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Brad Miller at Robischon

Brad Miller makes sculptures of wood or clay. The wood works are compacted congeries of branches, assembled and then cut to make an overall shape far more regular than its parts—pruned, for example, into the approximate shape of oversize lungs, but so packed with branchlets that they leave one breathless. The same distinctive mixture of simplicity, complexity and visually communicated sensation is found in Miller's ceramic work, which made up this recent show, one of a rash of ceramic exhibitions throughout Denver scheduled in conjunction with a meeting of the National Council of Ceramic Educators.

The clay sculptures tend to two types, both of them 2 to 3 feet in the largest dimension (usually

height). One involves "growths" of thick, short angular branches that bring to mind such natural forms as coral, kelp or staghorn fern. The other sort is assembled of various rings and bat-shapes, all gently rounded and together seeming to defy gravity. Neither shows a great range of color; Miller is known for his lack of interest in glazes. In addition, the works call less attention than usual to particularities of surface.

Instead they seem integral and look solid, even when, as in *Rounder*, the parts rummage through the range of beiges, to its yellowish, grayish and brownish boundaries. The color is apparently mixed in rather than applied, and it speaks of the source of clay in earth rather than of the glassy qualities of glaze. *Rounder* has that antigravity quality; it

looks like a stop-action depiction of an explosion. One flat-bottomed, leaning biomorphic shape serves as the base and establishes one axis of implied motion. Rising from a bump on the base, a cruciform shape leans in another direction. Attached to it are two corn-kernel-shaped appendages and one beaver-tail-shaped one, plus an indented round form that operates loosely as a head to the cruciform "body." On another bump perches the largest single element, which looks like a doughnut. These associations may or may not be part of Miller's conceptual program. Certainly he admits the doughnut notion in another sculpture made entirely of rounded elements, which he titles *Dunk* and therefore slightly trivializes, but another complex piece that partly consists of rounded elements is interestingly and ambiguously titled *That's How It Works Now*.

The branching works may make one think of the leathery bracts of plants that can survive eastern Colorado's arid high plains (the roundness of the others may evoke wind or water erosion). These pieces of stoneware, threaded onto a steel armature, are almost uniformly a dry, dark brown. Whether mounted on the wall or shown on a pedestal, they have the flickering character of brushstrokes or suggest a graphic version of the Burning Bush. The parts are small and therefore never assert an individual identity. They make an image that, in its prickliness, fully occupies three dimensions. —Janet Koplos



Brad Miller: *That's How It Works Now*, 2000, ceramic sculpture, 11 by 32 by 23 inches; at Robischon.