



#### SANTA MONICA

Adrian Saxe

Frank Lloyd Gallery

While Adrian Saxe's previous work embodied dual aspects of beauty—penetrating attraction and a natural link to the grotesque—the work in his recent exhibition, "GRIN," is not easy on the eye. The sculptures are freeform Surrealist objects that make suspect everything that categorizes the sense of things. The linkage of a highly crafted, non-utilitarian

Top: Adrian Saxe, *Outback Cathedral*, 2011. Porcelain, lusters, and mixed media on antique wood base, 15 x 7 x 7 in. Left: Adrian Saxe, *Holy Trinity, Fat, Salt, Sugar*, 2011. Porcelain, lusters, and mixed media on antique wood base, 16 x 8 x 5.38 in.

object with a utilitarian technology is, as de Lautréamont wrote, as "beautiful as the chance meeting on a dissecting table of a sewing machine and an umbrella." Such dissonance is characteristic of Saxe's work. Each object bears overtones that stand in ambiguous relationship to its tangibility. The current work is humorous in a deeply questioning, philosophical fashion.

The objects are distancing because of the bravura, almost brutal, force of Saxe's technical skill. Yet the work in "GRIN" is also made approachable by its seductive use of "gold" lusters (shiny metallic glazes). Saxe's glaze is as familiar as the gold of a wedding ring or a gilded pattern printed on tableware. Even though luster helps draw viewer to object, it's icing on the cake—inviting as the objects are, they're demanding and not an easy read.

In terms of form and detail, every work has close ties to the Chinese ceramic tradition and its aesthetic philosophy; all are made of porcelain or earthenware, and most are placed on traditional wooden bases. Most of these works are not conventionally beautiful; instead, they have the intense attraction and fascination of the grotesque, resembling termite mounds or botanical specimens. Saxe's work is saturated with a complex and subtle idea of beauty that derives from two sources: historical Chinese ceramics and Western chinoiserie.

*Dynamite-maki California Spider Roll* consists of a running elephant, trunk held aloft, that bears a golden pot sprouting a glassy, fiery-red plant. In Chinese culture, the elephant symbolizes strength, wisdom, prosperity, good luck, and prudence. Saxe's elephant, a true piece of orientalist kitsch, is covered with small, button-like emblems, each bearing a different decorative motif. The flame-like plant is dotted with small, colorful crystals. The whole ensemble stands on an antique wooden base that lifts

it into a quasi-historical, ambiguous realm. It's a chimerical geep of plant and animal mixed with a reference to sushi.

The "GRIN" of the exhibition's title is an acronym for Genetic Robotic Information Nano (Technologies). Titles are important to Saxe, and this one underscores a particular aspect of the new work—embedded QR codes. *Holy Trinity, Fat, Salt, Sugar* is a shiny, narrow, cylindrical vessel with two ornate handles. One side bears the carved Chinese words "fat," "salt," and "sugar." The other side features three stacked plaques, each bearing a QR code. When a code is scanned, it links to an image associated with fat, sugar, or salt. These simple and direct pictures evoke a problematic aspect of contemporary American culture—fast food—without further commentary.

*Outback Cathedral* is completely covered in gold luster. Its clay body was mixed with an ignitable additive that burned out in the kiln, leaving a heavily pocked, porous surface. Reminiscent of a termite mound, scholar's rock, or branch of coral, the object bears spherical protrusions on all sides that terminate in tiny, emerald green, translucent pearls. A black and white QR code on a square chip sticks out from the side of an upper branch. When scanned, the code links to the image of an Australian termite mound at dusk. The luminous, phosphorescent gleam of the mound mirrors the green stones embedded in *Outback Cathedral*.

Saxe's use of QR codes creates a network of linked imagery that extends the dimensions of his work into the virtual world of cyberspace. In this body of work, he has redefined sculpture by expanding its conceptual boundaries. The idea of an object with a correlate in another dimension seems more like theoretical physics than art, but Saxe's QR works prove otherwise.

—Kathleen Whitney