

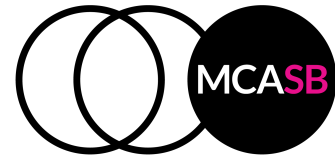
Bloom Projects: Brian Rochefort, *Absorption by the Sun*

Brian Rochefort's mesmerizing ceramic vessels, which mimic craters and volcanoes found in the far-flung locations that he has been drawn to over the past few years, can be both visually shocking and magnetic. We may perceive elements of our own embryology within the works: a subconscious recollection of the inner material and matter that our human organs are built around. Working with the most basic earthly elements - earth and water - Rochefort constructs vessels made of the same components that comprise our planet and even ourselves.

Inspired by extensive treks into fragile and threatened ecosystems of Central and South America, as well as East Africa, Rochefort's work is infused with impressions of what he encounters: aquatic life, tropical birds, insects, flowers, geological formations, and volcanoes, as well as the discovery of intimate realms of self. The combination of clay, glaze, slip, and glass creates surfaces which ooze as if erupting from a mysterious source. Each work is titled so as to reflect the external natural world, celebrating beauty most of us have not had the privilege to witness in person.

Creating haptic pieces that either repel or beg to be fondled, Rochefort pushes the boundaries of the tradition of working with clay, injecting his ceramic works with play, exploration, and a sense of freedom. These vessels are not made to be containers but are decorated voids imbued with a weight of that which is disappearing due to our daily actions.

Building upon years of experimentation, Rochefort pushes his materials to the brink. Carefully crafting glazes and testing them relentlessly until the desired expression emerges, Rochefort's studio practice is at once an exercise in timing, balance, patience, and control while simultaneously relying upon spontaneity, chance, uncertainty, and discovery. Each sculpture begins as a large unfired piece of clay that the artist smashes and manipulates, shaping it into a vessel that is then submerged in mud and clay - often mixed with other natural materials such as sand - after which it is left to dry. This initial drying process lays the groundwork for the base structure, which is built up using slip, glaze, airbrushing, and at times molten glass, over multiple firings in the kiln. Some pieces may endure up to five firings in the kiln before reaching their final form.



Rochefort continues a line of modern and contemporary ceramic practice that refuses to exist within the traditional confines of 'pottery' calling into question the sometimes volatile relationship between craft and fine art simply through the use of clay as a material. The work relates to a west-coast tradition of ceramic artists that flourished in the late 1950s, initiated by Peter Voulkos, who was trained in ceramic work by pioneering female ceramists including Marguerite Wildenhain and Frances Senska. As a professor at the Otis College of Art and Design (then called the Los Angeles County Art Institute) Voulkos impacted the experimentation of ceramics within the practices of artists including Billy Al Bengston, Ron Nagle, Ken Price, Paul Soldner, and others. Building upon the expanded field of ceramic sculpture, Rochefort's mark leaves a deep impression.

Each piece expresses visually arresting microcosms that are reflective of the artists' many external and internal journeys inviting the viewer to participate in a visceral journey themselves.

Text by Alexandra Terry, Associate Curator, MCASB