

Kayne Griffin Corcoran

art
agenda

Peter Shire's "Drawings, Impossible Teapots, Furniture & Sculpture"



View of Peter Shire's "Drawings, Impossible Teapots, Furniture & Sculpture" at Kayne Griffin Corcoran, Los Angeles, 2018.

Los Angeles is an unruly city. Under shaggy palm trees and the bruised purple blooms of jacarandas, roads snarl in mile upon mile of naked asphalt and concrete lined with buildings from every conceivable shape and era. Mostly there are low-slung, postwar ranch houses and bungalows with yards swollen with succulents alongside patches of grass, strip malls with packed parking lots under a patchwork sign advertising dozens of shops, hawking everything from soul food and vegan tacos to Thai massages and pot dispensaries in three different languages—and all of it, caught at dusk, wearing the rich, smeary colors of smog-smothered sunset. Then again, tucked between the hills and highways, you're just as likely to find fruit orchards and high-rises, marble palaces and shantytowns. All over, things jut and stick out. The brash cacophony of visions and the tucked-away secret gardens make up a city that is both a mess and a dream, constantly resisting just about anything you can say about it and existing like Venice in Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* (1972), as every city and none. You might hate it, but LA has got style. And few artists capture its gleeful and garish, brash and beautiful resistance like Peter Shire.

Born in Echo Park, where he still keeps a studio seventy-odd years later, Shire first made his name as a member of the Memphis Group, plucked from the pages of *WET: The Magazine of Gourmet Bathing*—a beautifully strange, underground LA culture rag—to join the design collective in 1977. A ceramicist and designer as well as an artist, Shire still sells the iconic color-splattered mugs he first made in the 1970s. But his work ranges from lively chairs to bright installations, from urban design projects to works on paper, and from delightfully impractical tea pots to large public sculptures, almost always wrought with beaming, clashing colors, shapely bods, and incredible humor. Many such works are on view in this survey, his debut at Kayne Griffin Corcoran.



Views of Peter Shire's "Drawings, Impossible Teapots, Furniture & Sculpture" at Kayne Griffin Corcoran, Los Angeles, 2018.

I can't help but notice how quite literally shapely are all the chairs and pots, impossible and possible constructions. Rows of chairs come together with cylinders colored sunburst orange and banana yellow, looking like they'll almost roll away. Glossy spheres—candied red and orange, like beach balls and gumdrops—make up the rear legs of chairs with high backs like shark fins (*Giza* and *Cairo*, both 2018). The recombination of simple forms is a way to see the elemental shapes that underlie all things, but also a way to renew their potential. But not all the shapes are simple ones composed into complex new designs. Those impossible teapots lengthen into difficult pours. They are long, low, and stealthy in everything but their colors. Others are slender towers: fluted black-and-white columns stacked with single succulent peaches, with candy-flaked amoebas for handles and spouts like marbled, day-glo boomerangs. Shire's ceramics are both enduring and fragile, and these Zen contrasts come back with basic shapes and primary colors—the most elemental, perhaps, finding themselves in daringly acrobatic complexities, awaking in unlikely combinations more interested in play than symmetry.

Shire's hot chroma is a byproduct of, and an antidote to, modernity, finding its most playful rebellion in the irrepressible tangle of LA. The magic of Shire's work—and the magic of the city—attests that no matter the angles and planes, drab hues and bland shades imposed on life by industrialization and its aftermath, humans are still playful, funny, and stylish, refusing common shapes and finding ways to bend and shimmy: to express the loose and quirky joy that makes us human. Anyone who knows LA understands that for every cinder-block wall, there's a brilliant fuchsia bougainvillea, thorny and beautiful, softly wrapping those hard angles with its lush color.

—Andrew Berardini