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Brad Miller

Molecular Discourse

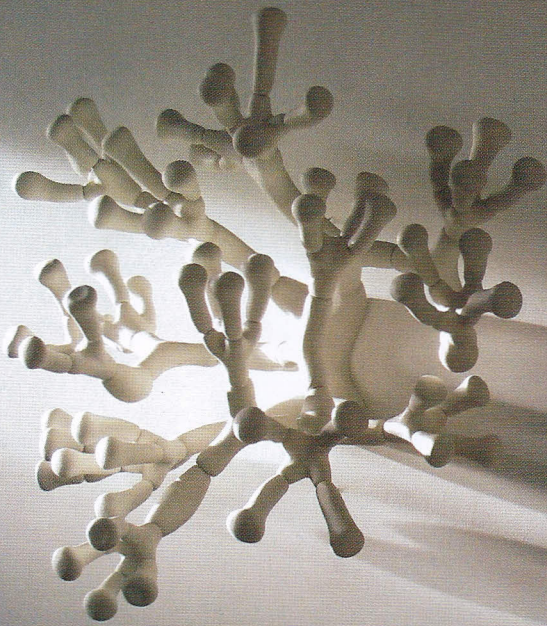


A Review by Judy Seckler

BRAD MILLER'S SOLO EXHIBITION *Brad Miller: Primordial Algorithms* at the Edward Cella Art + Architecture gallery in Los Angeles, California, has brought together a combination of works that richly explores the beauty and order of molecular systems found in nature. Similar to painter Georgia O'Keeffe, whose flower paintings famously enlarged structural details in nature in an intimate way, Miller shines a micro light on his ceramic cosmos.

The exhibition curated by Cella from 23 April to 28 June, 2011, included 25 paintings in addition to the four sculptures and 19 platters and bowls. (This review will confine the discussion to the ceramic work although Miller's obsession with cellular patterning and bisymmetry is consistent throughout all of the work on view.)

The exhibition's name alludes, in part, to the orderly and, at times, claustrophobic, close packed forms that define the surface of Miller's supersize functional ware.



Facing page: *Sampler*. 2011. Ceramics and steel attachments. 35 x 25 x 18 in.
This page: *Feelings*. 2011. Ceramics and steel attachments. 21 x 38 x 17 in.
Borders, all pages: *E17-07 (Detail)*. 2007. Earthenware. 4 x 16 x 16 in.

His technique of grinding down and polishing the porcelain surfaces in the end stage of his process gives rise to patterns that lean toward the reptilian.

In contrast, the identity of his sculptures springs from the seemingly random placement of smooth white stoneware appendages. The minimalist approach creates floating forms that weave and dance in space. The exhibition begins with the modernistic sculptures and smaller paintings and builds to a crescendo with swirling, massive bowls and platters.

Using steel hardware, Miller works from a central core, creating sculptural forms that fan out symmetrically both to the left and the right. There is something hopeful in the outstretched, abstract limbs of *Sampler* that resemble the dendritic structure seen in nerve cells. Miller, who calls Peter Voulkos one of his important influences, captures a similar dynamism that borders on explosive. Wisely, Miller leaves his sculptures unglazed and focuses on their structural integrity. Glazed surfaces, in this instance, would clutter the finished statement.

His preoccupation with order is a welcomed respite

from a chaotic world. The rounded, smooth shapes are the ideal complement to the angular appendages outstretched as if in prayer. Recognisable yet alien at the same time, Miller's *Sampler* taps in to our desire to embrace the new and fresh as long as there is an element that grounds it in reality.

Wreck is another sculpture that works as a hybrid between *Sampler* and a third sculpture *Feelings*. Although less symmetrical in form, the work's overlapping sections suggest biological origins. Again, smooth, unglazed sections are the building blocks here for a larger design. An outgrowth of the triangulation of the shapes is a claustrophobic foreboding that creates a palpable tension. Miller works from sketches that serve as loose blueprints when assembling his sculptures, leaving additional room for play.

