

Alice Maher

David Nolan

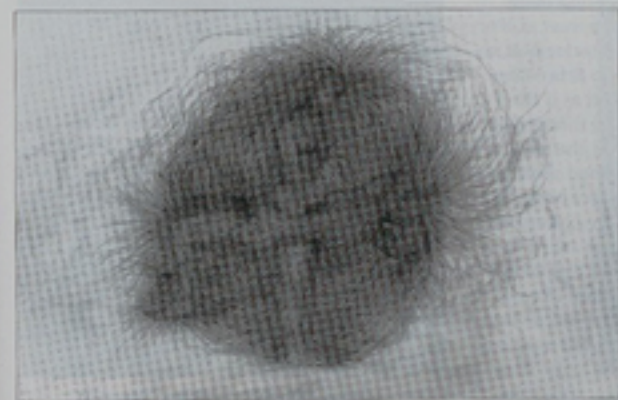
Irish artist Alice Maher, who's long been pulling it all together (myth, magic, folklore, memoir, in video, music, drawing, sculpture, and more), turned this unlikely venue into a small theater with viewers sandwiched between screens that tantalized and confounded with a kind of primitive animation.

Little in this fascinating show of video works, sculpture, and prints was exactly what it seemed. There were the videos with soundtracks by British composer Trevor Knight, drawings and prints in the back gallery, and mock-classical sculptures of a boy and a girl—the kind you might find on Victorian mantelpieces or in cemeteries.

The videos initially suggest a narrative with mythological creatures and lots of metamorphosing. There's a centaurlike fellow, a Rapunzel figure, and mounds of what might be gold. But it soon becomes clear that what we are viewing is really a series of erased drawings, one atop the other, assembled in the manner of animation but leading nowhere in particular.

In a still from her video *Godchildren of Enantios* (2010), a woman sits side-saddle (sans saddle) on a bull. Wearing knee-high stockings, big underpants, and a necklace, she is draped with flowing, unstoppable-looking hair, which also covers the bull's eyes, effectively blinding him to her charms.

Here, rather than being cumulative and in a linear progression, the drawings appear as a palimpsest, continually reminding the viewer that the past is always a presence.



Alice Maher, *The Music of Things (III)*, 2009, etching, 15 1/2" x 18". David Nolan.

Maher's work is much about hair, head, and body; and it's about sex—men's decapitated heads sucking at a sphinx-postured woman's breasts/teats—and a lot about art as the process of production.

Through the erased penitenti, we can gauge the evolution of the work and the story/nostory. The music is ambiguously allusive and elusive, producing disconnected enticing sounds that keep us spellbound all the while.

The quickly sketched and erased drawings suggest dreams almost recollected and not nearly understood, showing that resolution is not what art and dreams are really about. —Barbara A. MacAdam

'Birds of Dawn'

Joan B Mirviss Ltd

This beautifully curated show, subtitled "Pioneers of Japan's Sodeisha Ceramic Movement," celebrated the work of three artists who were the guiding lights of Japan's avant-garde ceramists. Yagi

Kazuō (1918–79), Suzuki Osamu (1926–2001), and Yamada Hikaru (1923–2001) were founders of Sodeisha ("Crawling Through the Mud Association"), a pottery collective formed in Kyoto in 1948. Until then, the country's ven-

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Suzuki Osamu, *Horse Figure*, 1982, stoneware with red slip and ash glazes, 20" x 7" x 6". Joan B Mirviss Ltd.

erable ceramics traditions focused on tea bowls, jars, and other utilitarian objects. But the experiences of the war, combined with a sudden exposure to modernist influences from the West, caused a young generation of ceramists to call into question the traditional assumptions of their craft.

Yagi's tall, slim *Double-mouthed Flattened Vessel* (ca. 1956), made of glazed stoneware inlaid with

white and brown abstract markings, reflects the impact of Joan Miró and Paul Klee. The weird and humorous *Direction of the Wind* (1955), with its pieces of unglazed clay pipe poking through the walls of a seemingly broken ceramic container, shows Yagi deconstructing the symmetrical art of the potter's wheel, which he had earlier mastered.

Yamada went further still, specializing in upright, rectangular pieces that evoke tablets and small screens. His *Flot Form* (ca. 1991), two smoke-blackened ceramic planes joined like the covers of a book and incised with concentric squares, plays intriguingly with light and dark, positive and negative space.

Closest to traditional sculpture, Suzuki's work is, in some ways, the most satisfying in the show. His abstract animals composed of rough-hewn red Shigaraki clay pay homage to the work of Constantin Brancusi, but also to Japanese ideographs. Sometimes it takes a bit of staring to find the creature in the mass. *Bantam Rooster* (1985) may initially suggest a large cowbell, but then you find the fowl in the form. The artist's horses don't conjure equine anatomy as much as they do the spirit of the beast. Patinaed like centuries-old terra-cottas, the ceramics here seem both ancient and of their own time.

—Mona Molarsky