

BOMB

Studio Visit: Jessica Jackson Hutchins Hutchins by Amelia Rina

Ceramic and glass works that invite discovery.

May 26, 2022



Jessica Jackson Hutchins studio. All photos by Amelia Rina.

Jessica Jackson Hutchins wants art to be an event, not a product. In every material—from clay and found objects to fused glass and decommissioned bus shelters—she prioritizes curiosity and intuition over knowable outcomes. Visiting her studio in southeast Portland, Oregon, I was delighted but not surprised to find a feast of materials in various stages of completion and activation.





The first work by Hutchins I ever encountered in person was *Cushion* (2017): two blobby ceramic figures embracing on top of a couch cushion that sat on the floor at lumber room in downtown Portland. It was sometime in 2020, when the pandemic was still very new and especially terrifying, and the sculpture felt deeply saturated with both the grief I was feeling and a palpable sense of loving support. Looking at it, all I wanted to do was hug someone like that. Two years later, in Hutchins's studio, her ceramic works filled me with the same feeling—as though they could embody the psychological weight of surviving today.





And yet despite their emotive radiance, the works are playful instead of sad. She showed me how two ceramic figures serendipitously fit into each other perfectly, as though they were designed as a pair. In *The Fortunate One* (2021), the top figure, a glossy teal mound that looks like it's losing a fight with gravity, sits on a more upright greige structure painted with horizontal and vertical stripes in muted colors. Like star-crossed lovers, they seem fated to complete each other. In works like this, Hutchins embraces what she calls the “energetic potential of seemingly fixed objects.” She told me that she loves to contemplate the objects she makes, especially when they leave her feeling unstable—an anti-authoritarian sentiment infused in all the work she does. Instead of fussing over the preciousness of her creations, Hutchins embraces the generative process of breaks, mistakes, and surprises.



The resulting works have a unique combination of precision and unpredictability, epitomized in her fused glass works. At her studio, she showed me a mock-up [image 2] of the approximately forty-five by seven-foot piece installed at the Carnegie Museum: a monumental work overflowing with color, movement, and a celebration of materials. I always love seeing maquettes, especially of works that will eventually be huge. There's something deliciously furtive about it, like getting to see a being in its gestational period—so full of potential. In a world where life feels simultaneously capricious and unpleasantly definitive, Hutchins's sculptures celebrate opportunities for discovery.

Jessica Jackson Hutchins: No Relief is on view at Adams and Ollman in Portland, Oregon, until June 11; Hutchins's work can also be seen in the group exhibition Working Thought at Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh until June 26.

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In Profile: Jessica Jackson Hutchins

A pivot to glass by the sculptor shows an attempt to see hope through political disillusionment

By: Laura van Straaten
December 1, 2017

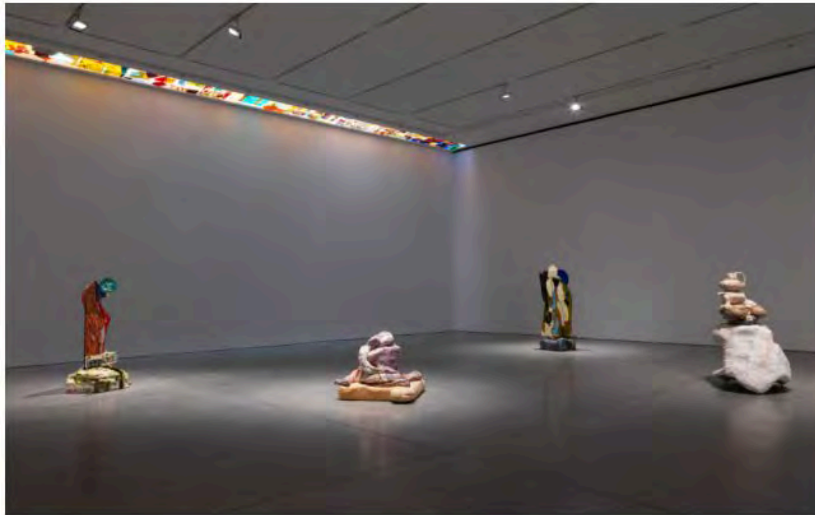
Jessica Jackson Hutchins has long explored the tensions between domesticity, femininity, labor and craft through her free-standing and wall-mounted sculptures, fashioned from common materials such as clay, papier-mâché, concrete, well-worn furniture and commercial textiles in various states of decay. But her latest solo exhibition at Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York, *The People's Cries*, marks a pivot for the artist. In addition to several multimedia floor sculptures, Hutchins traverses higher-strung emotional and political terrain – including the election of Donald Trump – in a new medium for the artist: multicolored fused glass panels whose prettiness she wields like a weapon.

The panels have been packed tightly along 12-meter rectangular skylights; each is a discrete work with its own title (all from 2017), though they fit together like one continuous frieze, or a cartoon strip that lacks a clear narrative. 'I found myself working in this beautiful new medium at the time when the political climate in the United States was beginning to change drastically,' Hutchins writes in the press release. 'The sensory extravagance (the gorgeousness!) of colored light was as overwhelming as the political upheavals and injustices.' She goes on to describe the light and color of the glass as creating 'a kind of hallowed space' that might 'be the salve of hopefulness that we need right now.'

Making use of a medium associated with medieval church windows, Hutchins's glass panels are a sacrament of a different sort. Their surfaces bear painted phrases from punk songs and political placards carried by protesters around the world: 'General Strike', 'Power Up', 'Mercy for the Innocent', 'Oh Bondage Up Yours'. Elsewhere, she's canonized recognizable figures like the activist Angela Davis, whose image appears in the mix. Hutchins has also kitted out the gallery's front window, so her work is visible from the street.

Despite the anger, fear and frustration apparent in these words and images, Hutchins has found redemption – and even delight – in working with a new material, which she manipulates playfully in a palette far more vibrant than the muted mauves, yellows and earthy tones of her earlier sculptures.

'The colored glass is kind of whiz bang insanity,' she told me with a laugh when we spent a day together in Portland, Oregon – the city where she lives and works – in August. We drove to the Bullseye Glass Studio, where she has been in residence for several months, to see the glass panels in progress for her Marianne Boesky show. Weaving through traffic in her dusty minivan, we gabbed about growing up in Chicago, where she and I were three years apart at the same small private primary school, just blocks from Lake Michigan. Though I have followed her career, we had not been in touch for decades. We talked too about our tough teenage years, by which time we had each lost our mothers and begun to dabble in bad behavior. We both credited school, especially literature and the arts, for giving us something to hold onto. 'I always felt like art was salvific,' she said.



While scouting locations for the 2016 Portland Biennial, Hutchins found herself in an abandoned Christian Science Reading Room in Pendleton, Oregon. She noticed that several of the stained glass panels on the ceiling's oculus were missing. She said she was seized with a desire to fill the gaps with her own glass works, despite never having worked with the material: 'Within five minutes I had called a glass fabricator I had heard of in Portland and was on my way there.'

At Bullseye, Hutchins demonstrated how she used a scoring tool to hand-slice sheets of pre-pigmented glass and then composed them into collages, drawing with paint and adding in other materials for detail and texture. A kiln melts her compositions together, leaving in slight overlaps in color and a crude messiness that she favors. (The fresh panels immediately evoke Shrinky Dinks, the 1970s craft of our youth that encouraged kids to melt plastic into shapes in an oven.) In addition to the skylight panels, Hutchins has designed metal stanchions so that several of the panels can be incorporated into the floor sculptures or installed at eye level on vertical walls and illuminated from the back, which makes imperfections in the glass more visible; in some sections, the uneven surface of the glass reveals where Hutchins has permitted small air bubbles to form and freeze. 'With glass especially you run the risk of it being design-y,' she explains, 'So these imperfect bits help get it to be complicated, emotional and about human frailty and urgency instead.'

An imperative not to be 'perfect' or 'precious', as Hutchins puts it, is something she's carried over to glass from her work in ceramics. She completed an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, but she decided to learn ceramics by taking 'adult-ed' courses at the Oregon College of Art and Craft. While Hutchins is included in *Vitamin C: Clay and Ceramic in Contemporary Art*, a survey of the top 100 artists worldwide working in ceramics published last month by Phaidon, she remains almost defiantly uninterested in acquiring – or at least showcasing – her own skills. 'That came from a decision I made to avoid a kind of slickness that becomes co-opted so easily,' she explained. 'I want to resist design and commodification, even of the artist's hand, in favor of privileging a crude eccentricity, allowing for a sense of entropy and punk instead of a rarified perfection.'



The day we visited Bullseye, we also dropped by Hutchins’s brand-new main studio, in Southeast Portland. Half-finished floor sculptures destined for her shows at Boesky and a January show at The Pit in Los Angeles were strewn about the hulking street-level structure. Incorporating a mishmash of materials more in keeping with her signature style, such as fabric and clay, many of their ceramic forms often evoke the often lumpy heft of human figures without being overtly figurative. ‘I like to use fabric for softness and for ‘culture’ – color and texture – and to interrupt the hard with the soft,’ she explained.

At one point, Hutchins sat down in her studio on an upholstered chair whose cushion now forms the foam plinth for her most figurative ceramic work in the Boesky show, *Cushion* (2017) – a pair of ceramic figures fused in an embrace. ‘Creative process is still in many ways my content,’ she mused, leaning back into its peachy plushness. ‘It is the meta content.’

CRUSH



Jessica Jackson Hutchins Interview

By: Danielle Wu
September 13, 2016

Upon scouting locations for the Portland Biennial, Jessica Jackson Hutchins immediately fell in love with the Christian Science reading room in Pendleton, Oregon. What was once a space for believers of healing through prayer looked bereft. Its wall-to-wall red carpets were faded, and three missing windowpanes in a central oculus flooded the room with natural light.

Hutchins described it as dilapidated. “It was beautiful,” she recalls.

Hutchins is about to complete the centerpiece of her show: three stain-glass wedges that replace the oculus’s missing segments – her first time working with the medium.

We spoke about how casting aside deadlines and creating art for an unconventional space was a liberating, meditative, and healing process.

Is it exactly as you had envisioned?

Well, if it was exactly as I had envisioned, I wouldn’t be as excited. I’ve been more excited about the process of translating my sculptures, which are found objects, into a sketch, and then into lead lines. I’m also excited about seeing how light filters through colored glass, changing at different times of day. I’ve never worked this way before.

What was it like creating something so site-specific?

I’ve been working with a stained glass professional. I brought him sketches and photographs of the artwork, which he then redraws them with lead lines, because only he knows where those lines need to be for structural soundness. And then I choose the colors of glass. I use opalescent colors to make objects seem more solid and distinguish them from the background, or try to define and push the perception of space.

Now that I’m working with stained glass, I’m reading the aesthetics differently. There are moments where I say to myself, the space is too packed with information. I can feel the original church window-makers saying to me, “There’s still more opportunity to change colors!” But, I have to dial back at times just to privilege certain kinds of information. I deal with ambiguous iconographies, which are less readable than, for example, a flower or figure of Jesus.

There is one component in the stained glass that is readable, which are these alphabet letters.

Yes, I've been reading a lot about Vimala handwriting, which is a kind of cursive. I read this book, *The Soul Development Through Handwriting: The Waldorf Approach to the Vimala Alphabet*, which claims that people who use this kind of handwriting have more independence and self-assuredness, which suggests that this handwriting is key to something. I'm interested in the kinesthetic, or the innate wisdom in our bodies; it's not respected enough in our culture, although it's very important for a sculptor.

I'm also interested in esoteric philosophies or esoteric thought around our basic aspects of life. Roy Lichtenstein did it too, and so did Indian philosophers, who wrote about the mystical potential of language. Religion does that. Stained glass does that. Artists do that. That's what I'm interested in — the mystical potential of the objects around us.

Can we talk about your relationship with religion and why you refer to it?

I do like to signal the potential for mystical thought. My last exhibition, *Confessions*, at the Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery, emphasized the power of transcendental transformation. You can tell a narrative, but a confession implies the transformative power of the story. A confession is an act that is supposed to be either redeeming or incarcerating.

For the Portland Biennial, I'm showing in the Christian Science Reading Room. At first, it just seemed like an opportunity to intervene in a space that wasn't a conventional museum or art space.

My mother was Christian Science for a couple of years. She died of Lou Gehrig's disease when I was a kid. She became involved with Christian Science as a last resort, because there wasn't anything anyone in the medical world could do. But to me, there's a lot of interesting thematic content in Christian Science relating to my work and the way I talk about the power of objects, thought, and poetry.

I'm not validating its concepts. If anything, I'm a polytheist [laughs] or an omni-theist. I just believe in the transformative power of objects. But, that is a kind of religious sentiment, isn't it? The beauty of a painting can change you by giving you access to a different language in that moment.

In fact, I have a friend who is a homeopath who is writing an essay to accompany my Portland show, exploring the intersections between Christian Science, homeopathy, and my work. Homeopathy is a very alternative kind of medicine. A lot of people are suspicious of it, but then again a lot of people are very suspicious of contemporary art, too!

Because the humanities are hard to quantify as effective, right?

Exactly! There is really no quantifiable reason to put in stained glass windows in Pendleton. Nobody really cares that they're there. No one is paying you for that. But art saves lives all the time. I know it does, because it saved mine. People have become divorced from the importance of beauty and magic. Why does everything have to be practical? Aesthetic experience is crucial to human lives. The kinesthetic is something encouraged by Vimala text, such as writing letters as opposed to typing. It's my experience that real human compassion takes place in the body. The more divorced we become from our body, the less we are capable of that compassion. That compassion is essential for what we need to change the world that needs changing. That's one of the reasons why my work is very physical.

And how has the context of the Portland Biennial influenced your art-making?

It's been harder, because there is no institutional support, but as soon as I saw those windows, I had to make it happen no matter what. I knew the windows weren't going to get done until after the biennial was supposed to close. I only have a verbal agreement with the landlord to put the windows in. So I've just gone rogue, because I've become very passionate about doing those windows.

All images courtesy of the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York. © Jessica Jackson Hutchins. Pictures from Portland Biennial.

PORTLAND, OREGON

Jessica Jackson Hutchins

LUMBER ROOM/DOUGLAS F. COOLEY MEMORIAL
ART GALLERY, REED COLLEGE

Widely known for her sculptures deploying old couches and cast-off furniture as host bodies for plaster obelisks, papier-mâché appendages, and homemade ceramic vessels, Jessica Jackson Hutchins for this occasion commandeered two Portland venues for a joint exhibition that amounted to something like a pocket retrospective of her work to date. “Confessions,” organized by Portland collector Sarah Miller Meigs and Cooley Gallery director Stephanie Snyder, offered Portland viewers a chance not only to commune with a hometown hero on an intimate scale but also to decipher how Hutchins’s crusty, blobular syntax has come into being. How is it that this work burns so cleanly through the fog of global art?

At Reed College’s Cooley Gallery, the works on view were largely recent, dating from 2012 onward. Exemplary among Hutchins’s numerous sculptures utilizing various seating elements, the wall-mounted *Might*, 2015, presented a grid of braille-like painted dots and some rough crosshatched lines on a swath of fabric attached to the backside of a hefty wooden stretcher. Smears of gray and mustard-colored paint were brushed across the verso of stretched canvas visible behind the fabric, and a sideways chair laden with a lumpy, dark-blue-green ceramic vessel was mounted to the frame’s bottom. Immediately



Jessica Jackson
Hutchins, *Untitled*
(*Piano Print, M*),
2010, oil-based ink,
ceramic, textile,
found object,
54 × 55 × 2 ½".

in front of it was the freestanding *Three Graces*, 2013, a bulbous purple-, pink-, and acidic-yellow-glazed ceramic figurine resting on a sectional marred by matted paint (in shades of white and tapioca) and three teardrop-shaped burn marks. While the sculpture was ostensibly based on a photograph of colliding football players from a relatively recent *New York Times* Sports section clipping, the work's classical underpinnings, intimated by its title, were reiterated by the urn form that rested atop the main ceramic mass, and by the peach-colored garland hanging below. Hutchins's signature combinations of disparate materials and chronological references were unpredictable, even thrilling.

