



SALON 94

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Ceramic anvil sculptures by Matthias Merkel Hess at Acme. (Robert Wedemeyer / Acme / June 11, 2013)

CRITIC'S CHOICE

## Review: Matthias Merkel Hess' sculptures at once earnest and sly

By Leah Ollman

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The dozen ceramic anvils on sawhorse and plywood tables at Acme are signature Matthias Merkel Hess: at once subversive and reverential, sly but earnest, gently comical, surprisingly beautiful and unexpectedly poetic.

Merkel Hess has transformed a range of functional objects into clay, in the process generally canceling out their functionality. His buckets and other containers can still serve as vessels, but heavy and fragile ones compared with their lightweight, indestructible plastic models. Ceramic anvils take this inversion to a wonderfully oxymoronic extreme: Made initially out of stone but now commonly of steel, anvils exist to be hammered upon.

They are tools to facilitate the production of other objects, not objects generally valued or appreciated in themselves. Merkel Hess ennobles them, pays homage to their history and variety, and invites us to see them as pure form.

### **PHOTOS: Arts and culture in pictures by The Times**

Isolated like this, as tabletop sculptures, they become curiously other: animate, weapon-like, elegant and elemental. Those with double horns resemble bulls, and those with only one suggest rhinos or some other ancient tusked creature.

However blocky and inert, their surfaces are alive with color and texture — a neon tangerine wash over gold, ivory dusted in ash, crater-pocked aqua and iridescent purple. One, glazed a glossy, gluey white, has two square eye holes that make it look like a hooded figure lifted from a Philip Guston painting. This series is Merkel Hess at his devious and delightful best, making the familiar odd and new.

Acme, 6150 Wilshire Blvd., (323) 857-5942, through July 6. Closed Sundays and Mondays.  
[www.acmelosangeles.com](http://www.acmelosangeles.com)