



Review

Rise and Fall: New Works by Randy Colosky

By Zachary Royer Scholz
November 6, 2014

On View

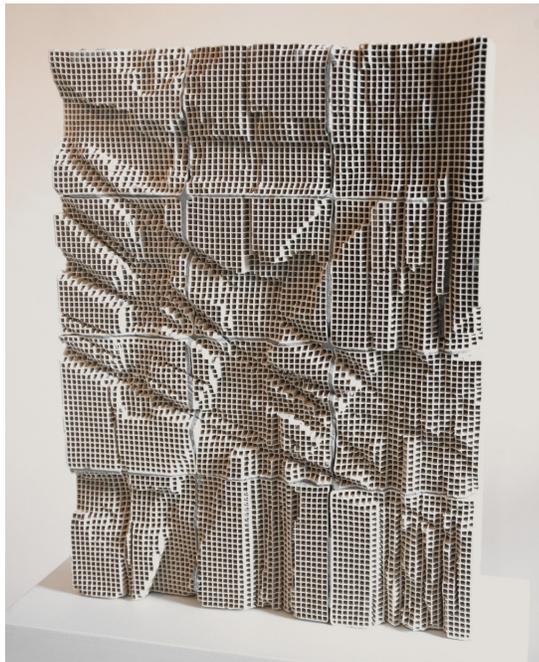
Chandra Cerrito Contemporary

October 3 - November 22, 2014

Solo Show

Rise and Fall: New Works by Randy Colosky, on view at Chandra Cerrito Contemporary in Oakland, is a diverse show composed of a range of works that succeed to various degrees. While the show's organization and boundaries are not clear, its best works are remarkable. And to be fair, the less successful pieces suffer as much from their side-by-side comparison with the show's successes as from their own inherent flaws.

The strongest pieces in the show are made of engineered ceramic blocks that have been cemented together and carved. The most powerful of these are the three works *Slab #2*, *Slab #3*, and *Slab #4*. In each, twelve engineered ceramic blocks have been stacked in four rows of three to form tallish rectangles. These engineered blocks are sections of extruded ceramic grid made for high-heat industrial applications like furnaces and engines. The blocks appear solid on four sides, but are mostly empty and largely transparent when viewed from either of their opposing latticed faces.



Randy Colosky. *Slab #4*, 2014; engineered ceramic block, cement; 18 x 24 x 4 in. Courtesy of the Artist and Chandra Cerrito Contemporary, Oakland.

Colosky has stacked these blocks with these gridded sides outward, creating a partially transparent slab in which the grids within the blocks echo the stacked construction of the overall piece. After cementing the blocks together, Colosky slashed and eroded the “front” and “rear” gridded surfaces, scarring them with clusters of crisscrossing canyons and furrows. The resulting stela-like works employ materials and methods that Colosky began using in 2010, but this way of working directly combines aspects of even earlier cut brick and metal pipe pieces.

Walking around each of the three pieces—which exhibited together in a row almost function as a triptych—light, density, and opacity shift in unexpected and poetic ways. From oblique angles, the profiles of the excavated tracks ripple, one after another, like hilly horizons. From softer angles, the striated voids fill with subtle volumes of shadow. And, standing square to the etched front or rear face of any of the three works, the eroded topography flattens and each piece becomes a shifting screen penetrated by flickering halos of light. The combined effect, accumulated over time as one circles the work, is hypnotic, meditatively quiet, and deeply felt.



Randy Colosky, l to r: *Light Green Pool*, *Amber Pool*, *Green Pool*, *Pink Pool*, 2014; installation view, *Rise and Fall*, 2014; cast lead crystal; l to r: 6.62 diameter x 2 in., 5.75 diameter x 2.5 in., 7 diameter x 2 in., 5 diameter x 2 in. Courtesy of the Artist and Chandra Cerrito Contemporary, Oakland.

The fourth work in the show that is built from engineered ceramic blocks, *Rise and Fall*, operates differently from the *Slab* series. Here, Colosky chose to construct a tall vertical stack of blocks whose gridded faces are cemented together rather than oriented outward. This seemingly minor shift negates the curious transparency that is so critical to the success of the three *Slab* works. Colosky's subsequent cutting and sculpting of the resulting column reveals some of the honeycombed cavities within, but the looming, hewn form remains comparatively leaden, despite looking a bit like an Alberto Giacometti figure.

The other works included in this survey of Colosky's recent output use ceramic block, lead crystal, and photography to various effect. A series of five small works in engineered ceramic, titled simply *Waves*, highlights the digital nature of the material, but the delicately carved forms end up looking like miniature 3D printouts of wire-form models. In another series of works, Colosky cast small, tapered round forms in green, pink, and amber lead crystal. The evocative, squat monoliths, which Colosky calls "pools," are reminiscent of Maya Lin's "table" monuments installed at Yale, Stanford, and the Southern Poverty Law Center, but seem more like maquettes than fully realized pieces. In the three works titled *Red Vug*, *Blue Vug*, and *Green Vug*, Colosky has combined materials, excavating cavities into engineered ceramic blocks and then coating the voids with different-colored lead crystals. Unfortunately, the glittering crystals send the pieces in a kitschy sci-fi/fantasy direction that fights against Colosky's otherwise elegant sensibilities.



Randy Colosky, *Rise and Fall*, 2014; engineered ceramic block; 60 x 12 x 6 in. Courtesy of the Artist and Chandra Cerrito Contemporary, Oakland.

The last three works in the exhibition are installed in the space beyond the main front room, and oddly seem more part of the selection of inventory displayed in the back gallery space than part of the main exhibition. Colosky's small sculpture *Remnant* (2014) is cast-lead crystal, but otherwise has little connection to the rest of the show.¹ The final two works, titled *Natural Selection No. 1* and *Natural Selection No. 2*, are both digital prints in which found snapshots of rainbows have been cleverly linked together so the rainbows form a continuous, snaking line. The pieces themselves are fine, but are unrelated to the other works and too similar to the lighting drawing series that Cassandra C. Jones produced between 2009 and 2011 and exhibited in the Bay Area in 2009 and 2012.²

I'm sure that Colosky wasn't aware of Jones' similar lightning work. Artistic synchronicity happens all the time.³ However, these incongruous "rainbow" pieces embody the show's biggest issue. Complex shows of a single artist's diverse output can be fantastic when each facet works to elevate and deepen every other, but creating such

an exhibition is an art unto itself. There is something interesting about getting to see the range of ways that Colosky is shaping and combining engineered ceramic block and leaded glass, and in being reminded by his rainbow pieces and older inventory that he is an artist with a complex practice. However, the uncoordinated diversity of the work on display dissipates the impact achieved by the best works and hamstring what could have been, done just a bit differently, an amazing show.

Rise and Fall: new works by Randy Colosky is on view at **Chandra Cerrito Contemporary**, in Oakland, through November 22, 2014.