Across town, with a selection of works drawn entirely from Meigs's private collection, the Lumber Room exhibition delved into the artist's back catalogue. From 1999 came a series of collages, some made from Scotch tape and cut-up playing cards, arranged with a light touch suggesting a grunge Richard Tuttle; from 2006, two pieces stemming from a prolonged Darryl Strawberry obsession. Among the more recent works was *Rope Stanza*, 2013, a tarp painted eggplant and forest green with punches of yellow draped over a bent utility ladder, with a ceramic sack-form placed in the improvised tent's "lap." Strands of macramé suggested umbilical cords, and on the work's side sat an algae-green pile of glazed ceramic, all of which gave the assemblage a witchy, salt-watery cast. The eggplant hue was a holdover from *Untitled (Piano Print, M)*, 2010, a mostly black print made from the lid of a grand piano, decorated with wads of turquoise-, bister-, and lemon-colored clay and some scrawled lettering obscured by a scrap of sheer purple fabric—bandit bandanna, veil, or pubic triangle, depending on one's frame of reference.

The double-chambered show evidenced a sensibility that has evolved in dramatic bursts over the years, both conceptually and literally. As Hutchins's pieces have enlarged, her connection with the tangled roots of sculpture has also come to the fore. Her grammar seems particularly grounded in a holy trinity of postwar American artists: Johns, Rauschenberg, and Twombly. From Johns she has taken the half-scrutable erotic semiosis, the occasional exposed stretcher bars, the affixed "balls," and the household objects; from Rauschenberg, a warmer, looser reliance on at-hand materials and the newspaper-based collage-as-rebus; and from Twombly, a certain mystical fogginess, the decidedly nongeometrical classical references, and a romantic employ of names from antiquity etched in rustic graffiti.

Hutchins's shapes feel bracingly unauthored—a fungus of papier-mâché pimpled with decoupage magazine clippings of wristwatches, a ceramic anemone with a wrinkled silk scarf. Rarely abject, her works are gropingly, spreadingly alive, rife with nuances by turns erotic, pious, funny, and gross. Out of the humble materials of plaster and old upholstery, she has birthed a vernacular, a brood of hodgepodge bodies who dream of olive trees and ancient light.

—Jon Raymond

VANCOUVER

Owen Kydd

MONTE CLARK GALLERY

At what point does a picture cease to be one? Owen Kydd previously pondered this question through works he describes as durational photographs, which utilize extended single-shot video recordings to present static pictures of unmoving objects. The selection of new works on view here, however, marked a significant turn toward large-scale photography; the most salient feature of these works is that of their having been printed on adhesive-backed mural paper. These new works prompted a separate question: What is the point at which a depiction loses coherence?

Vulture
May 29, 2015
Jerry Saltz



Jerry Saltz: Jessica Jackson Hutchins Finds Truth in Clay

By Jerry Saltz



Jessica Jackson Hutchins, *Ultrasuede Wave*, 2015. Courtesy of the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York © Jessica Jackson Hutchins, 2015

“Castratos of Moon-Mash” is what Wallace Stevens said we’d be “without the sexual myth, the human reverie or poem of death.” Without these ravaged facts of physical life, organic depths and regrets, constant re-becomings, separation, fear, dreams, bodies, and defeats, Stevens said, we’re not human, only neutered beings — Platonic abstractions without flesh. Since her breakout show at the Ten in One Gallery in 2001, the 44-year-old Jessica Jackson Hutchins has wrestled with the sexual myth, reverie, poems of life and death, human dependency, motherhood, clustered flesh, and social loci made material. In the past, she’s created couches and chairs with pulpy masses, hypersecretions of ceramic and papier-mâché spilling over like a body fermenting, rising into flesh, cratering away. There are vases and vessels resting in forms, possibly puckered openings, voodoo -protuberances, erotic shapes, shelters, micro-cosmic colosseums. She’s equally gaudy and hermetic, ragingly vulnerable but cloaked; at once abstract but always alluding to figuration. Another sculpture finds a painted ceramic shape kneeling into another and performing what looks like fellatio on another mass. She has talked about “the powerful language of objects,” and I see nonnarratives of skin, geologic and biological mergings, big things being broken down, little things becoming immense. She’s uneven and abstruse, but I think she’s among the best artists working in America today. Certainly with ceramics.

Clay reappeared in the art world about ten years ago. Long disparaged as a craft material, it was — like the demeaned paper silhouette that Kara Walker excavated in the early 1990s — something artists turned to in reaction to the processed, slick Jeff Koons–Damien Hirst movement toward jobbing art out to production teams. Clay represented a way to retake ancient territory and techniques and redefine skill with less expensive, labor-intensive, malleable material that takes on aspects of the body. Unlike the navel-gazing, marketable Zombie Formalists, who have also defined themselves by their unslickness, artists who turned to clay and papier-mâché weren’t making tame-looking art about art. Not only does worked clay show the traces of its making; it’s a tremendous support for painting, twisted, smooth, shaped, with insides and outsides, battered, eternally hard but always liquid-looking. Surprises of glazing are built in, the way surprise is built into painting. Women instinctively

understood clay as unprotected territory, as they'd seen photography in the early 1980s — something no one cared about, and thus available. Hutchins, Huma Bhabha, Sterling Ruby, Shio Kusaka, Sarah Lucas, Rachel Harrison, and others have made ceramics almost as ubiquitous in galleries as painting and sculpture. Glazed clay is so sexy that it's become a gateway material for other "lesser" processes, like weaving and embroidery.

Hutchins was a standout in [Francesco Bonami's 2010 Whitney Biennial](#), notable in part for showcasing more women than men — hallelujah! By then, she'd shown in New York, fantastically, for a decade. Then, as she was exhibiting all over the world, even having a survey at the ICA in Boston in 2011, she went five years without showing here, and amicably left her gallery. I got lucky and ran into her work in Europe twice — and was amazed at her growth and ambition — but New York lost track of her development. Her first outing at Marianne Boesky finds her still vehemently refusing that castrato world, using warping shapes, buckling forms, sluicing fluid color, nameless things looking alive. But she's striking out in so many directions at once that it may be hard for newcomers to process it all, especially since she has jumped from mixes of ceramics and painting to more-exclusive wall-works.

Hutchins's paintings here have ceramic shapes attached — a canvas sprouts an alphabetical form, there are insinuations of punctuation marks on surfaces (she's always loved the comma, once calling it "energy without subject or object ... performative ... a half breath"), and collage elements appear. A pulpy yellow vase rests on what may be a table, windowsills, curtains. One has a pillowcase from her adolescence; the tears cried here and signs of budding sexuality can be gleaned in drawings of penises. Even when flailing or falling short, this is an artist always striving for radical vulnerability. I love that Hutchins isn't checking herself. These paintings give us a view of the world from the interior studio of someone's dreaming mind. But the paintings aren't resolved; they manage to ornament and aerate but not increase the psychic density of the show.

Best, though, are the sculptures. Beautifully glazed, gnarly three-legged ceramic stools rest atop similarly hobbled tables. "Hobbled like us," you think — by life, indignities, awakenings, fear, joy. All

have stupendous presence. *Acid Blotter* is a chair with a glacial shape embedded with painted paper cups. It oozes off the chair. A large blue-glazed disk is on the ooze — a pill to make us smaller, hallucinate, wanting to expand proportions, states of being? I thought the chair was a conjuring of what it's like to sit in one's studio and try to dream and then fashion worlds. I remembered the great picture of Willem de Kooning, sitting, looking at an unfinished painting, sizing up his next move. Hutchins removes any proscenium from sculpture, making mass seem cinematic, more like music, something that occupies time, getting around sculptural tendencies to stand still in space. It's painting if painting were amorphous, less bounded by edges, in states of becoming.

My favorite sculpture here is *Ultrasuede Wave*, an old fleshy sofa topped with a bulbous white shape that in turn supports a fabulous ceramic vessel with brilliant dark glazing. Another sofa, *Book of Acts*, has a rectangular slab of plaster, painted with a windowlike grid, and another incredible -ceramic vessel in what might be a window. I thought of the beautiful awkwardness of ancient Greek kraters, the way they come to life as we follow erotically intertwined figures all around the surfaces. In these two great works Hutchins reconciles and fuses the physical, painterly, sculptural, social, and sexual. It's a collapsing of Lucian and Sigmund Freud by way of de Kooning, Franz West, early Oldenburg, and the pregnant figures of Alice Neel. I thought of de Kooning's great quote "Flesh is the reason oil paint was invented" and heard myself say, "Flesh is the reason ceramics and sculpture were invented, too."

"Jessica Jackson Hutchins: I Do Choose" is at Marianne Boesky Gallery through June 13.

**This article appears in the June 1, 2015 issue of New York Magazine.*

NEW YORK

THE YEAR IN CULTURE: 2010

The Year in Art

By Jerry Saltz Published Dec 5, 2010 ShareThis



Adolf Ziegler, *The Elements: Fire, Water and Earth, Air (Die vier Elemente: Feuer, Wasser und Erde, Luft)*, before 1937.

(Photo: Courtesy of Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Sammlung Moderner Kunst in der Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich)

"Chaos and Classicism: Art in France, Italy, and Germany, 1918-1936"

At the Guggenheim Museum through January 9, 2011

It's not often that a show pulls back the curtain on conventional wisdom or revises art history outright. But guest curator Kenneth Silver has done that with panache. Thanks to his show, we have a clearer, less formalist idea of what was going on across Europe between the wars. As we've long suspected, art didn't simply march forward from Cubism in the teens through Dada and Surrealism in the twenties and thirties; it made some strange pit stops along the way, into an often disturbing realism. At the grand, terrifying end to this show—just yards from *Olympia*, Leni Riefenstahl's ode to Teutonic superiority—is the work of one of Hitler's favorite painters, Adolf Ziegler. That his triptych of four senevy female nudes looks uncannily like the work of John Currin left me gasping about the present.

2. Tino Sehgal's 'This Progress'

Guggenheim Museum

You began the walk up the Guggenheim's ramp—the walls stripped of art—accompanied by a child actor. At different stages, you were handed off to an older actor. As you progressed to the top, the talk was of progress; with each guide, the conversation would deepen or die, become more or less personal. What I loved? That Sehgal's creation—as real as the *Mona Lisa*—offered such an expansive and moving (emotionally and physically) definition of art.

3. Heat Waves in a Swamp: The Paintings of Charles Burchfield

Whitney Museum of American Art; curated by Robert Gober

It was a tremendous treat to rediscover the near-forgotten American visionary Burchfield, who turned ordinary things into eerie (ectoplasmic hills!), utterly original, even magical art. I much prefer the haunting, unknowable Burchfield to the Whitney's main man of constant solitude, Edward Hopper.



4. Sarah Sze

Tanya Bonakdar Gallery

Sze went all out in this two-story-high gallery show, inhabiting the area with a madly replicating architecture of multiple parts (fans, lights, pieces of bicycles). Space was explored, expanded, slowed down, woven back together, and transformed into the abstract machine it may be.

5. Jessica Jackson Hutchins

Derek Eller Gallery and Laurel Gillen

Hutchins is leading art into some fantastically promising places. With these two shows—"Kitchen Table Allegory" and "Over Come Over"—she turned abstraction and sculpture into imaginary fictions that are at once archaic, architectonic, filled with longing, and enchantingly awkward.

Sara Sze, *The Uncountables*, 2010
(Photo: Courtesy of the artist and Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York)



6. Joanna Malinowska, "Time of Guerrilla Metaphysics"

Canada

Joanna Malinowska, *Boli*, 2009, and *Mammoth Tusk*, 2008
(Photo: Courtesy of Canada, New York)

Her show opened at the end of 2009, but the physical presence, imaginative audacity, and sheer psychic power of Malinowska's massive Boli figure—placed at the center of her excellent

show—haunted me all year. The traditional tribal sculpture is made partially of excrement; the artist fabricated hers with wood, plaster, clay, and scraps of Spinoza's *Ethics*.

7. Huma Bhabha, "Sculptures"

Salon 94 Bowery, through December 19

Bhabha's formally inventive and rough sculptures of faces, bodies, fetishistic figures, and war machines conjure Roman antiquity and urban renewal, proving that serious high-mindedness doesn't have to be freighted with bombast or bathos.



8. Mike and Doug Starn, "Big Bambú"

Metropolitan Museum of Art

The brothers took the roof of the Met and spun it into a gigantic, evolving nest crawling with viewers. Thrillingly participatory and experientially awesome, it never stopped growing—much like the museum itself.

Mike and Doug Starn, *Big Bambú*

(Photo: Mike and Doug Starn/ARS, New York/Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art)

9. Arlene Shechet, "The Sound of It"

Jack Shainman Gallery

It's exciting to see artists using materials that, until recently, were ridiculed by the art world for being decorative or crafty. And somehow Shechet turned a variety of gnarly, curling, enigmatic (and oddly sexy!) objects into a convincing language of sculptural form.

10. "#class"

Winkelman Gallery

Just when we needed it, the spirit of activism, anarchy, and making it up as you go surfaced in this exhibition—a kind of think tank meets tribal gathering. Organized by artists Jennifer Dalton and William Powhida, "#class" was open to anyone who wanted to see performances, or talk about the market, careerism, and bad critics. Consciousness and hackles were raised; energy was generated.

INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE OF THE YEAR

Time Out

London



'Wedding Present', 2010

Jessica Jackson Hutchins

Jessica Jackson Hutchins's art is one of cast-offs and leftovers. It will appeal equally to the world-weary aesthete and the trash-modelling toddler, but in allying the battered and sagging patina of umpteenth-generation modernism with its domestic equivalent – a pair of worn, velour chairs given to her parents as a wedding present (pictured above) – the US artist does more than orchestrate old stuff in a deceptively casual way. 'Wedding Present' – those green armchairs, pushed together and given a ceramic bust – is at once a reclining figure, a wistful tableau infused with autobiographical resonance and a nimble vehicle of art historical transport, hastening us back via Sarah Lucas and Robert Rauschenberg to Picasso. Taken on a surprising diversion, I was momentarily reminded of David's painting of Marat, dead in his bath.

Anthropomorphism is fairly easy to achieve but these works don't give up their mysteries too readily. A *papier-mâché* 'Head', which may be one head or two, or perhaps entwined figures, seems to flaunt irresolution as a form of defiance, as do the pulpy extrusions of the same material that



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ruck her works on paper, or sit like an attenuated pie crust around a print made by using the lid of a baby grand piano. There are domestic narratives at play here, wry comments about the creative impulse as well, but it's the obliquities and partial articulations – those indicators of a thinking and feeling person at work – that keep you looking. **Martin Coomer**

Human Being

PICA

Jessica Jackson Hutchins

Children of the Sunshine

In Hutchins' home, the family piano provides both a literal and figurative rhythm to daily life. Transformed from a worn instrument into a body of artwork, the piano inspires a series of woodcut and collaged prints, forms the basis of a sculptural work, and serves as the set for a family and friends music video jam to the song *Children of the Sunshine*. In Hutchins' hands, domestic routines and objects blend with empathic and amorphous ceramic forms to stage abstract, yet resolutely human scenes.

Kristan Kennedy: When we last met you talked to me about your frustration with people who dismiss religious zealots, cult leaders, and other visionaries. You likened them to artists in their steadfast beliefs, especially as their ideas relate to the immaterial having value. In relation to this discussion, what makes your art important? Why is it worth defending, pursuing, and believing in?

