

VITAMIN C

CLAY + CERAMIC

IN CONTEMPORARY ART



PHAIDON

Elderton, Louisa, and Rebecca Morrill. *Vitamin C: Clay + Ceramic in Contemporary Art*. London: Phaidon, 2017.

albertz benda

515 w 26th st | new york, ny | 10001
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Looking at the work of the American artist Brie Ruais, the physicality of her relationship to clay is palpable. We can see the dynamism of her movements, her lived experience; how she likes to push the palm of her hand through this material spreading it outwards, or run her fingertips across it, channelling textured lines that pull the eye around, down or along her sculptures.

In *Premonition (with India Ink and 130 lbs of clay)* (2016) she kneels, naked, upon a bed of clay, spreading this into the shape of an X—a form that is mirrored in the cross that marks her own back (together, these equal XX, the female sex chromosomes). During a recent interview, she described her interest in conflating the female body with a body of earth through a practice of 'ecofeminism', which she says 'relates the oppression and domination of all subordinate groups (women, people of colour, children, the poor) to the oppression and domination of nature (animals, land, water, air, etc.)'. The work looks inwards at the body and its primordial physicality. It also centres on the traumatized body, while looking outward towards the land and the body's relation to earth.

Ruais' concern with gender results in sculptures reminiscent of the female X chromosome and the O of circles and holes. *Scraped Body Void, 130 lbs* (2016) is a wall-mounted ceramic, glazed in deep earthen tones. With a void at its centre from which clay is pushed outwards, it recalls a baking black sun of dark rays. Its form is powerful and bold, violent even, as clay is forced out of a void, bearing the marks of scratching or tearing, and embedded with finger and hand imprints. *Spreading Outward from Copper Center, 125 lbs* (2016) is softer and gentler, a thick, circular mass of wall-mounted clay, seemingly emitting beams of light as it shimmers beneath a warm metallic glaze.

Ruais always works within self-imposed restrictions: 'I begin with a list of limitations that determine the weight of the clay (often equal to my own bodyweight), the action, the time, and the basic shape, and then confront the material with my body in a highly physical process that involves kneeling, kicking, spreading, scraping, and skimming.' The forms are then cut into tiles, glazed and fired. These tiles are pieced together (often forming a grid) to give a sense of a fragmented whole, one that has the potential of being both ordered and disrupted. *Area Whale, 300 lbs* (2014) comprises a wall-mounted grid within which a giant hole appears. Its title uses word play, underlining both the positive and negative space of this hole (the void is mounted on the wall while the matter itself is on the floor, representing the 'whole' area and volume of the 'hole'). Made using clay pigmented with colour—from teal to midnight blue, lilac to bubble-gum pink—sweeping, gestural strokes document how Ruais swiftly shaped this material. Finished with a clear glaze to highlight the tonal vibrancy, the work is characterized by its will to break free, away from the grid, constraint and order, ready to reconnect with the earth in the ground. • Louisa Elderton

Brie Ruais Born 1982, Southern California. Lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. Selected Solo Exhibitions: 2016—'According to the Body', YoungWorld, Detroit, Michigan; 'Where You No Longer Are, There is Your Desert', Thomas Hunter Project Space, New York; 2015—'130 lbs of Proximal Frontage', Mesler/Feuer, New York; 2014—'Dugout', Galerie Lefebvre & Fils, Paris; 'Brie Ruais', Cooper Cole, Toronto; 2013—'XO', Nicole Klagsbrun, New York; 'Two Wholes', Halsey McKay Gallery, East Hampton, New York. Selected Group Exhibitions: 2017—'New Ruins', American University Museum at the Katzen Arts Center, Washington, DC; 2016—'Breather', Laura Bartlett Gallery, London; '3 Sculptors', Rachel Uffner Gallery, New York; 'Splotch', Sperone Westwater, New York; 'Mal Maison', Maccarone, New York; 'Low', Lyles and King, New York; 2015—'Performative Process', Halsey McKay Gallery, East Hampton, New York; 2014—'Brie Ruais & Anna Betbeze', Marc Selwyn Fine Art, Los Angeles.

