

Los Angeles Times

Art review: Matthias Merkel Hess at ACME.

By Leah Ollman

December 8, 2011



Merkel Hess is a gentle trickster whose material transformations send out ever-expanding ripples of resonance. His show, titled “Bucketry,” consists of a few dozen familiar containers — garbage cans, milk crates, laundry baskets — rendered in glazed ceramic. There’s a five-gallon water jug in lovely pale jade porcelain, a ‘Styrofoam’ cooler in burnt-earth stoneware, a trash can with a luscious skin of fuchsia and teal.

At first, the work seems merely clever, a bit coy. It graduates quickly into a smarter form of charm, a knowing contribution to the canon of shape-shifting surrealism. Pseudo-functional sculpture, the pieces nod to clay’s old confinement to the ghetto of useful craft, but they also bring to mind some of the oldest and most treasured relics of humankind, vessels for carrying water, storing grain. Merkel Hess has taken the new, plastic, mass-produced, cheap versions of those containers and made them double back into something semi-precious, handmade. He’s endowed the generic and uniform with character, irregular grace and a sense of humor. Even his price list is provocative and amusing.

ACME, 6150 Wilshire Blvd., (323) 857-5942 Through Dec. 21. Closed Sunday and Monday.
www.acmelosangeles.com

Image: Matthias Merkel Hess, "Bucketry" installation view, bottom. Credit: ACME