21st Century Ceramics
Four artists make contemporary work in an ancient medium.

Gudmundur Thoroddsen

Icelandic history and legend seep into artist Gudmundur Thoroddsen's ceramics. Although he doesn't study the Icelandic past directly, the folklore and culture of his home country definitely colour his work. Another important influence for him is Icelandic landscapes. “Though I don’t work with it as subject matter, it definitely impacts my work. Rock formations, the rugged texture of lava and the muted, earthy colours all find their way into my sculptures.”

In his recent series, Thoroddsen satirizes manly aspiration, referring to the macho trait of constant and meaningless one-upmanship, in a series of roughly made trophies adorned with grinning faces. Masculine themes tend to dominate his work and Thoroddsen approaches them with what he considers a male hand. “I can imagine those pieces being done by a heavy-handed burly man, who somehow snuck into the ceramic workshop when no one was looking,” he notes, as though he’s trying to accumulate misdemeanours through his sculptural output, while aware of his own shortcomings.

Thoroddsen plays imaginatively with the traditions of ceramics. With deliberately crude handling he only follows the rules as far as necessary to ensure that the work doesn’t explode in the kiln. He feels that “contemporary art ceramics might be moving away from the skilled craft into the direction of a more open and experimental medium, where ideas can be represented freely as in any other medium.”

Gudmundur Thoroddsen, American Pie Trophy, 2014.
Gudmundur Thoroddsen, People for Longer Pat, 2014.
All courtesy of the artist and Amy Ginsberg Gallery.

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