Brie Ruais



† *Area Whale, 300 lbs, 2014*
Pigmented and glazed ceramic, hardware
Square measures:
98 x 122 x 13 cm
(38 x 54 x 5 in)
Circle measures:
112 x 97 x 15 cm
(44 x 38 x 5 in)

* *Scraped Body Void, 130 lbs, 2016*
Glazed ceramic, hardware
142 x 148 x 27 cm
(56 x 57 x 10 5/8 in)

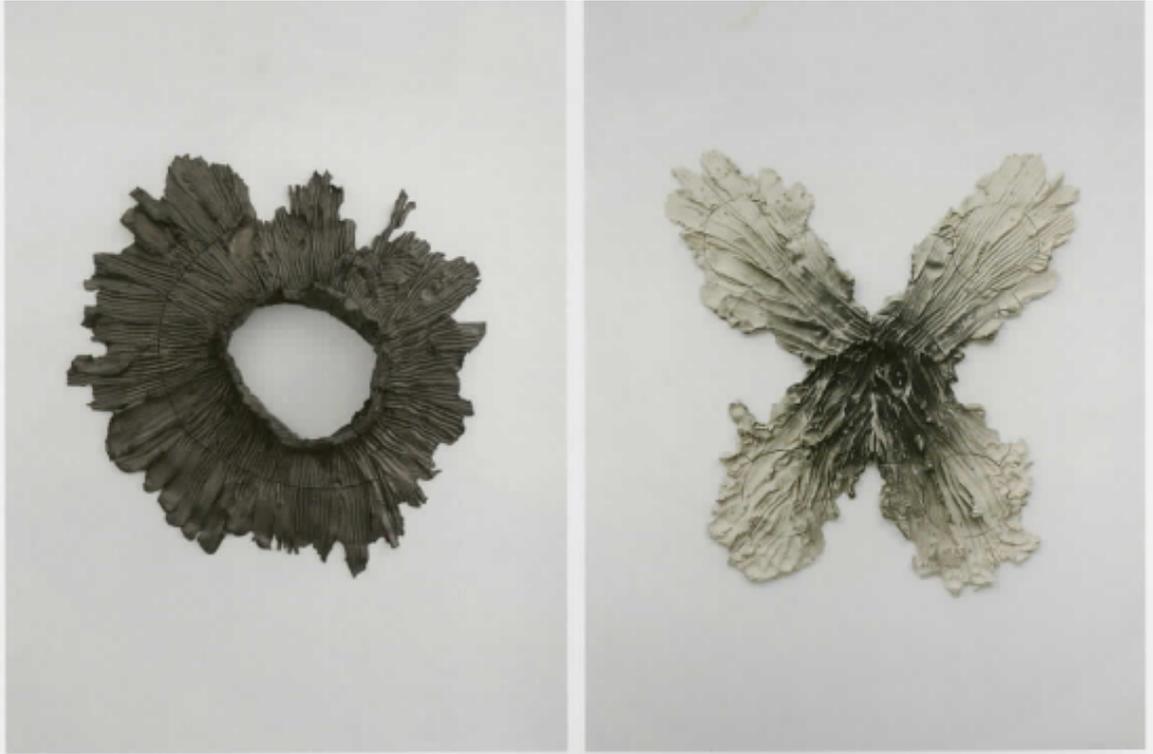
** *Spreading Out from Center in Five Directions (Left Arm, Left Leg, Right Arm, Right Leg), 130 lbs, 2016*
Glazed porcelain, hardware
140 x 140 x 9 cm
(55 x 55 x 3 1/2 in)

†† *Premonition (with India Ink and 130 lbs of clay), 2016*
Video, 9 min

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* *Carve Push*, 132 lbs
(Metallic), 2014
Glazed ceramic, hardware
190 x 42 x 41 cm
(75 x 16 1/2 x 16 in)

† *Romrod 3*, 132 lbs, 2015
Glazed ceramic, hardware
130 x 74 x 13 cm
(51 x 29 x 5 in)

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