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Rachael Gorchov at Owen James Gallery

by Elizabeth Johnson

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Rachael Gorchov, *Cloud Chair*, NCC with I. Noguchi,
2019, mixed media, 44 1/2 x 38 1/2 x 22 1/2 in.

Rachael Gorchov's concentric mixed-media sculptures assert More Is More by layering two-, and three-dimensional images and spaces. *Concave* pairs these four components, yielding a range of three possible categories: 3-D vs. 2-D, 3-D vs. 3-

D, and 2-D vs. 2-D. Using paper clay, vinyl, acrylic and ceramic media, the works evoke Wabi-sabi, as each unit embodies handmade imperfection and quotidian detail; though as a whole, Concave esteems what is new, possible, and plentiful over individuality.

An example of 3-D vs. 2-D, *Plymouth Meeting Mall Fountain with Lehigh Valley Hospital Utility Transformer*, displays the title subjects on a ragged, bowl-like, ceramic surface atop an inky, freeform abstraction that reads like a shadow. A white pool on the vinyl shadow inaccurately mimics how light would be cast by the bowl above, signaling that the rules in Gorchoff's world deviate from reality. Resistant, uneasy pairs crowd the work with tension: the bowl with its shadow, image with abstraction and physical void with implied void. A viewer's innate sense of parabolic curves rejects the lumpier forms Gorchoff presents. Regarding the title subject rendered, one asks, "Why paint this?" as easily as "Why not paint this?"

Like a potter attracted to odds and ends, the ephemeral or the mundane, Gorchoff replicates broken eggshells, vessel shards, clouds, rocks or other centered forms, raising questions about origins and evolution. Was it blown up in the kiln? Was it ever whole? What did it look like whole? Is this piece the sole survivor of firing? Why is the shadow in *Plymouth meeting Mall* so dark compared to its attendant form? Could the flat cutout be a reflection

instead of shadow? Could the curved form represent colored glass casting colored light, making the flat cutout?

Larger pieces such as *Balustrade*, *Bandelier National Monument with Column*, *Hanging Church-Cairo* start with an armature of hardware cloth or wire mesh that is impregnated with homemade mixed-media paper clay; the surface is finished in gesso and acrylic paint. *Balustrade* joins abstract and perspectival painting technique on a concave face, such that the recognizable railing is warped to conform to and enhance the surface: the front face is both 3-D and 2-D. Seen in its entirety, *Balustrade* has no shadow, its drama is self-contained, and as its facing and reverse surfaces are both 3-D they wrestle via color for dominance under the spell of a shared curved surface. Is the piece predominately abstract, containing architectural decoration? Or, is it realistic at the core, blending abstractly toward the edges?

Dotting the show, Gorchov's acrylic on ceramic tondi such as *Sarcophagus Toes*, *the Cloisters* explore 2-D vs. 2-D through subtleties in color, brushstroke, and design. Smaller and flatter, the tondi extend sketchbook studies, and quietly hold their ground amidst a roomful of more dimensional work.

Clowning in the spotlight, in the middle of the room, *Longwood Gardens Boxwood with Lehigh Valley Staircase* marries blundering rock with pooled shade. The most painterly aspect of the show, the whimsical shadow, seems

to slip away like an Alice in Wonderland hallucination regardless of being anchored to a rock.

Concave compounds and separates forms and images, stocking Gorchov's workshop with tools and strategies for bridging 2-D and 3-D. Working across photography, drawing, painting and sculpture, she also mines odd discoveries from teaching art. Elements of student work that wouldn't make sense out of the context of an assignment take on fresh meaning when they are integrated into her multilayered world.

Based on a student sculpture, *Cloud Chair, NCC with I. Noguchi* may be *Concave's* most satisfying piece. Painterly, at ease witnessing the struggle between facing and reverse sides, it suspends a floating, chair-like form within dappled, world-mocking coziness: through pure magic it levitates the image, just like a seashell held to the ear plays the sound of the sea.

[About the author: [Elizabeth Johnson](#) is an artist and writer.]

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