

# The New York Times

## Art in Review

By ROBERTA SMITH

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Adrian Saxe Newark Art Museum 49 Washington Street Through Oct. 23

This 87-piece survey, organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, sums up more than a quarter-century of work by the ceramic artist Adrian Saxe, who, whether you like or dislike his work (and it seems entirely possible to entertain both reactions simultaneously), is somewhere near the top of both his medium and his form. As a ceramist, Mr. Saxe is part jeweler, part painter and part cultural critic. Faberge, the Marquis de Sade and Claude Levi-Strauss working together might approximate his exquisite, suggestive ceramics, fraught with cross-cultural references and intimations of the polymorphous perverse.

His covered jars in particular often possess a manic, nearly figure quality (they can make you think of Jim Nutt), and he is probably at his best in his tasseled jewel-studded jars whose biomorphic forms seem to be based on gourds or squash. (Such pieces, taken to further extremes of decoration dominate Mr. Saxe's exhibition at the Garth Clark Gallery on West 57th Street in Manhattan.) But too often with Mr. Saxe's work, one is simply looking at dazzling technique, extravagant materials or unusual juxtapositions, as when Mr. Saxe endows porcelain forms with rough stoneware bases that aren't really rough enough. And many pieces seem marred by errors in taste, as when the beautifully crackled surface of a large pale-gray jar is dotted with thick brush strokes that bring to mind Roy Lichtenstein. Taste, that outmoded word, is a big problem here, lost in the shuffle between Mr. Saxe's breathtaking craft, his fierce intelligence and a sense of humor that often goes overboard. It's too bad that he resorts to jokes when genuine beauty is often so near at hand. As a result, Mr. Saxe's best work is often in the details.

ROBERTA SMITH