

Amanda Jaffe: Infinite Space

Only in quiet waters do things mirror themselves undistorted. Only in a quiet mind is adequate perception of the world.

Hans Margolius

A retrospective exhibition provides a celebratory occasion highlighting the accomplishments of an artist's life work, making it possible to survey a full artistic range and shift of development. As an artist matures, diverse mixtures of experience including family, travel and relocation inform the work through the daily ebb and flow of life. A sense of place often has enormous influence; in the case of Amanda Jaffe, her adult life has been divided between Montana and New Mexico, both imbued by deep, open western spaces that have inspired generations of artists for the quality of light, spiritual renewal and experiential freedom. Since moving to New Mexico in close proximity of the Mexican border, her sun-drenched color palette took a noticeable shift towards warmer, vibrant and emotive hues: picante reds, mango yellows and turquoise blues.

Concurrent with her recent retirement from an illustrious teaching career and studio practice, this retrospective exhibition and attendant catalogue is timely, creating a summation of Amanda Jaffe's lifelong commitment to her art. Having known the artist since her years in Montana (where she still resides part-time), there is a remarkable consistency and clarity of vision in her style, subject matter and glazes, threading together four decades of creative excellence. From her mixed-media installations to public art and her ongoing investigations of nature in low relief, Amanda Jaffe has producing an enduring body of work that mirrors her affinities to the natural world and our place within it.

Jaffe found her artistic voice during the turbulent era of the counter culture movement, the Vietnam War and the rising awareness of feminism. In graduate school and the early years of her professional career, the craft field witnessed an explosive period where innovation and change trumped past traditions. She was among a handful of ceramists back in the late 1970s that created mixed-media environments and installations at a time when single object making dominated the field. Ken Price's *Happy's Curios* (1972-1977) and Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* (1974-1979) are

exemplary of this era in which Jaffe came into artistic maturity. Now, the multiplicity of objects is de rigueur in the contemporary art world.

Jaffe, like many other post-modernists, looked at a variety of sources from Roman and Byzantine mosaics in Italy to Islamic tiles in Spain and North Africa. Her melding of brilliant colors, bas relief tiles and sculptures with crisp interlacing designs and carving were also found in the works by artists in the Pattern and Decoration (P&D) art movement, which flourished in the 1970's and 1980's. One of its practitioners (<http://www.artnet.com/galleries/dc-moore-gallery/artist-joyce-kozloff/>) Joyce Kozloff, primarily known as a painter, also produced ceramic tile for public art projects and room-sized environments.

Her first major work in this format *Patterned Space* (1980), is a scrim of floating bleached white fish swimming in an imaginary current with striated layers of rock forms and a parade of felines. Creating an illusionary surrealistic space within the darkened walls, the upper level of rocks viewed against the contrasting background creates a constellation of pattern and form, unifying the multitude of elements to a whole as well as orchestrating a rhythmic movement throughout the environment. *Scenes and Patterns* (1981), continues this investigation by using a system of overlapping grids; while the viewer moves through the installation space, their perspectives shift from a wall of salmon-hued cats to the more austere white wolves. The domesticity of the cats juxtaposed with their wild cousins provides an ongoing dialogue in Jaffe's work speaking about of the anxiety in the natural world, reflecting on society's angst.

Her early childhood years spent on California's Monterey Peninsula informed her interest in water, a recurrent theme in her work. Languid pools of water in saturated hues of blues and verdant greens offer a respite from the frenetic nature of everyday life. The artist speaks about the "soothing" qualities of water. Commencing in 2002, the artist embarked on her *Garden of Pools* series, commingling the aqueous with floral motifs. *New Leaves*, 2002, continues Jaffe's familiar miniature tile format with a tri-rectilinear blueprint; a faceted water border framing an inset of flower buds with the central panel comprised of a deep midnight blue background and turquoise floral motif. The telescopic perspective juxtaposed with bright, contrasting colors is typical of early 15th-century miniature illumination; source material

for the artist.

Turbulent Ocean IV (2002), is a frothier version than New Leaves; the churning outer edging contrast with the latticed floral ornamentation against a contrasting yellow backdrop.

“As I sit and look out at my garden I am taken in my mind to ... the pleasure derived by being in the garden. This is my hope for my images of nature; that they too can transport the viewer to that meditative place.” Nature abounds in Jaffe's Illuminated Pages series, her garden's bounty exploding in a torrent of peppers, chilies, pears, flowers and leaves. The most ordinary objects are singled out for contemplation, their harmony of color and design reflecting the peaceful mind that created them.

Kayak for Eddie (2008), tells a tragic tale put right by contemplation. “In this piece,” the artist relates, “a kayak is tossed by a rough ocean. It tells the story of an experience Eddie had following the death of his mother while visiting the coast of Maine. Eddie traveled by kayak to an island in the ocean. For him, the act of paddling a kayak while mourning his mother's death was a powerful and momentous experience.” The flowers stowed aboard in kayak exude a positive and creative response in the face of imminent turmoil.

Spanning decades, Jaffe's subjects have consistently created a tension between the sheer beauty of nature and the predatory instincts of the animal world. Masterful in her use of asymmetrical patterning, the works speak of regeneration, the cyclical rhythm in nature and life itself. Aiming to inspire contemplation or to make a statement about the imponderable harmonies of an ordered universe, Amanda Jaffe's small-scaled ceramics provide a microcosmic vantage into a larger cosmos.

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