Jessica Jackson Hutchins: My work is of the utmost importance to me and, by extension, to those right around me whom I directly affect. But I think it is better left to others to evaluate the kind of importance I think you are referring to; that [importance] would be contingent and whimsical and according to politics and the times. It also is not at all how I am inspired or driven to make [my work]. I wouldn't even know how to evaluate what I think is important art

for right now. That kind of ideological insistence doesn't actually interest me very much in art (unless it is really well done, of which I can't think of an example right now; maybe *Guernica*?).

I don't think I meant zealots or cult leaders for whom it is crucial to control the beliefs of others, whose power derives from their belief that they are right and others are wrong. I think that is really unethical in life and boring in art, mostly.

I think I was trying to speak to or about the more private aspects of faith and commitment to something outside oneself that doesn't engage a straightforward exchange in our society. A commitment that requires some hermeticism and study for its own sake, to nurture a kind of calling.

KK: You have been sourcing furniture and other domestic items from your own home, from the street, and from other locations. What is it about the stuff we live with that you are attracted to? When do you decide something should leave your home and exist in the studio?

JJH: I have always made my art from the stuff in the room—unremarkable, familiar stuff—so that the process of making meaning is emphasized, rather than just the finished product. I can create meaning just by rearranging things that were already around. This process is not extraordinary or exceptional, but quite essential to daily life, much like a chair is. [This method] can also communicate a "by-any-means-necessary" urgency or a kind of punk ethic.

KK: Are your vessels replacements for humans? They have anthropomorphic qualities and slump and rest and recline like we do, yet they also feel like architecture—a structure to things, or like landscape, lumps of earth interacting with rigid forms.

JJH: Yes, they are all of those things simultaneously.

KK: One of my favorite pieces of yours is a video called simply, *Plant Tour*, a first person wandering from the inside of your home to the garden. There is something so immediate about it, so familiar and strange; you reveal so much about your personal life in your work: we see your children, your husband, your home, we hear your wit and learn of your triumphs and trials. What is the role of the personal in your work? How much is too much to share?

JJH: I think, these days, the personal is coming front-and-center quite intentionally [in my work]. It seems like there has been some sort of crisis of content in art. No one could handle just having straightforward subject matter, as though somehow that is too vulnerable, or not 'important' or cool enough (thus the ubiquity of critical distance and ideologies and little tricks of abstraction to hide subject matter). So I am just going for it: no postures or pretensions. Pictures of my kids and real unremarkable moments are forefront.

I have also been working in and around allegory for the last decade and have always wanted to ground the more hermetic transcendental moments with real acute specificity, as if to say each is a vehicle for the other. I just made a big sculpture which is just 'SM,' my husband's initials. Maybe this and the pictures of the kids are perhaps so over-the-top that I hope the idea of subject matter is also made subject.

Hutchins is represented by Laurel Gitlen/Small A Projects in New York.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND LAUREL GITLEN, NEW YORK

JESSICA JACKSON HUTCHINS

by Stuart Horodner

Jessica Jackson Hutchins has been exhibiting her work steadily since she graduated from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago a decade ago. But in recent years, her visibility has increased exponentially—in significant exhibitions including *The Mood Back Home* (Momenta Art), *An Expanded Field of Possibilities* (Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum), *Dirt on Delight* (Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia), and *Shape of Things to Come: New Sculpture* (the Saatchi Gallery). These titles indicate what enthusiastic followers of this Portland, Oregon-based artist already know: that she operates in the often stigmatized arena of ceramic sculpture with intelligence and zeal. Her orchestrated assemblages tease out notions of function and display, as when she nestles awkward glazed vessels on worn readymade armchairs, couches, and tables, or props them up on lumpy or lean plinths of her own devising. The human body is referenced repeatedly, in all of its dumb charm and joyful habits.

Hutchins is consistently able to transform data from daily life into shapes and images that can yield an intimate urgency. Her understanding of collage aesthetics infuses her abstract objects in varying scales, intimate drawings, ambitious prints, and hand-wrought films. Over a few coffees on the Lower East Side, we discussed her two recent, concurrent solo shows in New York and her Obama-pasted couch in the Whitney Biennial. Hutchins was cautiously optimistic that we'd be able to address issues of influence and audience so early in the morning.

—Stuart Horodner

STUART HORODNER: You've just had two spaces simultaneously showing your work in New York and you had a piece in the Whitney Biennial. What's the difference between making the work and showing the work? What do you get out of seeing it in the world?

JESSICA JACKSON HUTCHINS: Showing the work finishes it for me. There's a certain understanding



SETTEE, 2010, CERAMIC, FABRIC, SETTEE, 27 × 46 × 19 INCHES. ALL IMAGES COURTESY OF DEREK ELLER GALLERY, NEW YORK, UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED.



COUPLE, 2010, COUCH, INK, SPRAY PAINT, CHARCOAL DUST, HYDROCAL, CERAMIC, 49 × 70 × 42 INCHES.



WEDDING SECTION, 2010, CERAMIC, 28 3/4 x 18 x 6 INCHES.
PHOTO BY DAN KVIKKA.

I get from showing it. I always feel like I know something more after it's shown. Even if it's at an art fair and there is no discernible feedback, it still feels different to me after. Maybe before that it's like the sound of one hand clapping.

SH: You learn something in the letting go of it?

JJH: I suppose. It's no longer *mine*. I don't have to do the work of understanding it, taking care of it. There are other observers changing the observed. This was especially true this time, because all kinds of factors around this work made it a little more fraught. Having the two solo shows and then the Whitney meant there were more people to deal with and a lot of energy focused around the work. It was a little challenging to make two separate but equal shows; I wanted to use the opportunity of having different venues to expand different qualities. My piece at the Whitney was a pretty political move. The Derek Eller show was more narrative, thus the title *Kitchen Table Allegory*. The show at Small A Projects had a more distilled quality. I also wanted there to be more of a bodily presence.

When I was first figuring out my work, I articulated to myself very clearly why I was doing it and what the ethical implications were. The ethics of it all was really important to me in the '90s.

SH: What do you mean by the ethics of it?

JJH: This was a long time ago, but I was reading philosophers like Emmanuel Levinas and Maurice Blanchot, who framed an imperative that expression be absolutely ethical. It was difficult to even *survive* after reading that stuff, frankly. Levinas's whole thing is the impossible relationship with the Other, whom we can never "know," because to know is to "murder." In the early work, the self is put into question by this relationship; at the end, it is "taken hostage." In his ethics, the self's sovereignty and autonomy is always at risk. I basically read it to mean that articulation almost inevitably confines and oppresses the Other by its demands. This understanding made my consideration of the viewer, and how I wanted to engage a viewer so difficult and strained. It solidified an isolation I already felt. Young artists are always trying to justify what they do, and this is such an unfortunate imperative. It's so ridiculous that it is considered selfish to be an artist, to devote your life to the production of meaning. Although I've let go of a lot of the urgency of these ideas, they inform how I work and how I present my work.

SH: How so?

JJH: I'm really careful about the imagery I cull from. I was never comfortable with the way any old found imagery was just bantered around; so many signifiers! Plus, it takes up so much mental space. I want to offer a little more space and rigor, and that is the more ethical invitation. Also, I obscure any sense of craft so that my own skill is not a subject. But at the same time, I think the look of the worn or worked is another way of

showing respect; it says that some effort was offered up. I guess it is a little paradoxical. You know, I think the book I made with Tom Fisher, *Convivium*, really addresses this.

In terms of physical spaces, I knew that the couch was going to the Whitney immediately. I was at the library with my daughter and some other five-year-olds when they called to tell me I was in the show, and a minute later I decided to use the couch. I literally never thought about it again. Because it is both current and historical in an undeniable way and that's what the Biennial wants to be. And it's tough; it can hold its own. That place can pull the guts out of a piece so completely, and it's nobody's fault. I've seen it happen, and I didn't even worry about it.

SH: The couch is covered in newspaper clippings dealing with Obama and has several ceramic vessels resting on its cushions. You made a decision to alter the piece when it was placed in the same room as Nina Berman's photographs of disfigured Iraq war veterans and their families. You removed a few of the vessels which I assume felt too close to severed limbs?

JJH: Yeah, that's right. I needed to restore a little ambiguity to it.

SH: What prompted your use of the Barack Obama newspaper images to cover the couch?

JJH: That was seminal. I was just paying attention to the language and imagery all the time before and after Obama's election, kind of like I did in my Darryl Strawberry piece. In 1996, after Darryl Strawberry broke his toe just before the World Series, I made a big toe for him. In the case of Obama, emotions were fever-pitched—there was hope for transformation and a sense of pride in our country, which was a new occurrence for many of my generation. A brand-new era. It seemed like a good idea right away to cover that particular couch with Obama stuff. I got a subscription to the *New York Times* for that purpose, which also felt like a good thing to do when so many newspapers were folding.

SH: I've been thinking about Allan Kaprow's concept of artlike art and lifelike art in relation to you:

Artlike art holds that art is separate from life and everything else, whereas lifelike art holds that art is connected to life and everything else. In other words, there is art at the service of art and art at the service of life. The maker of artlike art tends to be a specialist; the maker of lifelike art, a generalist.

JJH: Well, I'm certainly more interested in making art that is connected to life. Art about art can be so definable and limited. I don't think much should be made of the divisions, though; it can get too "us and them." As an artist, I don't think you can ever afford to be too general. The danger is to not really mean much at all or

to fall into being overly sentimental. It's always got to be really specific.

SH: You make sculpture, drawings, prints, and films, and you show them in galleries and museums, which Kaprow ultimately eschewed. I'm interested in the idea that you come out of painting. I was thinking about Mary Heilmann, a painter who comes out of ceramics. When you look at Mary Heilmann paintings, there's a quality in the way she applies material that feels like clay slip and glazed color.

JJH: I don't really come out of painting, though.

SH: You don't?

JJH: Well, I graduated from a painting and drawing department. And I studied painting a lot but I never actually *made* many paintings. The drawings I used for my grad-school application were really ink washy; pretty cool, really. I'd like to show them to you sometime.

SH: Whom did you work with at the Art Institute of Chicago?

JJH: Susanne Doremus. Gaylen Gerber was a really important teacher to me. I was coming out of all kinds of crazy personal stuff and I plastered the walls with little drawings that were so raw. I just used whatever materials I had lying around: nail polish, bits of papers. They were a little desperate. I made a couple of paintings but was never down with it. I was embarrassed to hold a paintbrush; it felt so heroic. I was much more comfortable being on the floor with newspaper. All this deconstructing the myth of the artist stuff was in my head. Even when I tried to make paintings, I would make little lithos and then print them thousands of times on the canvas. I used to have a couple of those—they're kind of pretty—I think I gave them to my brother. One day during my first month of school I made something really guttural; it was tear-stained papier mâché, and Gaylen really encouraged me to go in that direction. It gave me the confidence to make things that were very raw. I made limbs and body parts for people who were suffering. I made arms for junkies I knew out of wire and papier mâché, where the negative space was really important. Wires are like drawing in space. I made a tongue for Syd Barrett, whose music I was extremely influenced by. I was thinking that all he needed was to be rescued from the garbled utterance of his life. He needed to be able to articulate clearly, because he was so crazy in the basement of his mind. I made that toe for Strawberry. I made a heart for Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys. Hands for Townes van Zandt. It's funny, just this year I pulled those things out of storage and thought they were the most beautiful things I had ever seen. I made the legs of *Orange Bowl*, which is in Derek's show, trying to recapture that vibe, though they're much more muscular. Those early ones were more fragile.

SH: I love how the prompts for these works are so clearly driven by other creative practitioners, but out of their lack.

JJH: I guess I was trying to get at what was important for me about what art can do.

SH: So you provide some sustenance or sympathetic magic. Your work seems to examine various contingencies, objects subject to unique forces. Unforeseen or unpredictable situations, like what happens in the kiln, or the wear and tear of furniture.

JJH: Oh my gosh, I made hundreds of drawings called *Webs of Contingencies*. They were all about contingency and cause, which was something I thought about a lot in graduate school. Now I don't have to *think* about it anymore; it's just in the work. That's what's so great about getting older as an artist.

SH: There's something so referentially *human* about these pieces; vulnerable objects held in place, nestled into chairs, awkwardly propped up. Implied rituals or actual use.

I find myself walking into the venues that present your work and immediately becoming hyper-aware of my own body, my own erectness or slump. You've given me something to be physically and psychically connected to.

JJH: I love sculpture for that reason. How much it connects to the body and at least has a chance at a moment without masses of linear thought. I think although they can be about all sorts of things as well, there is the possibility of an experience of a monosyllabic impact. I've always used figures of speech to talk about my work. I often think of pedestals as prepositions: and, but, or, for. So even when I'm using a table as a pedestal, it becomes part of a prepositional phrase for positioning something but it also still has its power as a noun. The familiarity of it connects you right away. That's what sculpture can do. I find that paintings operate more like texts. There's a way in which they're explicating; they're like language on the wall. A sculpture is *in* the room, and so it always has its factness, even more so with the familiar found objects.

SH: This reminds me of Ad Reinhardt's statement "Sculpture is something that you bump into when you back up to look at a painting." "Bumping" is a word I like in relationship to what you make. There's also always something missing when you look at sculpture, when you experience something in the round. When people play the "if you could own any artwork . . ." game, I always wind up saying a multiple-element, stacked Brancusi.

JJH: My God, maybe the same for me. Those pedestals are simultaneously, exactly prepositions and "the stacks of mineral facts."

SH: Mostly because of the primal relationship of the materials. Combinations of roughly hewn and highly polished, the shifts that happen as you consider top-to-bottom and 360 degrees. When it comes to Francis Bacon or Alice Neel or any number of other amazing painters, I feel like I *know* them in the way I think you



COUCH FOR A LONG TIME (DETAIL) 2009, COUCH, NEWSPAPER, GLAZED CERAMIC, 29 x 76 x 33 1/2 INCHES. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND LAUREL GITLEN, NY. PHOTO BY DAN KVIKKA.



KITCHEN TABLE ALLEGORY, 2010, TABLE, INK, CERAMIC, 78 1/2 x 50 1/2 x 41 INCHES.



RECLINER, 2009, PLASTER, COLLAGE, CERAMIC,
55 x 34 x 30 INCHES.



FRONTAL, 2010, CERAMIC, CHAIR, 32 x 21 x 17 3/4 INCHES.
PHOTO BY DAN KVIKKA.

mean when you say painting is experienced as text. I feel like I grasp them in a way that I find the Brancusi unknowable.

JJH: I talked to Josh Shaddock, a great artist who also shows at Laurel Gitlin, about this the other night: when art really offers me something, the succor in it is its unknowability, a quality that makes it impossible to ever have a total handle on it. Books, like *Moby-Dick* or *Ulysses*, that I was really into as a teenager—even records like the Stones' *Exile on Main Street* and the Royal Trux's *Twin Infinitives*—there's an unknowability. In some cases it's from depth, in some from deep chaos that meant there was always something more to live for. But it's also just a weirdness. I like art that is deeply weird, art which only could have been made by that person who made it. I've been aware of this and clear about needing that quality in my work.

SH: Your work involves many transformations: papier mâché with its soaking and hardening; the forming, firing, and glazing process for ceramics; making paper pulp. The building or selecting of readymade pedestals/props/platforms or whatever we want to call them. Nothing is neutral and every element has time built into it. So when you nestle or prop ceramic objects on awkward plinths and furniture there are all of these associations built into that. The ritual of sitting in your favorite chair, eating at the table, sitting on the toilet—all of those residues and connections to living, to stains, spills, and repairs are in the work.

JJH: It's all about positioning and specificity, to get down to making a piece that means something but also that evades meaning a little bit too. Transformation, evidence of *work*, accidents, the time contained in the humanity of the objects—all that stuff is crucial to get at what I'm trying to get at, which is ways of connecting to the world, ways of knowing ourselves through the things we encounter.

SH: This goes back to earlier notions of making an offering to the gods or to the beloved. These are acts meant to curry favor or ask forgiveness or consideration. You remind us of this with your propositional objects in or on different delivery platforms.

