



## Julia Haft-Candell & Suzan Frecon at Parrasch Heijnen

April 6–May 25, 2019

At Parrasch Heijnen, Suzan Frecon's studious works on paper and Julia Haft-Candell's meaty ceramic sculptures share an affinity for amorphous forms—each embrace a canny marriage of sloping geometries and bleeding edges. An accounting of these intricacies necessitates acute, attentive viewing, revealing both a material and philosophical sensibility that champions slow, conscientious making.

Framed as a conversation between two discrete bodies of work (one by each artist), the exhibition begins with an intimate grouping of six small-scale works by Frecon, and consequently opens into a more cavernous room of sculptures by Haft-Candell, most of which roost on staggered white plinths of varying heights. Both artists occupy their respective spaces with a composed yet commanding physicality. Haft-Candell's ceramic sculptures (all works 2019) sit like scattered islands, each with an unexpected gravitational pull. Like land masses, they appear to be in constant tectonic flux, shape-shifting at each vantage point. *Forest Green Shift* morphs from earthen vessel to torso; its surface dripping with a muddy green and eggshell glaze and bearing the markings of fingers dragging through wet earth—both a visual metaphor and a precise summation of the work's own making.

Likewise, from one angle, *Folded Slab: Rose, Slate* enacts its title: the clay slab folds in on itself like a piece of paper, splintering—seemingly in situ, as if it could instantly crack and crumple—under the pressure of its own mass. This rupture finds echoes in Frecon's work, a collection of watercolors that similarly embrace mutable organic states. The paper in *composition in 4-5 colors with lapis and malachite* (2015) puckers and buckles under pools of ochre, lapis, and moss paint, echoing the weighty materiality of Haft-Candell's sculptures while also mirroring their painterly glazes.

Discordantly, a small half-wall bisects the two artist's spaces, partially segregating them from view of one another, and subsequently dampening the viewer's opportunity to be fully enmeshed in the works' nuanced connections. Akin to a lapse of direct eye contact during

intimate conversation, this curatorial partitioning effectively privileges monologue over dialogue.

While Frecon and Haft-Candell's pairing alludes to the ways in which both paper and clay function as malleable receptacles for the weight of the artist's hand, the connective tissue tethering the works' already quiet subtleties threatens to disperse in separation. As their sculptures and drawings undoubtedly reciprocate sympathetic gestures from across rooms, it begs the question of how a more interwoven installation could have fleshed out these complexities and coaxed them to bear fruit.

One entry point into this mysteriously dangling dialogue rests with the notion of the vessel—that sacrosanct paradigm inherent to the history of ceramics, but more or less absent from even the most esoteric discourse surrounding drawing. In Martin Heidegger's classic 1971 essay "The Thing," he asserts a purely philosophical definition of the vessel: "the vessel's thingness does not lie at all in the material of which it consists, but in the void that [it] holds." While neither Frecon nor Haft-Candell present vessels in the traditional sense, they maintain Heidegger's inference with regard to their holding of the void, or space abstracted.

In speaking of her work, Frecon has stated that it seeks the "highest possible plane of abstraction," interpreted here as an oblique compositional state wherein all external reference points are obliterated. This is particularly clear in *orange b, i* (2012–2013): an oblong, marigold wing of color overwhelms the edges of the paper, which can barely contain the contours of its shape, as if color were a pigmented void capable of slowly eating away at that which surrounds it. The warped, skin-like materiality of the paper nonetheless remains apparent, suggesting that the paper substrate is as pertinent as the abstraction that it contains.

Haft-Candell similarly cradles voided space as if it were concrete, alterable matter. In *Interlocking Arch*, the most monumental sculpture in the exhibition, a set of ashen, ceramic hands, connected by a limb-like appendage, sprout up from the ground to meet and interlace with an identical pair of hands, fused together by a second serpentine limb that cranes down from above. The sculpture forms a veritable ouroboros—the ancient Grecian metaphor of infinite wholeness characterized by a serpent consuming its own bodily appendage—and as such reads more as a portal than an archway. The work's tension derives from the fact that the void at its center both buttresses it and appears poised to destabilize it, as if the limbs could tumble and unfurl if the interlocking hands lost their grip around its brute force.

As both Frecon and Haft-Candell embrace the manipulative compositional power of material absence, they activate the negative space within and around their works as an elemental force, revealing the complexities of their relationship to abstraction. In the end though, this negative space extends to the physical space between rooms, where the distance ultimately becomes too great to sustain the subtle intricacies of this conversation.

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