

notes on looking

Contemporary Art from Los Angeles

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Zach Leener at Tif Sigfrids



Zachary Leener

2014

Glazed ceramic

11 3/4 x 14 1/2 x 13 inches

Image is courtesy of the artist and Tif Sigfrids



Installation view of Zachary Leener.
Image courtesy of the artist and Tif Sigfrids.

Zach Leener's sculptures at Tif Sigfrids are all without title, and they lack even the honorific "untitled." This choice feels self-deprecating; I think of Leener's sculptures that they might decline the status of art objects in the way that Groucho Marx declined to continue as a member of a social club: "Please accept my resignation. I don't want to belong to a club that will accept me as a member."¹

This unnamedness feels like an act of resistance on the part of the artist; and I wonder to myself whether I need a formal designation to tell me something is art, and I wonder why this might be so. I think about the space between art objects and objets d'art. I think how confident these objects seem: they are what they are, and if one names them one risks getting it wrong, or missing the point. Leener repeats two basic shapes in the seven artworks on display, and this repetition points equally toward high design specialty retail and the repetition in Minimalist Art. The first claims artisanal status in a manufactured world; the second claims the banality of manufacture in a world of art. Both offer ways for an educated and necessarily wealthy elite to identify itself (and reassure itself) through the display of good taste. Leener's sculptures cheerfully do none of this. (Well, they are *art*, so they are in that refined and specialized world of informed choices and considered histories. But they're weird; they don't offer camouflage, they stand out.)



Installation view of Zachary Leener at Tif Sigfrids.
Image is courtesy of the artist and Tif Sigfrids.

The exhibition *Zachary Leener* brings to my mind fond memories of R. Crumb and Zapp Comix, and of David Gilhooly and Roy de Forest, of Saturday morning cartoons and garden gnomes. The sculptures are bawdy and confident and funny. They are also a little melancholy. One looks like a covered butter dish with a ball handle; it also looks like a tomb. I get a sense of Thutmose in ancient Egypt, and of buttered toast at breakfast. The other resembles a pair woman's breasts with handles, it also looks like Minnie Mouse's shoes on a Segway. Leener's sculptures are not abstract in the "look at the clouds and find whatever you want" way; these objects *are* something. They are definite. They are active. (If my description offers little insight to their form, it is because I am confounded by them.) The sculptures are raised on pedestals, and (like a belly laugh and like a sucker punch) I feel them in my middle as I look.

The press release for the exhibition doesn't offer specific information about the artist or the work; instead it sets a tone, it offers a sensibility that is friendly, trippy, and unfiltered. The writing, by poet and artist Jeremy Sigler, takes the form of a story, and of a poem. The text is full of names – friends' names, the names of colleagues and of figures in this social art world. Sigler's way seems to be inclusion of his audience through all-encompassing rumination; and – thinking this – I recognize that the "specific information" I supposed was lacking, is present in the actions of these two friends: Leener's invitation and Sigler's writing.

I think back to Groucho, and to the refined, exclusive club that he declined. I imagine that after he quit, the comedian went back home and hung with friends, and they would "sit of an evening with our Napoleon brandies and long-stemmed pipes and discuss Chaucer, Charles Lamb, Ruskin, Voltaire, Booth, the Barrymores, Duse, Shakespeare, Bernhardt and all the other legendary figures of the theatre and literature."²

I think that the art world is like a club, and is often exclusive and petty and it obsesses about silly things. I think I prefer conversation with friends, whether the talk is elevated or crass, and I think that being awkward, taking risks and making discoveries is better than being comfortable and fashionable. Sigler's writing, and Leener's exhibition seem to talk about this.



Zachary Leener
2014
Glazed ceramic
13 3/4 x 11 3/4 x 6 3/4 inches
Image is courtesy of the artist and Tif Sigfrids



Zachary Leener
2014
Glazed ceramic
15 x 15 1/4 x 6 1/4 inches
Image is courtesy of the artist and Tif Sigfrids



Isn't this awesome?! I don't have information for it.
(Image is, of course, courtesy of Zachary Leener and Tif Sigfrids.)



Zachary Leener
2014
Glazed ceramic
11 1/2 x 11 3/4 x 10 inches
Image is courtesy of the artist and Tif Sigfrids

¹ For an interesting examination of Marx's telegram, the tactical abilities of jokes, and the relationship of this joke's structure to "impossible figures" such as the Penrose Triangle, see *The Original Function of Groucho Marx's Resignation Joke*, by Richard Raskin at [16:9](http://www.16-9.dk/2007-02/side11_inenglish.htm) (http://www.16-9.dk/2007-02/side11_inenglish.htm)

² Ibid.

Zachary Leener at Tif Sigfrids is on view through May 31, 2014

<http://www.tifsigfrids.com/items/-1/>

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