JJH: Sometimes I want those delivery platforms to just suggest that it should be recognized that positioning something as an object of contemplation is a leap of faith, a real event. At the same time, I feel like everything is paradoxical. So while I sometimes want to suggest that it is an extravagant gesture, I also want that gesture to announce some self-awareness and to be underwhelming—I hope there is humor in that.

SH: The poet Wayne Koestenbaum suggested that I read George Oppen, and I know he is a favorite of yours.

JJH: I've used what I think is an Oppen quote so much in talking about Brancusi: "The pure stack of mineral fact." I think he plays around with the same paradox

"THIS UNDERSTANDING MADE MY CONSIDERATION OF THE VIEWER, AND HOW I WANTED TO ENGAGE A VIEWER, SO DIFFICULT AND STRAINED. IT SOLIDIFIED AN ISOLATION I ALREADY FELT. YOUNG ARTISTS ARE ALWAYS TRYING TO JUSTIFY WHAT THEY DO, AND THIS IS SUCH AN UNFORTUNATE IMPERATIVE. IT'S SO RIDICULOUS THAT IT IS CONSIDERED SELFISH TO BE AN ARTIST, TO DEVOTE YOUR LIFE TO THE PRODUCTION OF MEANING."

I do: the simple *factness* of things is where their existential importance lies. So the fact of that table, the fact of that couch, how the bowl on the table is just a fact . . . but it's a whole transformative experience. I want both of those things.

SH: You mention the fact, the mineral, the quotidian. Newspapers, which you often use in your work, are aggregates of these. The newspaper is ideally delivering the most current information about the world, but the minute after you read it and gain that information . . .

JJH: It's history.

SH: Yeah, it's becoming obsolete as you're reading it, but then it's vital again tomorrow morning when it's waiting on the stoop. Something about all of this brings me back to poetry and essences. The recognition of particular moments: that's what poetry captures.

JJH: Yeah, I love writing that does something with time that's anti-narrative and thing-like. Objectivist poets such as Oppen or Gertrude Stein come to mind. This is unlike the approach of, say, Ed Kienholz or Robert Gober, where the work is so narrative.

SH: Let's talk about Chinese scholar's rocks and other things that are about place or presence. Is that the kind of moment you're talking about?

JJH: Absolutely. I was going to bring up scholar's rocks when we were talking about Brancusi. They really illustrate what I was talking about with the extravagance of claiming a contemplative object. I was bowled over by this great show at the Met where really humble rocks were on these gorgeous, laboriously carved pedestals.

SH: Something about the scholar's rocks that I love is the subtle manipulation of them. They were always assumed to be wholly made by the forces of nature. But they are a beautiful lie. It's clear that on some level they were "helped" to more clearly resemble the landscape, or people and animals.

JJH: I didn't actually know that, but it's just fine with me; I don't mind a lie. It's the opposite that I think is boring; art that depends on veracity. Like when it matters if the artist actually carried out the claim that the work makes.

SH: But the scholar's rocks can make you remember the power and singularity of mountains and the physical world. You don't look at a tree or a rock and say, "That tree should be browner," or "That rock needs to be more textured." You say, "It's a rock, it is that way." That's what I love about Brancusi. He formed every inch

of his pieces, but they have an air of inevitability. You get this in Isamu Noguchi too, a very refined and dumb primal combo. Your work has so many decisions in it: what materials, what surface, what is going to support what? But I get that same clarity of “no other choice.”

I watched the Olympic women’s downhill skiing the other day and was thinking about you. It’s amazing to watch somebody maneuver with unbelievable acumen, then suddenly catastrophically fall down, only to get up. It reminded me of your interest in Darryl Strawberry and other figures who represent an arc of *trying*. So much expectation comes with people of great skill. There’s a burden to deliver excellence and to negotiate that in public and private, and we follow them with interest because they are human beings.

JJH: Skill really is amazingly beautiful. The way Strawberry would hit . . . he was such an exciting hitter. And it’s even more beautiful in contrast with the failures. People sometimes talk about my work as about failure ,but I always feel that it’s more about victory. More vivid because of the looming threat of collapse.

SH: The possibilities of what can happen. There are many ways of coming at your work, and I think this is what makes it successful. What conversations can it belong to that don’t feel like bullshit?

JJH: I think my work is available to a sports conversation . . .

SH: Sports and also domestic life. And having lived in Portland for a few years, it strikes me that the Pacific Northwest landscape, its microclimates, its food and wine culture all have a potential link to what you do. It’s a very physical place. Nature is palpable.

JJH: I’m sure I was quite overwhelmed by it my first years here. I was always comparing the life to a New York life, because my first few years I was back and forth a lot and trying to decide where to live. It started to feel more and more uncivilized every time I went back to New York. I think I needed the newness, the nature, the physical comforts. I feel more free out here.

SH: Without making too much of your family life—you’re married to musician Stephen Malkmus, have kids, pets—it strikes me that activity and acceptance is there in the sculptures. Things in your work evolve, lean, crack, collapse, seem like they could collapse but don’t. They are like bruises, shifts of plan, changes, day-to-day things.

JJH: Yeah, there is something just so *regular* about raising kids—lots of people do it. And my work comes right out of my life, is sort of *about* regular life, and also about how extravagant it is to take that on. Simone Weil wrote something on that and I pondered it for years. But the truth is, it is also just a way of getting at that weirdness, that newness. It’s like the inner retreat is just a mechanism to ensure the work is really different and real. And so more interesting. I think I found permission to get more personal, more obscure

from Zukofsky’s book-length poem *A*. He allows himself to get so personal that it gets super obscure.

SH: I’ve always been interested in work that makes use of things of the world—Kurt Schwitters, George Herms, Hannah Höch, collage and assemblage history. There’s something that happens in work that absorbs histories and repurposed energies.

JJH: That makes me think of the Susan Howe line, “Abstraction o abstraction, come warm my icy feet.”

SH: That’s lovely.

JJH: It’s like abstraction has got to reach out of itself into the world, perform something practical, it’s got to warm your icy feet too.

SH: Food, theater, music, and art make us aware and connect us. I curated an exhibition called *Walk Ways*, and it included a series of sequential photographs by Martin Kersels. Martin is like a 300 pound, 6’ 7” guy, and in these photos he’s repeatedly tripping on the streets of Los Angeles on purpose, falling down. When you look at them you think, What a horrible moment. Then you realize he’s so in control of his body that he can do this time after time and not get hurt.

JJH: I really like artists who use their bodies. Like Adam Putnam: he’s incredibly tall and skinny, and some of his work involves how unusual his body is. He’s done some beautiful performances where he is strapped into a harness and his length fills and describes an unlikely space. It’s like his body is the pencil. Same thing with Martin.

SH: Martin is also exploiting your expectation of what his body means, the notion of the oafish, clumsy guy. You look at men like Jackie Gleason, W. C. Fields, or John Goodman, who are unbelievably elegant and have an ability to upend your thoughts about what comes with bigness. Elements of your sculpture do that also. They play with how delicate a big object can be, how vulnerable and graceful. How lumpen and elegant. There’s a pathos to it that comes out of the daily stuff you use, like sweaters and old jeans. You understand the little points of contact between forms and really exploit those moments of possessing and holding, stabilizing and teetering.

JJH: Inevitability is what it sounds like again to me. Earlier you said acceptance, which is nice—engaging in the commerce of what is already there, the ideas that are already there, the meaning that is there, and then just magnifying and celebrating it. But *inevitable* has the possibility of being a little funnier.

ARTFORUM

SUMMER 2010

Jessica Jackson Hutchins

LAUREL GITLEN/DEREK ELLER GALLERY

When certain artists transition from emerging to emerged, the moment is palpable. This spring, it happened for Jessica Jackson Hutchins, with concurrent solo shows at Laurel Gitlen (formerly Small A Projects) and Derek Eller Gallery and her inclusion in the Whitney Biennial, where she was represented with *Couch for a Long Time*, 2009—a worn sofa from her childhood home, covered in Obama-related newspaper clippings and occupied by ceramics. The artist's raw early ceramic and papier-mâché works project an artless, punk sensibility, but she has described her recent output as framed by what seems like punk's opposite pole: domesticity and motherhood. Her battered furniture has a family history; her patches of shabby fabric are cut from outgrown garments. The lumpen ceramics that hunker on couches and chairs inescapably bring to mind dense, weighty humans. Claes Oldenburg's sagging sculptures, the shadow of antiquity in Huma Bhabha's figures, Nicole Cherubini's overwrought vessels, and, of course, the relationship between craft and feminism in Judy Chicago's work are relevant but insufficient comparisons. Those artists specified the referents for their ceramics and worn objects; Hutchins's latest sculptures, even at their most referential—as in *Couch for a Long Time*—confidently float free of clear signification to things outside personal subjectivity.



Jessica Jackson Hutchins, *Couple*, 2010, couch, ink, spray paint, charcoal dust, Hydrocal plaster, ceramic, 49 x 70 x 42", Derek Eller Gallery.

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The couch as artifact of the everyday is once again the theme in *Couple*, 2010, shown at Derek Eller; it sags deeply under the weight of a hulking Hydrocal plaster duo connected from the necks down, like Siamese twins. A V-shaped ceramic vase is perched between their heads, another nexus within the form, and one "figure" appears to extend an arm around the other. The pair are almost cloyingly sweet, despite the gaping hole in their backs. The threadbare sofa looks to have been distractedly spray-painted purple, mimicking the hue of the nearby monoprint *Whole Things*, 2010, which, like many of Hutchins's recent works on paper, is collaged with used objects, in this case a pair of boxer shorts and the Robert Stone paperback *Dog Soldiers*. Similar echoes reverberated softly throughout the Eller show: Set in a corner close to *Couple* was the much grimmer *Orange Bowl*, 2010, a pair of kneeling legs with a small ceramic resting atop the truncated waist—a disfigured wanderer blindly groping, maybe, for the resting place (or warm companionship) of *Couple*.

In the show at Laurel Gitlen, Hutchins's works performed precariousness: Cracks in ceramics were visible and the vessels barely balanced on unstable, irregular surfaces. In *Last Unicorn*, 2009, which Hutchins based on a drawing by her young daughter, two pots balance on the slopes of a spottily painted heap of plaster. *Leaning Figure*, 2010, is a Hydrocal blob slumping heavily against the wall and cradling two oddly shaped ceramics in the hollow of its "collarbone." The broken wooden chair of *Sweater Arms*, 2010, which bears a lumpy pot and a sweater with arms dangling limply to the ground, barely stands.

For all the nurturing, supporting, and prevention of breakage going on in Hutchins's work, there's a great deal of clumsiness and barrenness that hints at something deeply melancholy. *Kitchen Table Allegory*, 2010, at Derek Eller, is a wooden table with an absent central leaf and a large, pulpy ceramic bowl nestled into the void, its innards the grotesque red and purple of, well, innards. Chicago's *Dinner Party* and gaping wounds seem implied here, though Hutchins innocuously identifies the table as her family's gathering point and the surface where she made the monoprints on view. So although the artist speaks of reclamation and recycling, signs of instability, absence, and pervasive references to disfiguration push the work beyond exclusively personal terrain toward something existential and corporeal, evoking a lineage of brooding modernist sculpture including Dada masks that reference war injuries and Giacometti's strained, emaciated figures. Webs of personal reference can feel narcissistic—and existentialism anachronistic—but Hutchins's sculptures get to the heart of the folly and fragility of the social and physical body while maintaining a politics of the personal rooted not exclusively in familial reference but in the resistance of virtuosic craft and its relationship to thrift. Hers is complicated work, deserving of its emergence.

—Nick Stillman

Art in America

INTERNATIONAL REVIEW

JESSICA JACKSON HUTCHINS

6/4/10
LAUREL GITLEN AND DEREK ELLER
by John Motley



In her ceramic work, Jessica Jackson Hutchins eschews technically rigorous craft in favor of subtle imperfections that speak about human frailty. Just as the slightest disruptions in the kiln result in visible flaws in her vessels, our bodies are indelibly marked by the incidental, often dramatic misfires of daily life. Thus the Portland-based artist's bowls and urns exhibit a bodily vulnerability: they bulge, slouch and generally expose their failure to live up to a formal ideal. In a pair of concurrent exhibitions, Hutchins (who was also included in this year's Whitney Biennial) situated her ceramics in the familiar context of domestic furniture, some from her own home—a kitchen table, chairs, sofas—in an apparent response to Rauschenberg's dictum to act in the gap between art and life.

For a series of monoprints with collage (2009-10), distributed between the two exhibitions, Hutchins applied ink to the surface of her family's kitchen table and used it like a woodblock, letting its nicks and scratches tell the physical story of its daily use. Such scarring is especially important to the artist's idea of family: that the people we are closest to are seldom treated with a light touch. It's fascinating, then, that Hutchins embellishes these prints with a homemaker's flair, adhering a teacup, a paperback novel, scrawled drawings of silverware and collaged photographs of opulent bouquets. The unavoidable mark-making of life and the literal damage enacted on the table are mitigated by the prettifying ornamentation.

At Eller, the table itself asserted a motherly presence, in *Kitchen Table Allegory* (2010), a number of the prints hung on surrounding walls, orbited like children. Its role in "birthing" the monoprints was suggested by the table's leaves parted like labia to reveal a symbolic vagina at its center: a rustic bowl with a bright red interior. *Couple* (2010) presents a hulking plaster form atop a paint-smear sofa, whose cushions sag beneath the weight. The plaster sculpture is abstract and its surface strangely mummified, but it suggests a couple frozen in an embrace, balancing between their faces one of Hutchins's characteristically misshapen ceramic works with a mottled, dripping glaze. Messy and grotesque, *Couple* makes no concessions to conventional beauty yet exudes a paradoxical sweetness. In spite of the couple's seeming disfiguration and dysfunction, their faces are precisely calibrated to stabilize the vessel. This is art that embroils itself in the unwieldy psychology of life and family with a high degree of emotional candor and intellectual sophistication.

Photo: View of Jessica Jackson Hutchins's *Kitchen Table Allegory*, 2010, table: ink, ceramic, 39 1/2 by 79 by 42 inches; at Derek Eller



WHITNEY BIENNIAL

Todd Levin

Flash Art n.272 May – June 2010

THE VOICES OF SILENCE

Whitney Biennials (and -ennials of any type) are overrated vehicles if curatorially approached as a singularity attempting an overview of the state and direction of American art. The current state of American art is more akin to a foggy swamp, crisscrossed by numerous muddy paths that disappear into the mist, most leading nowhere. Nevertheless, collectors troll these paths at biennials, attempting to ferret out who will be anointed the 'hot shot' artist(s) in the exhibition, and then cornering gallerists at the vernissage to secure the glittering trophies. There is a lot that is ham-fisted, obvious and dreary about ranking artists, but it is an endemic aspect of these proceedings.



JESSICA JACKSON HUTCHINS, *Couch For a Long Time*, 2009. Couch, newspaper, ceramic, 193 x 74 x 90 cm. Collection of the artist; courtesy Small A Projects, New York and Derek Eller, New York. Photo: Dan Kvitka.

As to this exhibition specifically, it is a mildly interesting show. It posits modestly viable continuities in American art. As always, there are strange inclusions and exclusions. The exhibition is reasonably comfortable to navigate. It is marked by diversity and breadth of form. Most of the artworks are negligible. Perhaps the most cogent statement in the catalogue's deficient essay is its summation that "for many, it [art] is also an effort to make sense of their own existence..." Malraux stated this more succinctly in *The Voices of Silence*: "All art is revolt against man's fate..."

Suzan Frecon, at almost 70, is still a hotshot. Her paintings have a blunt bare quality to their shapes. The balanced masses and offset arrangement are classic forms of composition. The paint is applied with intense finesse. The result is both complex and simple, and the work is as orthodox as it is radical. These paintings show the extent of what can be done in painting, and have an immediacy and veracity much needed now. Paintings of this size are \$160,000.

