approaches derived from many media. These elements were on display in her September 2012 show at Patina Gallery in Santa Fe, New Mexico, US, *Speaking of Klee*, which coincided with the 45th General Assembly of the International Academy of Ceramics.

Zacharia perused other careers before embracing ceramics. A native New Yorker, she began her

professional life as a singer-songwriter. She performed on the New York club circuit for 10 years and published several songs. Yet her education at Southampton College had been in painting and she yearned to re-engage with the plastic arts. She experimented with clay and took workshops and classes, including ones at the well-

known Artworks and Greenwich House Pottery. In time this led to a teaching position at the River East public school in its pilot ceramics program and, later, teaching at the

Art School at Old Church in Demarest, New Jersey, and the West Side Y, among other places. In 2010 she had an extended residency at the Museum of Arts and Design and received a Northern Manhattan Arts Alliance grant,

*A Review by
Martha Drexler Lynn*



Facing page: *Mujer Contenta*. 2012.
 Above left: *Porcelain Quilted Object*. 2012.
 Above: *Lap Quilt*. 2012.

funded by the JPMorgan Chase Foundation. In 2012 she was included in the 19th San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts national completion in Texas, judged by Garth Clark and Mark Del Vecchio. While making and exhibiting work, she also took on curatorial tasks.

Zacharia's work reflects her fascination with form, colour and pattern presented within the frame of her handbuilt vessels. Handbuilding had intrigued her since childhood because of its direct blending of the process, hand and material. Her work is large-scaled for table-sized pieces and reflects a bold interpretation of the vessel form. Each piece requires careful shaping and multiple firings, often over as many as five days. Her enthusiasm for engagement with her chosen materials resonates throughout her complex surfaces which balance intricate patterns within the confines of the vessel form. She works in stoneware and porcelain and her pieces reflect rhythms seen in the sun, moon, sea and natural landscapes. Stamped and scratched textures combine with vivid colours and patterns that are undergirded by surfaces that evoke ancient artefacts. For Zacharia, "ancient forms and painted surfaces are what inspire [my] work." Her passion for music and dance supply a lyricism evident in her well-balanced presentation of line, colour and palette. For her there is a "stunning similarity in these two different areas of art." Bold but modulated, her work is proud, engaging and confident.

Porcelain Quilted Object is a vertically oriented piece that features pigmented, geometric quadrants that are textured like mosaic tiles set against a weathered wall. The front of the piece offers a counterpoint to the back, with its scrummed surface and smaller colour passages. When viewed from afar, each side stands on its own, yet in the round, they work together to form a complex whole. The modulation of volume is important too: Zacharia relieves the solidity of the base with a squared void. With an interest in bygone cultures, dance and music and a feel for textures usually seen in fibre, her work synthesises painting

concerns with volumetric imperatives. This dance of contrasts is a hallmark of her ceramics and reflects her working method of playing jazz or other music while in the studio. Modelling and painting sessions are often enlivened by dancing around the studio.

In *Mujer Contenta* Zacharia uses a theme of interlocking rounded forms to define her vessel. Softly coloured sections outlined with grey lines balance circles and squares. The two distinct halves create an internal dynamic that is punctuated by the intersecting outlines that echo across the work. *Plaid Vessel* features a colourful contemporary plaid pattern offset by a textured frame. *Lap Quilt*, the single wall piece in the exhibition, returns to the theme of textures and textiles. Featuring the interplay of angular and circular forms rhythmically moving across the surface, the work shows consummate skill in manipulating recurring and complex patterns. The result is truly bold visual poetry.

Zacharia has a full schedule of exhibitions through the end of 2013. The Santa Fe-based Jane Sauer Gallery will show her work at Chicago SOFA in November and later that month, Zacharia will show at the 38th Annual Karen Karnes Pottery Invitational at the Art School at Old Church. Her new work for these exhibitions is already in process and features a series called *Dancers*. Articulated with heavier outlines, it continues her familiar forms and bold shapes, but moves into Art Deco-inflected colours.

Martha Drexler Lynn, PhD, the author of many books and articles about studio ceramics and glass, was in charge of the 20th century decorative arts collections at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. In 2010 she wrote the permanent collection catalogue for the Sidney Swidler Collection of 20th century studio ceramics at the Crocker Art Museum. Currently she is working on a book about the American studio ceramics movement from 1941 to 1979. All photos by Sheryl Zacharia.