The sculpture possesses an air of mystery that could be construed as a Siren's call. The spiky sections throughout the piece, however, make it clear that the danger of being impaled lurks if one gets too close. The design work of Charles and Ray Eames serves as another inspiration for Miller's sculptures. Following their footsteps, he establishes a decorative simplicity so



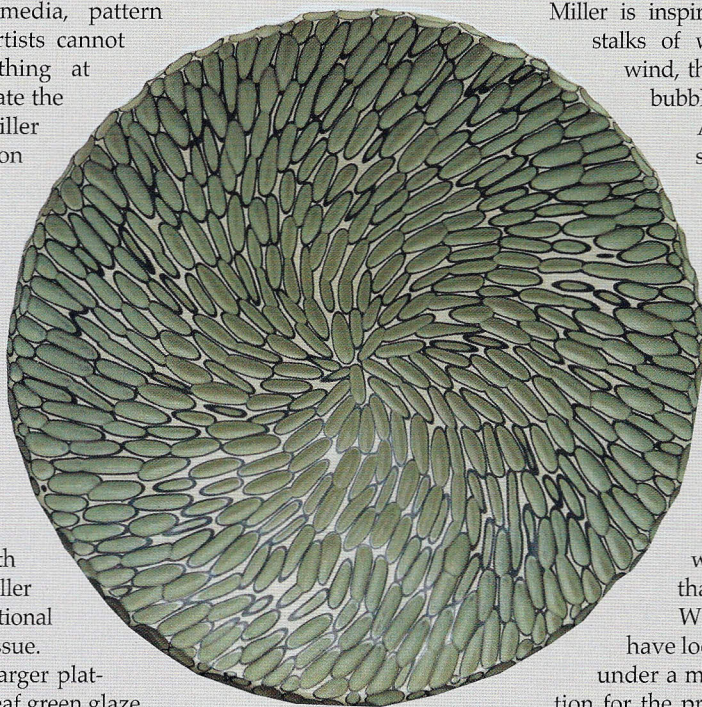
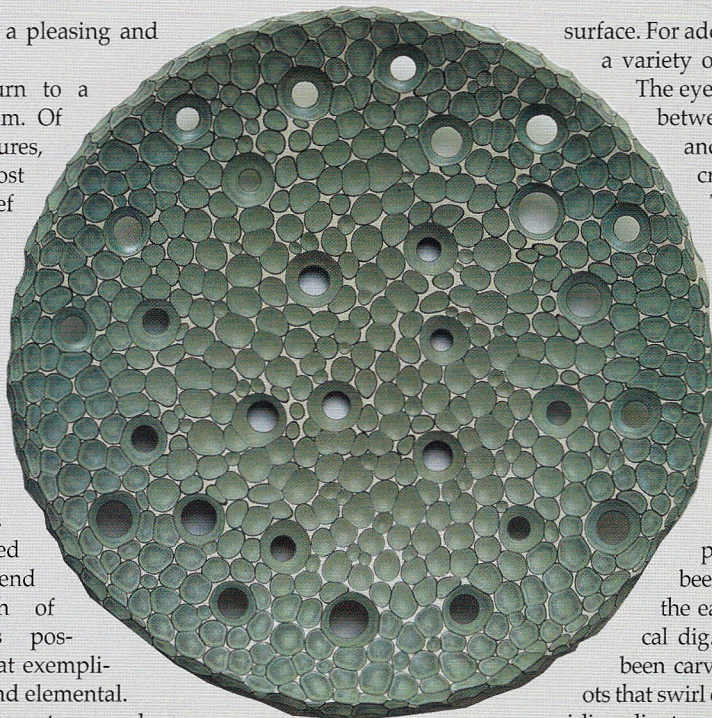
that the outcome is a pleasing and memorable design.