The installation of R.H. Quayman corroborates that she is one of the most intriguing artists in their forties. The approaches used — of fantastic clarity both in format and color — achieve a maximum of boldness and impact, and reveal a spectacular compositional ability. Her references to both the building architecture and Edward Hopper strikes more sparks than I can kindle in a paltry paragraph. The vigor and intricacy of this installation are insanely great. Prices are \$5,000-\$18,000.



STEPHANIE SINCLAIR, *Self-Immolation in Afghanistan: A Cry for Help*, 2005. Digital print, dimensions variable. Collection of the artist. Courtesy VII, New York.
 JESSE ARON GREEN, *sitt from Arzatische Zimmerymnašk*, 2008. Hi-Definition video projection, color, sound, 80 mins. loop. Collection of the artist.

Ms. Frecon and Ms. Quayman have some distant things in common with Tauba Auerbach. In Ms. Auerbach's case, none of the relationships between the visual/perceptual sense or flatness/three dimensionality fail entirely, but they suggest more profound and compelling conclusions than are presented. These large and fashionable paintings are momentarily pleasant and subsequently bland. The involuted surfaces suggest crumpled cloth — not a depiction of cloth, but a diagram of it. This is a very lax idea of painting, and confirms the opinion that Ms. Auerbach's reputation may be exaggerated. Paintings are \$40,000-\$70,000.

In a serene way, the paintings of Maureen Gallace are dynamic, but their organization is decidedly subtle. The muted color, the shapes, and even the degree of care are rather like aspects in Morandi's work, but Ms. Gallace's own individuality remains exultant. The painting's nuance is amplified by the inclusion of qualities resistant to expression. This coolness of expression is one of Ms. Gallace's most beguiling qualities. Paintings are \$47,000.

Lesley Vance is perfectly represented by four small paintings. An obvious comparison to her work is the structure of 17th-century Spanish painting; there is a diagrammatic and emotional affinity, but certainly not one of philosophy. Confident technique and lambent atmosphere are the work's salient virtues. They are intuitive, refined, and canted by motion. The compositional parts are not rigid delineations of their space, but appear capable of expansion and contraction. Paintings are \$7,000-\$9,000.

The delicate drawing technique of Roland Flexner is derived from the Japanese *Suminagashi* art of floating ink on water or gelatin. Mr. Flexner uses the technique with extreme finesse. These drawings' reserve and compressed intimacy sharpen the delicacy of the technique. Mr. Flexner's works are diminutive spatially, but they're compelling visually. Single drawings are \$6,000.



PAË WHITE, *Untitled*, 2010. Installation view at the Whitney Biennial, New York, 2010. Photo: Sheldon C. Collins.

Charles Ray's opulent room of flowers is capable, certainly communicative in a general way, certainly easy, but not at all engrossing. One must ask if all fifteen works chosen and the amount of space dedicated to them were necessary. Four works would have said as much. Works on paper are \$100,000-\$200,000, which seems egregiously excessive.

Jessica Jackson Hutchins presents a single work existing somewhere between ordinary sculpture and something new without sculpture's structure and qualities. It is not a synthesis and thoroughly independent. There is little of what is tritely referred to as composition and it cannot be understood through a contemplation of the sculpture's individual elements. This attitude is recent and conspicuously lively and strong. The work is improbable as well as exceptional, and should present a general threat to much current dullness in sculpture. Sculptures are \$12,000-\$30,000.

In contrast to Ms. Hutchins' work, the sculpture of Thomas Houseago is massive and peculiar. Retaining the appearances of a passive classical gesture, Mr. Houseago nonetheless manages to turn sculpture into academic art. This sort of hyper-expressionistic composition is a chronic fault of much younger art. The work is vigorous and insubstantial, but good enough to make it conceivable that although Mr. Houseago might do something compelling and coherent one day, he hasn't done it to date. Sculptures are rather expensive, \$200,000-\$300,000.

The work of The Bruce High Quality Foundation is abecedarian in both conception and creation. Their vocabulary exceeds their knowledge of its meaning. They can't seem to decide if art or morals have been corrupted, and their allusion to the work of Beuys is tenuous and sophomoric. I suppose the work is meant to have verve and wit. It's vacuous. Prices are unquoted.

The photographs of Nina Berman and Stephanie Sinclair are familiar stylistically and well done. For both artists, the works' imagery and psychology are too obvious and simplistic to command attention beyond the initial shock of empathy. How interesting would these photographs be if the subject matter were not so brutal? One thinks of Arbus's ability to frame everyday people as emotionally moving and psychologically powerful without the need to resort to spectacular tragedy. Photographs by Ms. Berman are between \$1,500-\$3,000, and those by Ms. Sinclair were not priced at the time of this review.

Josephine Meckseper's video is definite in structure and movement. This video is both objective as a documentary, and yet the subject matter is ruthlessly subjective. It is simply and broadly scaled and consequently it has a peculiar potency. Videos are \$34,000.

In comparison to Ms. Meckseper, Kate Gilmore's video is fresh and vivacious, but not inquisitive. It is true that an ordinary action can have an indirectly mimetic effect, and that a series of ordinary acts can raise heck. In this case, Lucy Gunning's 1993 video *Climbing Around My Room* presented the same subject matter in a more sophisticated and engrossing way. Videos are \$10,000-\$13,000.

"2010" is a good facsimile of a good Whitney Biennial. Overall, the work is assured, diverse within limits, new in a way, and each piece has all the aspects of what we consider to be art. In the end there is a great deal of unexceptional work. Whether this is a reflection of curatorial timidity, or a general state of timidity in American art at the present moment, is debatable.

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS

Jessica Jackson Hutchins

LAUREL GITLEN (SMALL A PROJECTS)

261 Broome Street

February 21–March 28

There is much more than art at stake in Jessica Jackson Hutchins's work. Her mixed-media sculptures, prints, and works on paper, currently on view in the 2010 Whitney Biennial, as well as two solo exhibitions at Laurel Gitlen (Small A Projects) and Derek Eller Gallery, radiate an intoxicating experimental energy. Hutchins is interested in pure, bare life—in pain *and* ecstasy. Likewise, her sculptural protagonists are often sports heroes like Tiger Woods and Daryl Strawberry, and she tells their stories with a Sophoclean intensity manifested in a ferocious risk taking and a curious, visionary combination of organic matter and personal mementos.



Jessica Jackson Hutchins, *Disgraced Skater*, 2010, glazed ceramic, 17 3/4 × 16 3/4 × 2 1/2"

At the center of Hutchins's show at Gitlen is *Disgraced Skater* (all works 2010), wherein a humped red mass slumps over a gnarled, spindly appendage. The sculpture began as a drawing executed over a newspaper image (which is included in this exhibition in an untitled collage). Dark glazes stream across the surface of the sculpture, pulling the eye downward. Hutchins uses the velocity of materials—paint, plaster, and ceramic glaze—to swell emotionality. One sees the influence of Chinese landscape painting as she shifts the scale of nature to reflect human pathos.

Hutchins uses objects as catalysts for other works. The collages *Brown Print Blue Sky* and *Kitchen Table Constellation* began as prints created on the surface of an old wooden dining table that the artist sawed and carved into a printing plate. For nearly ten years, Hutchins has created social space within her work by incorporating usable ceramic cups and bowls. These detachable vessels wait calmly on mountainous forms, as in *Leaning Figure* and *Last Unicorn*. In Hutchins's work, the promise of succor is never forsaken for the fleeting enjoyment of a formal argument.

A related exhibition is on view at Derek Eller Gallery, 615 West Twenty-seventh Street, until March 27.

—Stephanie Snyder

THE NEW YORKER

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

MARCH 23, 2010

JESSICA JACKSON HUTCHINS

At the entrance to the gallery, a worn-in, skin-pink settee plays pedestal to an outsize pair of organic glazed forms—squatter eggs in a makeshift nest? mutinous cushions? Domesticity reaches baffling depths in Hutchins's sculptural koans—ceramic furniture hybrids that marry utility and frivolity with the lazy urgency of a friendly shotgun wedding. A striking piece in the current Whitney Biennial is mawkishly contextualized: Hutchins's abstruse-object-strewn, newsprint-slipcovered sofa shares a room with Nina Berman's devastating photo-essay about a wounded Marine's return home from Iraq. But in this two-gallery show (the second installment is at Gitlen, downtown) mystery trumps bathos. Through March 27. (Eller, 615 W. 27th St. 212-206-6411.)



Jessica Jackson Hutchins' *Couch for a Long Time* (2009) in the 2010 Whitney Biennial



Installation view of "Kitchen Table Allegory" at Derek Eller Gallery. Left to right: *Fairy Wing Over Men's Pants* (2010), *Bouquets* (2010) and *Indefinite Break (Tiger Woods)* (2010)



Jessica Jackson Hutchins' *Kitchen Table Allegory* (2010) [foreground] and *X-Flowers with Yellow Bowl* (2010)

MINOR MIRACLES by Ben Davis

The 2010 Whitney Biennial has produced at least one new star -- Jessica Jackson Hutchins (b. 1971), an artist based in Portland, Ore. Whether they loved it or hated it, Hutchins' *Couch for a Long Time* -- a couch, papered with newspaper clippings about Barack Obama, with two rather pathetic ceramic vessels standing in for human figures atop it -- was the one work that all the critics mentioned in their reviews of that exhibition. Perhaps this is because *Couch for a Long Time* nailed together the two strands that run throughout the 2010 Biennial: a sort of distracted leftist sentiment, on the one hand, and an inward-directed formalism, on the other. Hutchins' couch is also, in my opinion, a pleasantly weird work to look at.

New fans of the artist have been lucky enough to have two opportunities to sample her recent work in New York during the last month. At Chelsea's Derek Eller, the artist is presenting "Kitchen Table Allegory," her fourth solo show at the gallery, while on the Lower East Side, "Over Come Over" is at Laurel Gitlen/Small A Projects at Broome and Orchard streets. Both shows feature Hutchins' signature mixed-media sculptures and works on paper. Her sculptural work incorporates found furniture, often broken, unsightly, and painted in various slapdash ways, and these objects are frequently combined with ceramic or papier-mâché forms: big inert blobs -- "guttural upchucks," the artist has called them -- which vaguely evoke idling human figures.

For a recent series of works on paper, Hutchins used an actual tabletop to make giant woodblock prints. Derek Eller has on view the paint-smeared table, now transformed into a sculpture titled *Kitchen Table Allegory* and featuring in its center a large, irregular, empty ceramic bowl. Prints made with the tabletop, each in different colors, feature a pattern derived from the pits and grooves of the well-used table surface, and are also spray-painted with marks, and festooned with a variety of found objects. *X-Flower with Yellow Bowl*, for instance, features an X pattern of plastic flowers, sloppily glued to it -- emphasizing it as a picture plane -- as well as a small ceramic bowl fixed to the lower right, emphasizing its correspondence with the horizontal table surface.

Hutchins' under-produced, "unmonumental" work shares some of the "so wrong it's right" esthetic of Rachel Harrison's sculpture. But the junk-sale feel, the deliberately awkward combinations of objects, the half-buried but knowing anthropomorphic references, the "flat-bed picture" plane, the scraps of newspaper collage, the sly puns -- all these qualities suggest a more primal predecessor: Robert Rauschenberg. Rauschenberg is pretty much an Old Master by now, so the echo explains why Hutchins' exhibitions have an almost classical feeling to them, despite the general messiness. Her gawky art may fit right in line with what Hal Foster recently argued was the characteristic avant-garde spirit of '00s art, "precariousness" -- but it nevertheless feels quite settled.

Still, the comparison with Rauschenberg also helps isolate what is unique and novel about Hutchins' creative temperament. Rauschenberg's reference point was the public sphere, via media-culture, consumer junk and some macho wrestling with art history (with a healthy undercurrent



Jessica Jackson Hutchins
Black and White Print
 2010
 Derek Eller Gallery



Jessica Jackson Hutchins
Elbows
 2010
 Derek Eller Gallery



Installation view of "Over Come Over" at Laurel Gitlen/Small A Projects.
 Foreground: *Figure with Red Bowl* (2010),
 with *Untitled* (2010)



of gay sex thrown in there). Hutchins' subject matter, on the other hand, is defiantly domestic; if there is a theme of her work, it is domesticity. "My art deals with the experience of being me," she told *Modern Painters*. "Motherhood and being an artist are the experiences that have mattered to me more than anything."

This manifests itself everywhere, in subtle and not-so-subtle ways. Her media -- papier-mâché, ceramics, the scraps of clothing and fabric she embeds in her pieces -- have traditional craft associations, and thus refer to the home. In fact, her use of ceramics coincides with leaving New York City for Portland to start a family, while the found furniture is scavenged from her house (*Couch for a Long Time* was even "the couch from her childhood living room," she says). The leitmotif of the current shows is the kitchen table, and one of the table-prints at Derek Eller has affixed to it a pair of underpants and a paperback novel, making you think that the overall series, with its suggestions of different configurations of objects passing over the same surface, is about the disorderly routines of the household.

True, some Rauschenbergian play with pop culture makes an appearance. *Indefinite Break (Tiger Woods)* is a squat, cracked brown-and-white ceramic piece that resembles an abstracted torso. But aside from the title (and the fact that the vessel that forms the head is, you know, empty), it's a challenge to locate any real reference to the disgraced golfer in the work. It is more casual comment than commentary, a chatty, casual reference that evokes supermarket gossip magazines. A series of collage and ceramic works at Laurel Gitlen explore the abstracted shape of a *Disgraced Skater*, or so the title would have us know -- more tabloid chatter. Even the newspaper clippings in *Couch for a Long Time* seem to indicate political news as passively consumed. Indeed, that work is about as close to an exact visual metaphor for "armchair commentary" as you can get.

The theme of many of Hutchins' works would seem to be domestic bliss: *Wedding Section* (2010), a ceramic work of two fused figures, or *Couple* (2010), featuring two large, fused ceramic blobs atop a well-worn couch. One of the table-prints, *Bouquets*, has as ornament a photo of a beaming mother gripping a smiling, burbling, low-headed baby. At Laurel Gitlen, *Last Unicorn* -- a mountainous, waist-height white plaster piece, wrapped in floral-print fabric, crowned with a glazed ceramic vessel -- is said to be based on a drawing of a unicorn done by Hutchins' daughter. It's worth remembering that family has been her theme for a while: At her 2008 show at Derek Eller, Hutchins presented, alongside sculpture, *Sun Valley Road Trip*, an unedited 40-minute video focusing on her daughter working on her sticker book in the back of a car, while her husband (former Pavement front man Stephen Malkmus) drives.

But does any of this add up to something so concrete as a "theme"? In fact, the works are rather oblique. They don't exactly rush to meet you with their meaning, any more than they try to seduce you with their beauty. Hutchins would seem to be following two opposed impulses simultaneously. All of her work manifests a tremendous sense of "thing-ness"; if not exactly "abject" in the overused and theoretically imprecise way that the term is deployed in the art world, the sculptures confront you with a lot of raw, pathetic matter, globs of glue, broken chair caning, bulbous projections of plaster and clay. On the other hand, they are almost always anthropomorphizing -- cups standing in for hands, paired vessels suggesting relations between people and so on. Hutchins art waffles between the everydayness of stuff, and some kind of narrative, allegory, or whatever.

Illuminating in this regard is a small picture book that the artist recently put together with Portland State University poet Thomas Fisher, available at Laurel Gitlen/Small A Projects. It pairs pictures of Hutchins' recent sculptures with various bits of epigrammatic poetry from Fisher (next to an image of *Kitchen Table Allegory*: "predations' plunder gathers booties'

Jessica Jackson Hutchins
Leaning Figure
2010
Laurel Gitten/Small A Projects



Jessica Jackson Hutchins
Sweater Arms
2010
Laurel Gitten/Small A Projects



Jessica Jackson Hutchins
Frontal
2010
Derek Eller Gallery

bodies; in jaws maw even the past is gathered. . ."). Each of these pairings, in turn, is introduced with a quote from a fashionable thinker: Maurice Blanchot ("power links, un-power detaches"), Walter Benjamin ("For the thing possessed, representation is secondary"), and so on. (Anne Carson and Terry Southern are in there somewhere, too.)

