

Kayne Griffin Corcoran

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Peter Shire at Kayne Griffin Corcoran



Peter Shire, *Drawings, Impossible Teapots, Furniture & Sculpture* (2018) (installation view).
Image courtesy of the artist and Kayne Griffin Corcoran, Los Angeles. Photo: Flying Studio.

The contemporary art object is defined as something that has no use value, even as challenges to this unspoken decree have come in the form of artists who exploit the tension between the functional and non-functional. Peter Shire's multifaceted output includes the functional (pottery and furniture), the non-functional (sculpture and drawings), and objects that fall somewhere outside either category. This latter group includes leftover clay scraps, glaze tests, failed vessels, painted tools, and other objects generated by the ceramic making process that nonetheless demonstrate an improvisational beauty.

The majority of the works in *Drawings, Impossible Teapots, Furniture & Sculpture* are small ceramic pieces in Shire's signature style: a kind of pop, colorfully glazed, architectural vessel. Displayed at identical angles on pedestals, the installation shows to great advantage the ways that seriality, a seemingly unremarkable attribute of the functional object, uncovers subtle formal qualities when seen in an art context. The *Saki Pot* series (2010-2011) shows how different shapes are created through changes to the placement of functional elements such as spouts or handles, while *Cairo, Giza* (2018) and the *Pecker* series (2014) demonstrate how color can radically change form, composition, and volume. In general, Shire uses glaze like paint, juxtaposing outrageously bright areas of color with splatters and textures that are uniquely achievable in the ceramics process.

Shire's collapse of the art object with its functional use is a reminder that most pre-modern art objects have their origin in ritual. From chalices used by European religious orders to African figural sculptures, these objects were used in rituals that connect the participant to a larger social and spiritual worldview: a function that is lost when they are brought into the museum. In a sense, Shire alludes to this loss by making art objects that are used in everyday life, challenging a system where art objects are to be viewed and contemplated but never touched. The works also beg the question of how art objects—even ones that are part of daily activities, such as eating, drinking, and sitting—can create rituals that are meaningful in contemporary life.

—Molly Larkey