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Alexandra Rowley
DINA MITRANI GALLERY
2620 NW 2nd Avenue, Miami, FL 33127
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An Artist's Work Is Never Done by Eduardo Alexander Rabel

Alexandra Rowley's current show at Dina Mitrani Gallery brings together photography, ceramics and sound to create an appealing, personal meditation on the many small acts of transformation that make up our daily lives.

The first two images that greet the viewer are a striking pair of larger-than-life photographic prints, each depicting a colorful, ornate plate enlarged against a solid black background. These decorative plates are shiny and attractive, but what is most interesting about them is that several large pieces have broken off from each one. The pieces have been arranged next to each plate in the careful manner of an archeological re-construction. No clues are provided as to what caused the breakage—whether accidents or acts of violence. Only the large scale of the photographs suggests that whatever did occur was important somehow. In addition the exhibition checklist informs us that the plates belong(ed) to specific family members, hinting at a special personal significance but offering no further details. I found this non-story to be a bit intriguing at first, yet ultimately there was just not enough to sink my teeth into.

Fortunately, the main body of work on view offers more to feast on, both visually and conceptually. After having presented us with two images that were immediately recognizable, the artist switches gears with a series of absorbing works that at first glance might appear to be abstract paintings. Upon closer inspection it becomes apparent that these works are greatly enlarged photographs, richly detailed close-ups of various metallic surfaces that have different types of substances on them. But an air of mystery remains. What exactly *are* these fragments of reality? That puzzle is integral to the works' charm, and I won't spoil it for you. Thankfully, the specifics are available on the exhibition checklist. Suffice it to say that all the images in the series depict residues of certain routine domestic activities that we usually take for granted. Instead of showing the intended results, Rowley focuses her lens on the unplanned, inconsequential by-products. She captures the instances of unintentional beauty that have been left behind, and by blowing up these images to nearly monumental proportions, she reminds us of





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the importance of process over product—that what truly matters in life may not be the goal but the journey.

To me these enlarged matte photographs are the strongest works in the exhibition, particularly the four that have more subtle color schemes. I found myself hungry to see more such work. Yet instead, interspersed among the larger pieces are several smaller, related projects that are less compelling. There are four photographs of bright-red stains on white paper—blood, unsurprisingly. Obviously images of bloodstains are generally used to represent violence (although blood can also be seen as the essence of life) but despite such potential symbolic overtones, these antiseptic images lack both the compositional strength and the transformational punch of the others. There is also a series of twelve snapshot-size photos that appear to depict drips, splashes and other random residues of work and life activities. These images are more interesting than the bloodstains, but, as tiny and glossy as they are, they too lack the power and splendor of the large, intricately-textured pieces.



Alexandra Rowley, *Broken plate blue*, 50 x 40 inches, Archival pigment print; Courtesy of the artist and DINA MITRANI GALLERY.

In the center of the gallery is something completely different—a table with forty-nine modest ceramic vessels. None of them are particularly impressive as individual objects, but as a collective installation they do have a convincing presence. Their round shapes and uneven, semi-translucent glazes—all various shades of white, beige, and light grey—reflect a sort of Zen simplicity, in contrast to the chaotic compositions and colors in the more ephemeral, process-oriented photographs.

Lastly, don't overlook the unassuming installation that sits in one corner of the gallery. On the wall are two rather mundane photographs of the hair on the top of someone's head—the artist's young son, we are told. But it's the sound art in front of the images that is worth paying attention to. Put on the headphones and you hear two things simultaneously: a child (Rowley's son) laughs loudly and playfully, while in the background President Obama gives a press conference in his usual measured tone. Surprisingly, I found the boy's laugh to be more riveting than the President's words, which I had to strain to hear at first. Yet it was worth it to attempt to listen to both at the same time, especially as it became clear that the press conference had been held not long after the devastating impact of superstorm Sandy had altered the national conversation on climate change. It is a simple pairing: our top political leader talking about the long-term problem of protecting our planet's environment, juxtaposed against the innocence of a small child, representing the future of the planet. Yet it is elegant and effective, reminding us not only how important it is to care for the earth, but also how vital it is to treasure a child's ability to laugh and enjoy life. What an apt coda to a stimulating exhibition that invites us to notice the incidental transcendence in the everyday.

—Eduardo Alexander Rabel

[Image on top: **Alexandra Rowley**, *Untitled (Foil after roasting beets 65)*, 2010, Pigment print on archival cotton rag paper Edition of 3, 80 x 60 inches; Courtesy of the artist and DINA MITRANI GALLERY.]

Posted by **Eduardo Alexander Rabel** on 3/19 | tags: [ceramics](#) [sound installation](#) [photography](#)

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