Such nuggets, by now thoroughly colonized by the more imperious realms of academia, would seem unbearably unsuitable to Hutchins' kitchen-sink post-minimalism. The citations gain a great deal of poignancy, however, from the artist's introduction to the book, where she explains the collaboration with Fisher, and the significance of the texts for her: "The writers quoted in these next pages I digested second hand through Tom in the mid-'90s (oh the '90s!) and they instigated an esthetic/personal crisis that was seminal in the discovery of my work. The difficulty they assign to expression came to determine much of my daily life and chemical dependencies. It became impossible to move with any ethical certainty, and then just impossible to move." Such sentiments will be very familiar to anyone who has ever been caught in the no-way-out cul-de-sac of High Theory, where all positive communication, every experience of beauty or intimation of historical progress, is deemed to be a proto-totalitarian act of violence by default (oh the '90s, indeed!).

A sense of a healthy working through of this impasse forms the context for Hutchins' recent work. "There is real struggle in these texts to push through an almost claustrophobic impenetrability," she writes of Fisher's labyrinthine poems. "But to the struggle is owed the increased pleasure of the moments of clarity, the amplified beauty, humor and humanity. I have tried to embed the same values in my work, so that they might inspire the same effort and the same payoff." Hutchins, in other words, seems to have found a way to live with the theoretical difficulties of communication without either retreating from them, or becoming hung up on them. Specifically, she has found her own personal safe passage across the theoretical scorched earth of postmodernism -- or at least a table where she can work in peace -- via an embrace of the pleasures of an art that is firmly rooted in her private side.

Jessica Jackson Hutchins' art derives its pleasure from the fact that it seems at home in, but not tendentiously obsessed with, its impenetrability. It is only half-invested in wrestling its emotional matter into shape for public consumption. Her works refer to a certain buried world of quotidian, private family experience, but by their nature don't say much about it, leaving it to remain, precisely, private, below the radar. This is a minor pleasure and not a major one, and you could interpret it as a little self-involved, at least potentially. But, if it is taken in the right way, there is something idyllic about it -- her work radiates a feeling of achieved tranquility amid the messiness of life.

Jessica Jackson Hutchins, "Kitchen Table Allegory," Feb. 19-Mar. 27, 2010, at Derek Eller Gallery, 615 West 27th Street, New York, N.Y., and "Come On Over," Feb. 21-Mar. 28, 2010, at Laurel Gitten/Small A Projects, 261 Broome Street, New York, N.Y.

NEW YORK ART

Change We Can Believe In

The Whitney Biennial is thoughtful, humanly scaled, and blessedly low on hype.

By Jerry Saltz Published Feb 24, 2010

5 Comments | Add Yours



Jessica Jackson Hutchins, *Couch For a Long Time*, 2009. Couch, newspaper, ceramic, 76 x 29 x 35.5 in. (193 x 73.7 x 90.2 cm).
(Photo: Dan Kvitka; Collection of the artist; courtesy Small A Projects, New York, and Derek Eller Gallery, New York)

The cover of the 2010 Whitney Biennial catalogue displays a picture of Barack Obama as a Dapper Dan cowboy. Inside, guest curator Francesco Bonami and co-curator Gary Carrion-Murayari call the president “the coolest artist of all” and say their show is about “innovative forms,” “new relationships,” and “personal modernism.” After two biennials devoted to dealing with “failure” and “darkness,” this catalogue speaks of “renewal” and “optimism.” Yes, it’s the Obama Biennial: alternately moving and frustrating, challenging and disappointing—and a big improvement on what came before.

It is also historic: For the first time, there are more women included than men. How thrilling and important this is shouldn’t be overlooked or treated cynically, because this biennial isn’t about women’s art, feminism, or affirmative action. Nor is it about painting, although there’s more nonphotographic, handmade two-dimensional work here than I recall seeing for decades. Instead, it provides glimpses of American strangeness, of pluralistic grassroots experimentalism. It is rich in surprises and new names, doesn’t follow too many trends, and deals with the self and aesthetics in fresh ways.

It's also—praise God—small. The Biennial has finally been pared down to a manageable 55 artists. It is not visually assaultive; it gives all the art room to breathe, whereupon you realize how bombastic most such shows are. The 2010 Biennial is anti-blockbuster. It avoids razzmatazz, star power, and high production. It's more like a medium-size group show than a big museum smorgasbord. It isn't New York-centric, youth obsessed, or drawn mainly from a coterie of high-powered New York galleries. It is quiet. The art world has clamored for these things for years, and people should cheer this show.

They probably won't, though. By now it's clear that there is no such thing as a "good biennial," that the form itself is bound to generate a mixed bag. This time, the clunkers are the bland placeholders. Too much of the two-dimensional work either recaps ideas about craft and abstraction in generic ways or touches on issues of identity without saying anything. But the unexpected curatorial choices outnumber the banal. I love that, instead of encountering a huge installation in front of the giant fourth-floor window, we see Richard Aldrich's tiny abstract voodoo doll. Huma Bhabha's Giacometti-esque sculpture of decaying gods stands almost directly below Sharon Hayes's videos of someone trying to listen very hard: Does she hear them? Or that the self-reflective, formalistic films and photos of Babette Mangolte are given an entire room, and thus form one of the beating hearts of this show. This veteran artist's obsessive examinations of what it means to make and display art, her investigations into seemingly outmoded ideas of modernism and presentation, and the ways these things make visible the self are touchstones for much of the work in this show.

A lot of the art shows people acting out, dressing up, playing around, doing private dances, or making idols to otherness. It's like seeing the ghosts of seventies dance and performance move to new rhythms. The ways in which some of this art melds the public and private selves produces sparks. In one of the best pieces here, Jessica Jackson Hutchins collages newspaper clippings about President Obama onto a lumpy couch that is also a base for two marvelously gnarly ceramic vessels. All those images together with the cracked pottery evoke intense pressure—the pressure that we, he, art, and America are under. It's a homemade altar, and it's displayed among Nina Berman's photos of Ty Ziegel, an Illinois marine sergeant severely disfigured in a suicide attack in Iraq. Expectations, shattered dreams, hope, and loss rub up against one another.

Just off the elevator on the fourth floor comes another energy surge: Piotr Uklanski's spectacular gigantic semicircular fabric planet thing. You quickly grasp that this immense sculpture is a comment on feminism, craft, and science fiction, but its scale and skill tell you that it's also sincere and involved. He's making this out of love, not just intellect, and it's a tour de force. Similarly, in the next gallery Charles Ray's beautiful portraits of flowers send a message to artists everywhere: "We no longer have to only 'make it new.' That is killing us. We can simply make art and explore inner recesses, secret lives, unimagined realms, or any other dimension."

A lot of people will want more from this show than they'll get, but Bonami is on the right track. The 2010 Biennial wants to change what behemoth shows like this can be. After seeing Ari Marcopoulos's intense video in which two young kids make electronic music in their tiny Detroit bedroom, I left the museum with a giant burst of happiness for the infinite creativity of America.

Jessica Jackson Hutchins

1971 Born in Chicago, Illinois



Jessica Jackson Hutchins explores the relationships between people and objects and the ability they have to form and inform each other. She transforms care-worn, everyday items (such as household furnishings and discarded toys) with ceramics, newspaper, papier-mâché, and fabric, rendering quotidian objects into sculptural works that probe the space between the banal and the sublime. As she investigates how self-awareness can be heightened through encounters with the items that are part of our daily surroundings, Hutchins gravitates toward objects and experiences from her own life to serve as the underpinnings for her work. The artist's recent sculptures have originated from pieces of furniture that have been readily available in her home. She says that this furniture-based sculpture comes out of an awareness of women's bodies: "bodies as food, bodies as domestic furniture, as support." Her use of ceramics contributes to this awareness by simultaneously invoking associations with everyday items as well as historical artifacts.

In *Couch For a Long Time* (2009) Hutchins completely covers a couch, inherited from her childhood living room, with every newspaper article she has encountered about Barack Obama. The couch seats five ceramic pieces: three are abstract and two are vessels. The vessels—a recurring form in Hutchins's work—relate to the artist's interest in regeneration through their metaphoric association with the female body and the transformative influence they enact as they are placed in a specific relationship to the couch and to each other. Although the three other ceramic pieces are not

necessarily emblematic of masculinity, as a collective whole, the five objects become anthropomorphized, imbued with a sense of humanity. The haphazard grouping of these ceramic objects on the couch makes them appear casually at home—like surrogates for the human presence that previously enjoyed its comforts. As a relic from Hutchins's past, the couch carries traces of its former life in the voids created by the indentations in the seat cushions, while the references to Obama's presidency firmly ground the work in a specific moment. *Couch For a Long Time* fuses public and private moments, creating a sense that monumentality can pervade everyday life. HDM



Couch For a Long Time, 2009 /
Couch, newspaper, and
ceramic, 76 x 29 x 35 1/2 in.
(193 x 73,7 x 90,2 cm) /
Collection of the artist

INTRODUCING JESSICA JACKSON HUTCHINS

Using papier-mâché, clay, and glitter, this Portland-based artist makes visceral forms from everyday objects
By Camela Raymond / Portrait by Justine Kurland

In Jessica Jackson Hutchins's sculpture *Conversation/Conversion* (1999), two empty wine bottles, connected by a fragile arc of paper stars, rest atop a flimsy painted-wood end table. When she made it, Hutchins says, she was thinking of Brancusi's stacked pedestals—sculptures that, prodigiously, foreground the apparatus of display. "I want[ed] a recognition of the difficulty of presenting something," she explains. But besides the intentional precariousness of the setup, what's notable about *Conversation/Conversion* is the "something" it presents: a couple of discarded containers, arranged in a crude image of figures trading erotic



above *Conversation/Conversion*, 2008
Table: linen, papier-mâché, and ceramic 87%
w 56% h 53% in
opposite page Jessica Jackson Hutchins in her studio, Portland, Oregon, November 2008

sparks. This is sculpture devoid of Brancusi's ideal forms—insistent on the messy otherness of reality, and on the leap of faith required for understanding. "There are things we live among / And to know them is to know ourselves," Hutchins wrote in an email, quoting the Objectivist poet George Oppen.

Exposing the artifice of display, searching for authentic encounters with the "real": these enigmas have occupied Hutchins, 37, since she began her MFA at the School of

the Art Institute of Chicago, in 1997. Her artworks speak the self-conscious vernacular of punk rock: they are intentionally unskillful and emotionally raw, scrapped together from cheap cardboard, newspaper, and glitter. Hutchins calls them "guttural upchucks." But in their awkward materiality, they betray an awareness of the gaze that brings them into being—following not just Oppen, but also punk icon Richard Hell, whose onetime slogan "You make me" Hutchins borrowed for the title of her most recent show at Derek Eller Gallery in New York.

In the past decade, Hutchins has investigated all manner of ways in which people and things make, and unmake, each other. For instance, identity becomes a matter of fragile codependency in *Keith and Anita* (1998), a portrait of a rock 'n' roll celebrity couple as two cardboard six-pack beer cartons wrapped side-by-side in papier-mâché and glitter. Media spectacle focuses collective emotion in *Darryl's Tears* (2001), an installation of pinned-up newspaper clippings chronicling the public's sympathetic fascination with baseball player Darryl Strawberry and his bout with drug addiction (cut-out pictures of butterflies stud the pages like a crowd's encouraging cheers). About three years ago, Hutchins uprooted herself from New York, where she had lived for six years, moved to Portland, Oregon, started a family, and took up clay sculpture, turning the high-ceilinged garage a few yards from her house into a studio. With this more hands-on approach to the process of making, Hutchins's accustomed tone of fragility and tentativeness battled against more certain tendencies. She had begun making large, commanding sculptures in 2004 that connoted crashing waves and ponderous mountains. Her newer works were also contemplative objects, but they invoked even more overtly spiritual themes. Several were based on the pillar of St. Simeon Stylite, a first-century Arab Christian ascetic saint known for living on a platform atop a pillar. Hutchins's "stylites" are rough cylinders stacked precariously on lumpy bases, poignantly reaching for the sky. Other sculptures of the same year referenced ancient Chinese scholars' rocks, which Hutchins reinterpreted as simple glazed-ceramic cups perched on rugged, painted papier-mâché stands.

Lately though, the visceral facts of home and motherhood have come to the fore. Some recent curatorial efforts have positioned Hutchins's work within histories of feminism and craft, associations Hutchins doesn't shy away from, despite averring that she hasn't "intentionally addressed" feminist issues in her work—and despite what would seem more obvious links to the work of such figures as Claes Oldenbourg, Franz West, and Rachel Harrison, artists who've broadly (and sometimes hilariously) explored how visual forms regulate identity and desire. "My art deals with the experience of being me," Hutchins remarks. "Motherhood and being an artist are the experiences that have mattered to me more than anything." A video from 2004 consists of a diaristic tour of Hutchins's garden, and more recent furniture-based sculpture has sprung from an awareness of "women's bodies, bodies as food, bodies as domestic furniture, as support," Hutchins explains. The base of *Loveseat and Bowls* (2008), for instance, is a tattered floral-print sofa, which



opposite page Jessica Jackson Hutchins in her studio, Portland, Oregon, November 2008



supports a heap of paint-smudged plaster, on which five clumsy ceramic crocks nest, their surfaces glazed in acid yellows and rich browns. On one level, this sculpture seems to present itself as a record of its own failed process—a crude still life superimposed on a bloated figure—yet the clay vessels, with their glistening upturned mouths, breathe fresh life back into the system.

Last year, she made *Sun Valley Road Trip*, 40 minutes of video footage recorded inside her family's car. In it, scenic mountain ranges of Idaho and eastern Oregon light the car's windows while her daughter plays with stickers and her husband drives. "I was framing a family car trip as if it was a painting," Hutchins says. "It's about banality and everyday life—and wanting to find what's

meaningful, important, and beautiful about that."

Of course, this meditation on banality remains, as well, a home movie, an introverted gesture for an insecure moment in history. But Hutchins's most recent works point to a more optimistic moment. The paper stars and butterflies—upwellings of Eros—that once clung dubiously to her sculptures now take center stage in Hutchins's collages. Gray mounds of earthy paper pulp cuddle cut-out pictures of beaming flowers and sparkling diamonds, and the effect is scrappy and earnest—bursts of hope emerging from debris. ♦

JESSICA JACKSON HUTCHINS'S WORK IS ON VIEW IN "COOKING WITH GAS," THROUGH MARCH 16 AT MOMENTA ART, BROOKLYN, AND "DIRTY ON DE LIGHT: IMPULSES THAT REM CLAY," AT THE INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY ART, PHILADELPHIA, THROUGH JULY 12.

Jessica Jackson Hutchins

07.22.09



Left: Jessica Jackson Hutchins, *Velvet Hand*, 2009, chair, waxed velvet pants, 33 x 21 x 20". Right: Jessica Jackson Hutchins, *Denim Vase*, 2009, ceramic, denim, 9 x 7 x 5".

This summer, the Portland, Oregon- and New York-based sculptor Jessica Jackson Hutchins is participating in several group exhibitions, including *"Dirt on Delight: Impulses That Form Clay,"* which originated at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia and is at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis until November 29, and *"Bent,"* a three-person show at the Oregon College of Art and Craft on view until August 23. Here, Hutchins talks about her practice.

