

Stilled Life: The Ceramics of Kelly O'Briant

With contemporary society awash in current unease and migration, artists are becoming increasingly reflective of displacement on individual and collective psychologies. Particularly urgent and timely has been the examination of a "sense of place," exploring an aggregate of geographical, cultural, and familial histories past and present, rooted and uprooted in our current times.

Kelly O'Briant has ranged far from her North Carolinian roots, exploring and expanding her craft, while meditating on issues of universal concern. Recently she has been in residence in Jingdezhen, China, the porcelain capital of the world, known for its centuries-old ceramic production and skilled craftsmen who facilitate working processes for international artists.

Migration, rootlessness, and the quest for home has become a compelling theme in contemporary art. The Museum of Modern Art exhibited Jacob Lawrence's *Migration Series* in 2015, followed a year later by *Insecurities: Tracing Displacement and Shelter*. In the summer of 2017, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art mounted the work of forty-two Latino and Latin-American artists in the exhibition *Home—So Different, So Appealing* of which Peter Schjeldahl wrote in *The New Yorker* (June 26, 2017), "...a primordial idea: home, where you hang your hat, if you have one, and where the heart is or, for some grim reason, fails to be."

During her residency at Jingdezhen, O'Briant completed the work *All the Good Things*, consisting of a meditative assemblage of 150 gold-lustered bowls containing porcelain seeds. Not unlike Ai Wei Wei's *Sunflower Seeds* project, which argued for human compassion during a period of uncertainty, *All the Good Things* embraces optimism in the face of impermanence. While the significance of gold is an important

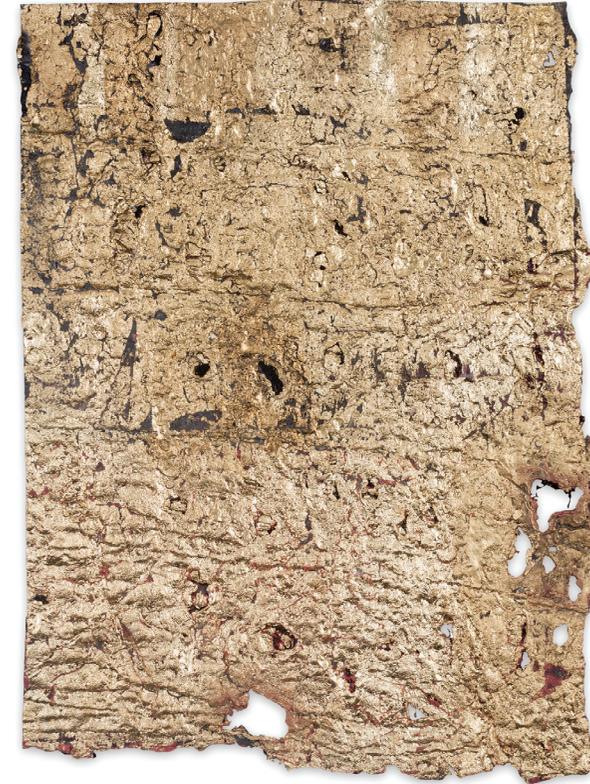
part of the Chinese culture, associated with abundance and high status, O'Briant explains that the seeds represent her migratory travel and work experiences marked by the generosity and gestures of gratitude of those encountered along the way.

The Things We Carry, also completed in China, is composed of twelve porcelain rooftop homes, embedded with household objects impressed on the exterior surface. O'Briant has remarked that, "reminiscent of the traditional still life, these installations capture a moment of intimacy between everyday objects and their users; illustrating patterns of communication habits, story-telling, and community." Such rumination was accelerated by her observations of China's historic neighborhoods undergoing demolition and rebuilding, resulting, sometimes in the blink of the eye, in individual displacement resulting in a society unhinged from its history.

Impenetrable without entrance, they act as a collective memory bank, traces of utensils and textile designs formed in the walls of an illusionary dwelling are a distillation of the artist's untethered nomadic journeys and her desire for secure anchorage. The use of repetitive forms, monochromatic glazing, and familiar objects place O'Briant's installations in both the concrete and metaphorical realms.

Balancing the qualms of recent moves, the artist finds reaffirmation of belonging with her passion for her chosen material and the closely-knit community of clay workers worldwide. Like all good art, deeply felt conviction is buoyed by well-honed craftsmanship, resulting in shared experience for fellow travelers.

Peter Held
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Conversation | What Remains

Rachel Meginnes + Kelly O'Briant | October 3 – November 19, 2017

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Rachel Meginnes: The Batting Series

Loss is one of the most profound and universal experiences we share. It can be devastating in its definitive nature. And yet, stripped bare by grief, we often find an unexpected beauty in sorrow. It can allow us to confront truths about others and ourselves that weren't previously possible to understand. Rachel Meginnes's new series is a meditation on the sweet and terrible beauty of loss.

Meginnes begins each work by meticulously deconstructing a "cutter quilt," or a quilt so ragged and worn that its only function is to be cut up and turned into something else. The batting provides a rich and authentic texture upon which the artist applies stains and pigments to create rhythmic fields of color, depth, and pattern. Her interest in preserving the history of the object, its rips, tears, holes, and tatters, speaks to the importance of the quilt as an artifact—a relic that reflects the marks of a previous maker and the passage of time.

The process of deconstructing and reconstructing each quilt becomes a metaphor for dealing with loss. With each work the artist is forced to confront a ubiquitous set of questions: What do I hold onto? What do I cover up? And, do I trust myself not to mess it up? Grief, figuring out how to move on, navigating the weight of history without becoming frozen by fear—these are just some of the questions bound up in the structure of Meginnes's new series.

The final wall hanging is no longer a quilt, an object with distinct layers. Instead the color, surface, and pattern of the cover merge with the batting into a new object, one that is surface and structure, image and form at the same time. Through this transformational artistic process, Meginnes confronts the feelings of loss, grief, and fear, turning old and worn out quilts into artworks of great contemplation, beauty, and grandeur.

Marilyn Zapf
Assistant Director and Curator
The Center for Craft, Creativity & Design



Left: Rachel Meginnes: *Assemblage*, 2017, Deconstructed quilt, cotton batting, hand stitching, image transfer, India ink, acrylic, 31 x 50 inches

Right: Kelly O'Brian: *Collections, Deposits, Reconstructions, I & II*, 2017, porcelain, resin

Front: left: Rachel Meginnes: *Mantle (Fragment)*, 2017, deconstructed quilt, cotton batting, acrylic, India ink, metal leaf, 11 x 9 inches; right: Kelly O'Brian: *All the Good Things*, 2017, porcelain, gold