Feelings is a return to a more optimistic realm. Of Miller's four sculptures, its iconography most resembles a coral reef in the ocean. Miller captures a lightness of being among the sweeping, outstretched segments. A forceful tactile quality spreads evenly over the work like a wave. Each section of the sculpture is composed of rounded digits that extend harmoniously. Each of Miller's sculptures possesses a life force that exemplifies all that is pure and elemental.

Miller has taken care to pare down his vocabulary to the cellular level. He uses understatement to great effect and, in this series of work, he achieves a measure of success because he does not muddy up his sculptures with additional mixed media, pattern or texture. Many artists cannot resist using everything at their disposal to create the maximum noise. Miller earns our admiration with his restraint.

The exhibition picks up momentum as Miller exploits the use of geometry and cellular patterns with his bowls and platters. From the smallest work (nine inches in diameter) to the largest, (22 inches in diameter) and with robust thickness, Miller distinguishes his functional ware from standard issue.

P5-11, one of the larger platters, is covered in a leaf green glaze that appears as concave cells sprawling across its surface. Miller hand carves the surface with ladles and melon ball scoops so that the light reflects off the various shapes, shifting over the uneven



surface. For added interest, Miller cut a variety of holes in the platter. The eye jumps back and forth between the glazed cells and the negative space created by the holes.

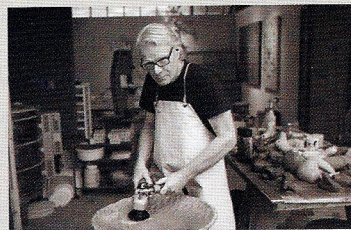
The cellular systems that Miller explored in his sculptures are revisited again in his functional ware through his use of texture. The design element is what gives this work its vigorous appeal.

P7-10, a smaller platter, looks as if it has been freshly plucked from the earth in an archaeological dig. Its black surface has been carved with rounded divots that swirl out from its centre. The swirling divots are barely contained by the rim of the platter. Miller uses a hand operated angle grinder to achieve a glass finish. He captures a bit of history; a petrified moment of primordial ooze.

The circular pattern is a familiar one. Whether Miller is inspired by a rainstorm or stalks of wheat bending in the wind, the surface of his platter bubbles with energy.

Another medium-sized platter (*P14-10*) stands out for its surging circular mass of green-tinged blood cells outlined in black. The pattern converges in the centre like a swarm of bees. Again Miller successfully uses texture and pattern to add dimension and to infuse the piece with a jolt of electricity that is irresistible.

Whereas Miller may have looked at a dab of blood under a microscope for inspiration for the previous platter, *E17-07* has a combination of round shapes that transport one to the site of an erupting volcano. The jagged black surface and rough, carved edges barely contain the lava-like pattern, lapping at its edges.



Order and nature rule the day for the three complementary series in the exhibition without any clichés to yawn over. Brad Miller uses a variety of techniques to win us over and to take us on an adventure worth remembering.

Judy Seckler is a Los Angeles-based magazine writer, specialising in art, design and architecture. (www.judyseckler.com) ([www.twitter/judyseckler](https://twitter.com/judyseckler)). Her previous two reviews for *Ceramics: Art and Perception* were Gustavo Perez *Recapitulando* and *Clay Nation Indivisible, with Liberty and Justice for All* (Issue 86 / Dec. 2011). The Brad Miller: *Primordial Algorithms* exhibition was held at the Edward Cella Art + Architecture gallery from 23 April – 28 June, 2011. All photos by Doug Piburn, courtesy of Edward Cells Art + Architecture (www.edwardcella.com).

Facing page, top: P5–11, 2011. Porcelain. 5.5 x 22 x 22 in.
Below: P14–10. Porcelain. 3 x 15.5 x 15.5 in.

This page: *Wreck*, 2011. Ceramics and steel attachments. 37 x 28 x 16 in.
Top: Brad Miller in his studio.