I'VE BEEN MAKING A LOT OF WORK FROM MY FURNITURE LATELY, just pulling it out of my house. Two sculptures in "Bent" are created from chairs that were in my kitchen. They were worn out, and their indentations readily invited the weight of ceramic. For *Velvet Hand*, I sewed some old velvet pants together to hold a pot that hovers over the indentation of the seat; it looks as if some barely sympathetic hand of God holds it there. In the other, a blue ceramic object nestles in the dip of the chair, which is decorated with a big sunflower. The sculpture resembles a landscape: the blue vase driving into an optimistic sunflower distance. I made it soon after Obama was elected and titled it *And it feels great*, which is a line from one of my husband's songs.

There are also two ceramic vessels that I've repaired or improved with fabric, including one with denim, which I love. These vessels might ultimately get incorporated into a large table sculpture I'm working on. I'm carving into a big, wooden table from my kitchen with power tools and making large woodcut prints from it. Some of these prints have collage elements, including one in Small A Projects' rogue summer show in Greenwich, New York.

I use common and simple objects because they can act as nouns. Strung together, they resonate like catchy song lyrics: chair, bowl, pants. They are also weird together, and loving, too. Sometimes the materials look old or crappy and that gives the sculptures a sense of urgency. They have a "by any means necessary" or punk sensibility. I don't think the sculptures would be very interesting if they didn't also possess disruptive qualities, if they weren't tough and insistent. I'm not attached to diapidation for its own sake. It's just the way things look when they are really part of the world. They're not slick and pristine.

With *Convivium*, the table piece included in "Dirt on Delight," I wanted to speak to the potential for ritual in daily life, to suggest the polyvalence of dinner-table conversations. I have made other table sculptures, but not one yet that wants to have the multiplicity that *Convivium* does. It is hacked into and sanded down, and color has been built up in the raw wood from the printing ink. It makes me think of the way life leaves marks and gives way to new urgencies.

I believe in osmosis between objects. With time, there is something happening at the molecular level, where the objects come together in some way and begin to form their own associations. So I will put an item on a chair and leave it, and I think it gets better overnight, even if nothing really changes.

—As told to Patricia Maloney

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frieze

Dirt on Delight

Institute of Contemporary Art

Sipping my tea, it has never occurred to me that beneath the cup's silky surface and pretty decoration lies hardened mud. Clay's potential for paradox and subtext is the crux of co-curators Ingrid Schaffner and Jenelle Porter's show, 'Dirt on Delight: Impulses That Form Clay', a gallop across contemporary ceramics with relevant historical figures lassoed in. Today's hipsters (such as Sterling Ruby) mingled with yesterday's hippies (Peter Voulkos) and kingpins of the European avant-garde (Lucio Fontana). All three, as it happens, share an affinity for gestural abstraction. That clay can feel at home in all kinds of environments explains its appeal to artists of many stripes.

Clay seems to be the last of the 'secondary' disciplines – coming after photography, crafts and, most recently, outsider art – to break into fine art circles. This broad cross-section of 22 artists spanning four generations is the first show I know of to survey clay's prevalence as a primary material within a thematic and historical framework. The only prerequisite here was that clay be central to the artists' core practices.

The levelling began with the installation. Most of the works were displayed on three white platforms the size of lap pools that put everyone on equal footing. Radiating like the prongs of a peace sign from the centre of the ICA's hangar-like main gallery, the immediate impression of the show was impressive. Ample floor space accommodated larger freestanding works and those with custom bases.

All of the works included seemed to be animated or in a state of flux. From Beverly Semmes' fluorescent red-orange, thigh-high 'Shinnecock Pots' (nos. 7, 9, 14, and 15, 2002) that are so thumb-printed they seem to shimmy, to Eugene Ion Bruenchenhein's open-work crowns and ewers (*Sensor Pot*, from c. 1950–80, and *untitled (ewer)*, c. 1960), wrought from leaf-shaped wafers attached end to end, the works

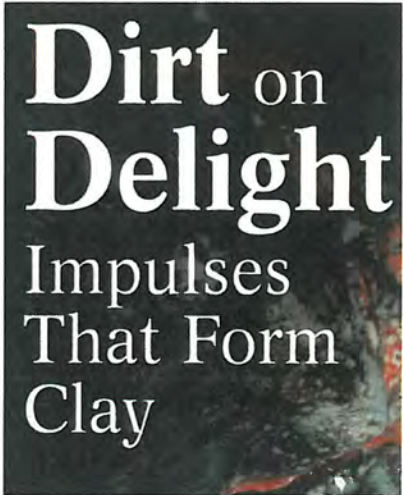
come into being one piece, or pinch, at a time. The generative impulse easily gets out of hand, as in Jessica Jackson Hutchins' fanciful installation, *Convivium* (2008), which comprises a kitchen table sprouting a Flintstone-esque monorail in floral papier mâché upon which clunky earthenware dishes are perched.

Like an assemblage-ist's sundae, Adrian Saxe's exoticia morph from their fecal or fungal bases into a fancy, high-fire, mid-section (such as a genie lamp in *Hi-Fibre Gyno-Monocle Magic Lamp* from 1997) with a quartz finial or, perhaps, a dangling dried botanical specimen on top. The piecemeal also appears where you would least expect it. In Ann Agee's tabletop display of rococo-style figurines, *Agee Manufacturing Co. (Winter Catalogue)* (2008), Pippi Longstocking look-alikes breastfeed five year olds and burn their bras. Look closely to discover cake decorator's squiggles and craft project cutouts holding the whole ruse together in shiny white porcelain.

From pot shards and amphoras to fine china and toilets, 'Dirt on Delight' explored how clay carries culture and history. Porcelain's royal ancestry is the target of Jane Irish's Sevres-inspired vases in marzipan greens and pinks, such as *Vase, Poverty* (2008), whose gilded cartouches feature not the traditional idylls but social realist-style paintings of cleaning ladies at work. Viola Frey's cast and painted accumulations of kitsch collectibles contributed to Pop-era debates about high and low, while her contemporaries Betty Woodman and Robert Arneson were insisting on ceramics as a medium for painting and sculpture. Ancient history is another natural reference point for artists in the show. One example is Jeffrey Mitchell's Asian-influenced ceramic compounds of Fu dogs, monkeys and other fauna in the midst of fruiting Bonsai trees. However, it is George Ohr's and Rudolf Staffel's modest cups and bowls that most simply embody the argument between baseness and beauty in play throughout the show. The former's early experiments denting and deforming his wheel-thrown tableware are well known, but few will be familiar with Staffel's otherworldly 'Light Gatherers' (c. 1967–96). In one, feathery strips and toothy bits of white porcelain coalesce – with what appears to be as little handling as possible – to form the flayed body of a small light-filled footed bowl. At once crude and confectionary, Staffel's works add the celestial body to clay's shape-shifting abilities.

Published on 16/06/09

By Melissa E. Feldman



Dirt on Delight

Impulses That Form Clay

Jessica Jackson Hutchins

Born 1971 Chicago, Illinois
Lives Portland, Oregon

Seeking graceful failure, Jessica Jackson's Hutchins sculptures push clay as far as imaginable. Hutchins began using clay a few years ago, a fitting addition to an inclusive material arsenal with which to explore themes of love, nature, family and mortality. She calls her approach to materials a quest for "daily available beauty," and, to that end, she uses what is readily at hand, the found as well as the distinctly handmade: drawings, collages, mixed-media assemblage, ceramic, video and papier-mâché, to name a few. With clay she does things ceramicists are not supposed to do: she improvises material, is intentionally sloppy and disregards kiln temperatures, clay properties and glaze techniques. Hutchins received an MFA in painting and drawing, and aside from a few classes, she has largely taught herself how to work with clay. Recent works eloquently marry the realities of motherhood with those of art-making. Large sculptures mixed found domestic items—chairs, tables and a child's rocking horse—with papier-mâché lumps and ceramic vessels.

Convivium is exemplary of Hutchins' unique eye and hand. *Convivium* is the Latin root of "convivial," a fitting description of a sculptural work that indeed conjures a merry feast. A plain dining table is draped with a white tablecloth edged in embroidered flowers. Atop this simple table setting sits an alien, terraced structure that evokes gesturing arms or branching tree limbs. Made from wire and papier-mâché, its surface is covered with hundreds of pictures of flowers clipped from mail order flower brochures. The decorative density of imagery suggests nature in abundant overdrive—a display of sublime delight. These flowered trails end in platforms on which sit ceramic vessels: shallow bowls, crude pitchers and funky cups. Each varies greatly in style, color, texture and material. A slumping white bowl was both thrown and hand-built; glazes were haphazardly applied, leaving bare spots; a found ceramic cup was partially plastered over with papier-mâché. The sculpture is an elaborate display mechanism for its own display. *Convivium's* intentional awkwardness coheres into an endearing and compelling portrait of a domestic landscape. (JP)



Jessica Jackson Hutchins. *Convivium*. 2008

The New York Times

FRIDAY, MAY 30, 2008

Art in Review

Jessica Jackson Hutchins

The Exponent of Earth
(You Make Me...)

Derek Eller
615 West 27th Street, Chelsea
Through June 21

Jessica Jackson Hutchins's third solo show in New York represents a big, exciting leap forward, even if it falls a little short. Up to this point Ms. Hutchins's preferred material has been glazed ceramic, in the form of smallish odd vessels on odder bases. Now her bases have expanded into double-tiered structures of found furniture (or in one case a rocking horse) augmented with eccentric growthlike forms of plaster and collage.

"Loveseat and Bowls" consists of a worn loveseat with flowered upholstery erupting with an immense bulge of plaster patched with similar fabric that conjures up Lucian Freud's heftiest female model. On top of it rest four simple, richly glazed vessels, a little like chalets on an alp.

While the various parts of these pieces can sometimes be quite engaging, their juxtapositions are often a bit, well, jarring. The exception is "Still Life: Chair, Bowl and Vase," in which a series of dark ceramic forms are settled into a wing chair like a terraced landscape but also like a strange figure. (Norman Bates's mother comes to mind.) The chair is papered with images of generic library cabinets and Oriental rugs that might complete the claustrophobic setting.

Other works of interest include several ceramic vessels on more routine ceramic pedestals and a robust paper-pulp collage titled "Diamonds and Poppies." A back-seat road-trip video centering on Ms. Hutchins's young daughter furthers the suggestion of a worldview profoundly changed by motherhood. Its revelations may not be completely digested yet, but this is a wonderful show, rich with promise and a determined sense of autonomy.

ROBERTA SMITH

Jessica Jackson Hutchins



In conversation with
Stephanie Snyder

Patience is the new ambition. Morality is the new transgression. Respect for the old is the new shock of the new.

Jessica Jackson Hutchins, an artist living in Portland, stands patiently at the head of these non-trends, making work in clay, papier-mâché and video, among other media, that's at once stylish and humble, simple and intense, of-the-moment and defiantly not.

Stephanie Snyder is the John and Anne Hauberg director and curator of the Douglas F. Cooley Memorial Art Gallery, Reed College, Portland, Oregon.

Following is a correspondence they had between May and July 2007.

Stephanie Snyder: Jessica, I'd like to begin our conversation somewhere between art history and philosophy, and ask you about the influence of Asian art and culture in your work. I'm particularly interested in how you have been affected by your study of the aesthetic and literary practices of the Chinese scholar ...

Jessica Jackson Hutchins: I've spent a lot of time looking at Chinese landscape paintings. I love how the paintings are at the same time the evidence of the painter's intimate and spiritual-meditative engagement with the landscape and invitations for the viewer to have their own wandering, and at the same time include all these references to the lineage of mark-making and calligraphy. That's how I understand certain works by, say, Chao Mung Fu (c. 1230). Chinese landscape paintings are so different than Western landscape paintings or photographs that consume or celebrate space and are heavily metaphorical and symbolic. Chinese landscape paintings are about activity. Looking at them is not a static experience; you're invited to have your own experience wandering through the space, separate from, but not unlike, that of the action of painter's brush and ink. A lot of those paintings are almost athletic looking. I've always intended my objects to be

invitations to the viewer to engage in some kind of contemplative or generative activity.

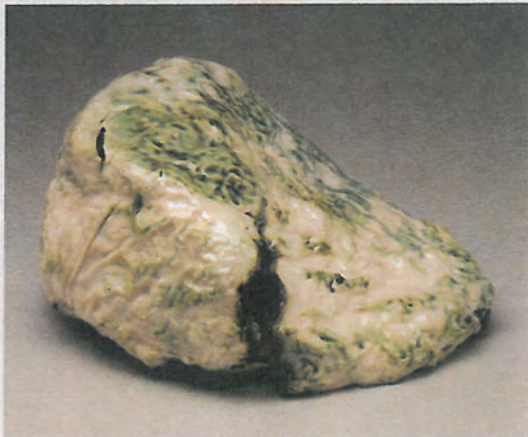
I'm also inspired by Chinese Scholar's Rocks, which inspire a similar active viewing, and if you get into them, they elicit a great abstract and really mysterious experience, with all these perspective shifts that are both physical and more conceptual. My favorite Scholar's Rocks are the most banal—but they really are extraordinary—simple rocks sitting on elaborate, beautiful pedestals often of exquisitely carved wood, which just dwarfs the little rock. So that the real gesture is the display. The process of framing a banal object and inviting the viewer to project, create, participate in the creation of its meaning is something I have been committed to since the very beginning of making art. But anyway—looking at these rocks you can imagine whole vistas and landscapes. You can transpose yourself onto the rock, and then experience the shift when the rock returns to being this small object: a humble object offering a sublime experience. Looking at Scholar's Rocks is one of my favorite art experiences.

I'm reading a book about a Chinese scholar and artist by Robert Harrist, my old professor (currently at Columbia University). The book is about a scroll called *Mountain Villa* by a scholar-artist named Li Gonglin, in which the representations of his garden and grounds become an autobiography. Harrist describes this occurrence in 11th-century painting when there was a shift from depictions of common literary, political, and religious themes to depictions of private experience. Some of my current concerns involve exploring my own private spaces (family, garden, home) and how these seemingly mundane observations inevitably but sometimes mysteriously tangent out to existential meditations or suggestions of the sublime. In the video piece I made—*A Plant Tour*—I conduct a pretty mundane narration of my garden and those in the neighborhood that somehow suggest real longing and conflict, and the significance of the smallest acts.

I am interested in this turning inward and the belief that it has real aesthetic and cultural-political significance. The Chinese scholars personified this stance of reentering the world in protest in such a



Relics from a Lonely Dinner Party, 2005; installation view at Derek Eller Gallery, New York. Image courtesy of the artist and Derek Eller Gallery, New York.



Hill, 2006; glazed ceramic, 6" x 10" x 12"



Family Dinner Table, 2006 (detail); papier-mâché, 39" x 39" x 39"

Jessica Jackson Hutchins



Studio Cup on Scholar's Rock, 2006; glazed ceramic and papier-mâché with ink and spray paint. 10.5" x 7" x 8"



Styfie Optimism, 2006; glazed ceramic and papier-mâché and spray paint. 10.5" x 5" x 3"

way that it involves a simultaneous commitment to it. I've read a lot about Chinese scholars, hermits, and anchorites. In 2002 I made a piece in Norwich, England, somewhat inspired by Julian of Norwich (1342–c.1416), a famous female anchorite/mystic. Anchorites were recluses; a ceremony was held in which they were married to Christ and then they locked themselves away for the rest of their lives. People accuse hermits and religious ascetics of being cop-outs, of rejecting a troubled world and dissolving into a private spiritual quest. But an anchorite like Julian committed herself to a belief and an activity of deeply compassionate engagement with the world, and that test of faith and commitment is reminiscent to me of the faith an artist has to have. For this piece in Norwich I framed a big empty room with found pictures of ivy, birds, and flowers, etc., stuck into plaster-coated scraps of wood wound around the room, door windows, floor, to create a marginalia for the room like those in medieval manuscripts. I wanted to frame the emptiness, and thereby the longing.

