

# KQED

## Airy Paintings Made Chunky, By Way of Ceramics, at House of Seiko

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Cross Lypka, 'VVVv,' 2024; glazed ceramic, 11 x 84 x 7 inches. (*House of Seiko*)

Shows at the Mission District gallery House of Seiko are usually spare by necessity: the storefront space is a mere 350 square feet. This is absolutely a good thing. A spare show gives art room to breathe. It makes small details pop. Viewers linger to chat and soak it all in. (The one downside to a spare show is that it looks completely underwhelming in photographs, but that's neither the fault of the art nor its arrangement.)

In House of Seiko's latest exhibition, Cross Lypka's *Tarantula*, just four ceramic works hang on the gallery's white walls. Created through a process of exquisite-corpse-like collaboration by Oakland artists Tyler Cross and Kyle Lypka, the sculptures are airy paintings made chunky, an alchemical fusion of delicacy and solidity.

It starts with a drawing, sometimes just the outline of a shape, often made by Cross. Lypka selects from these glyphs and hand-builds a three-dimensional object from clay. Cross applies the glaze, using a mixture of glass and other additives that run and pool according to the vicissitudes of gravity and heat. The pieces are fired in a bed of sand that fuses with the overflowing molten mixture, creating an encrusted skirt on an otherwise smooth finish. Then, the artists apply surface treatments and sealants.



Cross Lypka, 'Tij,' 2024 and 'Thunderhead,' 2024. (*House of Seiko*)

Up close, their undulating ceramic objects — in this show, all wall-hanging works — are covered in fine networks of crackle. Some glazes render colors as if they lie at the bottom of clear pools. Others resemble the watercolor-esque stain paintings of Helen Frankenthaler (and her copyist, Morris Louis).

While Cross Lypka's previous exhibitions have included more vessel-like sculptures, *Tarantula* resembles a set of architectural fragments that could have been pried off a rotting Victorian down the street. There are nods to cornices and crown molding. These are mysterious ornaments removed from any set purpose and showing signs of elemental wear.

*Tij*, the show's largest work, stretches nearly the entire length of the floor to ceiling, seven feet tall. It's a column in four parts, with two mirrored grooves running top to bottom, channels for bright yellow and lurid green glaze.

This color combination reappears in *h.e.r.d.*, now flowing between bookends of madder lake red. *h.e.r.d.*'s shape, slightly reminiscent of a hymnal board, protrudes along a vertical center line, like the negative shape formed by an open book.



Installation view of Cross Lypka's 'Tarantula' at House of Seiko. (*House of Seiko*)

Its positive hangs diagonally opposite; *Thunderhead*, with ruffled chanterelle edges, is the most organic of the bunch. If these reflected, Rorschach test sculptures are illuminated manuscripts, then *vVVv*, a piece that wraps in four segments around House of Seiko's one architectural oddity (a slight bump-out in one corner), is an accordion-fold book, hinged across three right angles.

I like this book simile because it gets at the multistep and transformative process by which these objects are made. Cross' initial drawings become flat covers. Lypka's extrapolations pad out the silhouettes, filling the book with pages and substance. The glass and glaze: text and illustration. Firing it all in the kiln, solidifying and fusing particulate matter — that's the binding.

What doesn't quite fit into this retelling is the sandy residue on each sculpture's back edge. This detail makes the sculptures more archeological than literary, as if rescued from the sea with a colony of barnacles attached. Books would never.

So maybe the works in *Tarantula* aren't books. They're already the result of a collaboration between a painter and a ceramicist. I truly don't need to throw another art form into the mix. This temptation comes from their ethereal quality of being a third thing: wet but hardened; crisp but handmade; taking up space, but gesturing, always, at what might fit around them.