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Review: Francesca DiMattio, 'Domestic Sculpture,' at Salon 94 Bowery
By Roberta Smith



A view of Francesca DiMattio's installation of ceramic sculpture at Salon 94 Bowery. Second from right is "Bloemenhouder."

EMON HASSAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Francesca DiMattio's paintings have always struck me as skillful yet generic and stylishly up-to-date. But her gnarly patchwork ceramic sculptures are very lively, perhaps to excess. Ms. DiMattio, who is in her mid-30s, turned to clay and glaze about five years ago, just as the ceramics bandwagon was gaining speed. Now she is elbowing her way toward the reins with a verve and abandon that is unusual. Anyone interested in the medium and ways of loosening it up should see this show. Consisting of five large sculptures, including a low-hanging chandelier, it displays Ms. DiMattio's ceramics without the paintings for the first time, an excellent idea.

Combining porcelain and stoneware, these bravura bricolages owe something to the ceramics of Nicole Cherubini and Arlene Shechet, while merging the improvisational energy of Peter Voulkos with the neo-Expressionist swagger of Julian Schnabel's broken-crockery paintings. But they mainly reflect Ms. DiMattio's voracious reconsiderations of the history of ceramics, seemingly deforming, shattering and piecing (or jamming) together appropriated vessels in contrasting styles, glazes and decorative patterns. The reassembled parts evoke Iznik pottery, jasperware, dime-store kitsch and flowery bits of Sèvres and various strains of blue-and-white, while other areas are so rough and organic they might be lava, as seen on one side of the otherwise demure work "Bloemenhouder." African fetish sculptures and cake decoration are also inspirations.

But everything is too deviant and offhand not to have been made from scratch by the artist, which it was. Sometimes this is hard to believe, as with the perfect little porcelain flowers on the better-behaved side of "Bloemenhouder," but there are clues, like glazed handles the length of monkeys' tails. This realization can force you to rethink everything, coming out ahead.