I think some artists remain in a fairly isolated practice, committed to some kind of search based on a faith that one's work will have some meaning, that it will do some good—or that there may be some point to it, a point that is impossible to take for granted or to find proof of. I mean—the episodes of doubt are similarly agonizing and unresolvable in some ways to both the anchorite and the artist. Not to mention the commitment to poverty!

Doubt, poverty, humility, renunciation, self-exploration, and devotion ... these aren't ideas and practices that you hear a lot about in relationship to contemporary art, Jessica. But let me ask you: can one be in a space of humility, renunciation, and love while being an artist in the contemporary art world? My hope is that one can, but I am extremely skeptical that market forces and power inequalities corrupt just about everything.

I want to hear your thoughts about this, particularly in relationship to the notion of tending, like the way you attend to your garden when you walk the viewer through it so poignantly in *A Plant Tour* ... attentiveness, attention, and the liberty of reverie seem like very political acts for you...

The world you occupy to make art is of your own creation. It is this space that provides the freedom to think and act at an angle to the prevailing power structures and the contemporary symbolic systems while remaining open to genuine possibilities of meaning. Otherwise, when artists approach their work with a regimented professionalism, they are really just in the business of perpetuat-

ing the sinister structures of power and oppression. The kind of engaged withdrawal that the anchorites practiced provides the potential for a radical alternative.

A Plant Tour is in some respects about tending, maintaining presence, as you say, or paying attention. And by doing so, becoming grounded in a place and in meaning. It is also about beauty and where it is found in everyday pleasures. What I'm really interested in is how totally personal, mundane observations or events can be just as easily meaningless or profound and sublime, and I like that line. I find it funny, absurd, and desperately tragic, moving, and absolutely true. So in *A Plant Tour*, almost nothing happens, it rambles on, and from a different perspective it is about fragility and loss and the heroic struggle to connect to the world and make something beautiful and meaningful.

The ceramics, and papier-mâché/ceramic pieces, the tabletop and dinnerlike pieces, are motivated by a similar set of interests—the bringing together of monumental scale into the common, domestic realm, and connecting familiar physical activities with the awareness of more existential considerations. I wanted to connect some really basic, common uses of objects with art, and say something about how we can know ourselves through the objects we live among. With the *Lonely Dinner* project I started to get into collapsing quotidian actions into ritual. That dinner really felt like a meaningful and transformative ritual, while simultaneously carrying on like any dinner party. This was the dinner when I served foods made from abject times in my life and served them on ceramics that I made specifically for the dishes. For instance, there was a platter for the ham we ate after my mother's funeral, and as we shared that food the guests spontaneously shared their dark stories and shameful experiences. And it was redemptive without being forced or authoritative. In the Reed (College) Case Works show, the ceramics really seemed like relics, almost like anthropological objects that had unknown uses.

Jessica, last year, while you were working on the sculptures that we've been discussing, you completed a body of work about the baseball player Darryl Strawberry. In fact, you began it some time ago, right? Is he someone who represents the fragility of humanity in the face of greatness? Why Strawberry alongside Chinese scholars?

Yes. Fragility, and the continuous cycles of failure and redemption, the ups and downs of his life, which have been to some extent



Pietà, 2006; etched glass, 14" x 11" x 7"

Jessica Jackson Hutchins

spectacular (at least his hitting was), but at the same time, his tragedies are not that unique to him—addiction and cancer.

I made my first piece with Darryl Strawberry material in 1998, in Chicago. It was a newspaper clipping that read *BACK HOME*, with a picture of him and an article about his recovery. The story was really moving to me, so I put a heart sticker on it and mounted it on some cardboard. Then in 1999–2000 he had another relapse, and recovery and relapse, there was a real onslaught of media attention on his problems. I was moved, not just by his troubles but by the public empathy expressed in the papers. It seemed rare—such sympathy for a celebrity addict. So I collected the stories and pictures from the paper, which became the basis for an installation I did at Debs & Co in New York. I covered a wall with them and with found images of butterflies—another image of transformation or hope, even sentimentality. In 2005, I shot Super 8 film of the same collection of clippings that became the video *Wounds of Compassion*, which I worked on at the same time that I was making *Pietà*, which in some way feels like a culmination of all the work about him. The work about Strawberry for me is largely about compassion and recognizing our humanity in one another. Darryl's ongoing story is a perfect allegory for these themes.

It's an interesting way to return to the notion of scale. Strawberry, with all his faults, larger than life, epic, but tragically reduced, continually by his own faults. Like Aristotle said, Comedy is what happens to the "low," whereas Tragedy can only really befall the "great." Newspaper and other "base" materials have a critical role in your work. Sometimes newspaper forms the base for porcelain slip, or more refined materials; it peeks out beneath gorgeous, soft colors. Other times, as in *Wounds of Compassion*, it represents its function as voice. You have also made objects from newspaper that seem to critique strategies of artistic display, like the "antique" female torso on a pedestal, constructed from newspaper. Here the words are both "material" and "information." I'd like to end by asking you about this ever-present and clearly important material to you ... where will it go next?

Yes, sometimes the words are just part of the material, but even still I like that the things are made out of semi-unreadable text and bits of current conversations and dates. It roots the making of the thing in time while referencing the timeless. I think there is a nice absurdity in representing forms symbolic of the eternal, the sublime (the mountains and waves), out of this disposable, transient material. The same with the self-portrait torso—there is a reference to ancient sculpture and concepts of beauty connected to the current language, events, and preoccupations.

The first papier-mâché objects that I made in 1996 came out of this real urgency—a personal-spiritual crisis—and they were about that. I made these body parts for people I knew and rock stars I was into who were suffering. Or who emblemized certain kinds of suffering. I made arms for the junkies, and a tongue for Syd Barrett to heal his inability to be understood, his alienation, a key for someone I knew in jail, etc. The newspaper papier-mâché contributed to the rawness of the things, the look of haste and imperfection—all of this I thought helped to suggest that the objects had a current usefulness, almost a ritual one, and countered any sense of mastery or static, enduring art object, which would have been a contradiction. I feel like it communicates profound, raw need and futility at the same time. It's also cheap, lightweight, and already in the room.

Newspaper is for conveying information: it has no enduring value except in this flow of exchange, which is something I wish to underscore about my objects. That they too are relational, completed in the interchange with other people. They don't have the self-contained solidity of steel or bronze objects, which are more likely to be content with themselves. It's an important part of the Darryl video that the story is told mostly through newspaper headlines and articles. There was this communal expression of compassion, drawn out there. I'm interested in the overly-simplistic, heightened emotionalism of these headlines for the same

reason I like the use of clichéd symbols (like hearts and butterflies)—to suggest something about distance, and the simultaneous truth of vivid pain and joy expressed in them, and the fleeting and trite nature of it all. I suppose again this absurdity of our attempts to close the distance, to really connect at all, and the urgency of the efforts.



Wounds of Compassion, 2006: installation view at Small A Projects, Portland, Oregon.



Self-Portrait as an Antiquity, 2006: papier-mâché and jewelry display rack, 60" x 10" x 13"

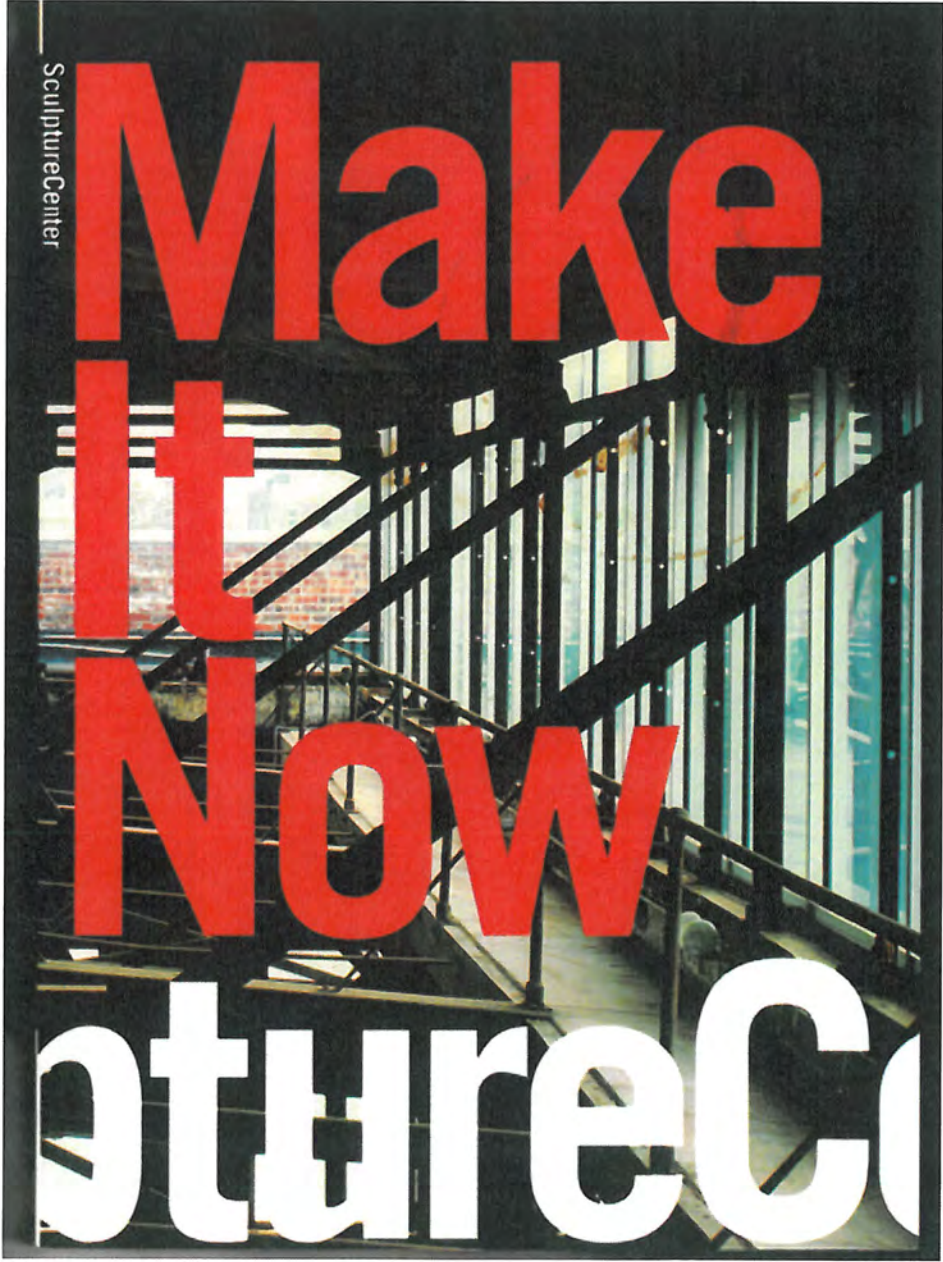
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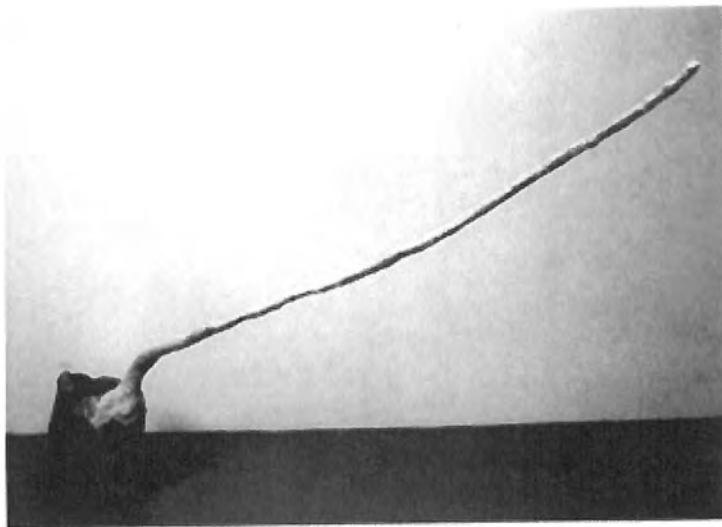


Jessica Jackson Hutchins b. 1971, Chicago, IL

The papier mâché and mixed-media works by Jessica Jackson Hutchins are elegant metaphors of natural forms. Her interest lies in emblems of landscapes, and the monumental shapes of mountains and waves appear throughout her work. Her sculptures hint at stories and characters, but the provisional materials keep her objects physically grounded and shun allusions to narrative. As the artist says, "mountains are eternal and bear the weight of too much metaphor," and when abstracted into fractured paper form, the epic becomes banal.

As if their metaphorical value were too heavy, Hutchins's sculptures seem on the verge of falling over. In *Untitled* (2004), a solid wave-like white form leans dramatically towards the viewer, its paper belly exposed. In her new work *Death Shroud For Us*, a long wooden stick props up a black shape, which drapes itself over its support and flows to the ground, suggesting an oversized cape or a paper waterfall. Time hovers over Hutchins's sculptures: both her materials and iconography carry the weight of the past. Despite that, she asserts her own faith in making those icons her own, and they become brittle, almost transparent. — AN

Jessica Jackson Hutchins earned an MFA at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1999. She has had a solo exhibition at Derek Eller Gallery, New York (2004), and a two person show at Midway Contemporary, Minneapolis (2003). She has been included in group exhibitions such as Surface Tension, Lombard-Fried Fine Art, New York (2004), Really Real, Gallery 312, Chicago (2003), East International Exhibition, Norwich Gallery, Norwich, UK (2002), and Winter Selections 2001, The Drawing Center, New York (2001).



top to bottom, left to right

Untitled, 2002. Plaster, paper mâché. 9' x 6" x 80"

Untitled (Dark Matter), 2002. Paper mâché, ink, plastic CD box. 44" x 17" x 16". Collection of Burt Aaron

Untitled, 2004. Paper mâché, spray paint. 80" x 62" x 32"

All images courtesy of the artist and Derek Eller Gallery, New York



VISUAL ART

Jessica Jackson Hutchins' *Stylite Optimism* is not an easy show to love. At a glance these ceramic sculptures look like a cracked cup here and a lumpy form there. But after spending time with this collection of recent works, I came away stimulated and even moved, mulling over not only questions of how we evaluate art and measure beauty, but thinking of how these same values extend into our "real" lives.

Hutchins' sculptures traffic in abjection—several have cracked in the kiln, exposing their unsightly wire skeletons. Others combine the matte hues of dried blood with fluorescent green spray paint and papier mâché. But they never wallow in the once-popular, self-deprecating, "I'm such a knowingly lousy artist that I can't even make a decent piece of artwork" attitude. Instead, Hutchins brings each object to completion as most artists would with a "satisfactory" piece, and in doing so, suggests that we reconsider how we might love objects that are less beautiful than their shinier competitors, and at what point we embrace or abandon imperfection.

"Earth Fragment" has the sloppy topography of a collapsed pie. But then one notices countless layers of attention and color that make up its surface, suggesting rust, burnt embers, and the faint green from an old lady's china set. Does the title and form suggest a small rock stumbled upon during a hike through Forest Park, or a monumental cliff rushing toward the ocean? Don't each of these share the same unpolished veneer as "Earth Fragment"? Why would we love that clumsy rock less than a river-smoothed boulder?

Hutchins' humor is more evident in pieces like "French Bread Pizza Coffin on a Fence." A small flat-black picket fence supports a Stouffer's pizza-shaped tomb with a resigned gravitas. But it's not all morbid death—even for a microwave snack—as a tiny cutout of yellow flowers are collaged to the fence below, hope springing eternal.

Every piece in *Stylite Optimism* worked for me on this level—once I opened up to their imperfections, they floored me with their honesty and intelligence. Hutchins' sculptures are fascinating objects of beauty, but only for those willing to embrace the cracks in their surface. CHAS BOWIE



Jessica Jackson Hutchins

Stylite Optimism

Reed College's Case Works (in the Hauser Library), 3203 SE

Woodstock, through Mar 31