


ICA (/london/art/galleries/ica), St James'  Until Sunday April 2016



Betty Woodman: 'Window Vase #2 and Carpet', 2013. © Betty Woodman. Photo: Bruno Bruchi

TIME OUT SAYS ★★★★★

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Art can tickle and tease, provoke and confound, but often it's best when it just puts a big stupid smile on your face. Betty Woodman – born in 1930, a prolific creator of art-ceramics since the 1950s but only recently a name on the international art scene – makes the kind of frown-defying work that should be prescribed on the NHS to counter SAD. Brushy, translucent glazes in jewel-bright colours and clashing patterns shimmy over the surfaces of her sun-kissed vases and set-ups of two- and three-dimensional forms, transforming a lunch-hour trip to the ICA into a mini break – fittingly, since the artist divides her time between New York and Tuscany.

If Woodman has a USP, it's that she does quick things with a slow medium. Clay – with all that rolling, shaping, drying, firing and hoping that nothing shrivels/cracks/explodes in the kiln – makes for a notoriously prolonged process. Yet, in Woodman's hands, it looks as effortless as paper collage. In fact, Matisse's late cut-outs are what spring to mind most readily, especially when looking at Woodman's 'wallpapers' where off-cuts of clay are fired and attached to the wall in groovy, semi-abstract patterns reminiscent of flowers or fireworks.

This isn't just eye candy, though. Emblazoned with cavorting female nudes, Woodman's pots are a ballsy riposte to the unreconstructed 'woman-as-vessel' attitude prevalent throughout ceramics history; see pretty much all of Picasso's ceramic work. She is evidently grounded in art history, but you don't need to be. This show, Woodman's first solo exhibition in the UK, is a delight.

DETAILS

Venue name:

ICA (<http://www.timeout.com/london/art/galleries/ica>)