Misty Gamble plays with excess, opulence and Chihuahuas in her thought-provoking show.

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Wildly opulent, excessive and lavish only begin to describe Misty Gamble's ceramic work in her exhibit "Abject Reverie" at Sherry Leedy Contemporary Art.

Gamble, who teaches at the Kansas City Art Institute, studies ideas about ornamentation, fetish and ideals of feminine beauty and borrows from rococo art's fantasy, wit and color palette. Think of Jean-Antoine Watteau's frothy paintings and Marie Antoinette's elaborate coiffures and dress.

Ornamentation visually communicates culture, identity, sexuality, gender or questions of gender, and social status. Gamble's oversized busts and torsos of women — the torsos look like dressmaker forms — are festooned with cupcakes, gift boxes, gigantic wigs of clay, ornate patterns and, quirkily, Chihuahuas. Gamble smartly repeats objects and forms, which strengthens the installation.

Typically, abject describes something that disrupts a social order: hair on your head is disgusting, crossing a boundary into abject. For Gamble, the disturbingly decorated female form perhaps takes the feminine out of the ordinary and into the grotesque of overly and overtly constructed beauty, for Gamble's works are indeed beautiful, but they cross over to rococo artificiality.

"Covetous" is one of two ceramic dressmaker forms with a steel wire "skirt" filled, in this instance, with tumbling Chihuahuas. Gamble's female forms both attract and repel. Their gigantic coiffures are strangely enticing and yet provide helmet-like protection, suggesting beauty and artificiality may serve multiple objectives.

Constructing beauty not only triggers attention but may be a defensive posture, and Gamble's female forms both attract and repel. Their gigantic coiffures are strangely enticing and yet provide helmet-like protection, suggesting beauty and artificiality may serve multiple objectives.

The gallery also presents "Taking Aim," a three-person exhibition that trades on images of weaponry, featuring the ceramics of Seattle artist Charles Krafft and Kansas City artist Linda Lighton, and the ink drawings of Connecticut-based Jane Rainwater.

Lighton's luminously glazed sculptures include machine guns and lipstick bullets. Krafft's "Balkan Bunny" features a pleasant delft earthenware bunny that unfortunately embraces a grenade. Rainwater creates delicate black ink drawings of botanicals whose flowers are composed of weapons.

The artists' works subversively call attention to violence by rendering them in beautiful sculptures and drawings. They are, in Rainwater's words, "horrible beauty."