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Art review: 'Los Angeles Museum of Ceramic Art' at ACME

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Los Angeles does not have a Museum of Ceramic Art.

And it doesn't need one. (Though not for the reasons usually trotted out.)

In a time dominated by overspecialized niche marketing and an increasingly splintered public, what we need is a more cosmopolitan way of thinking about art. Rather than treating various media — painting, sculpture and so on — as worlds unto themselves, it is more interesting, inspiring and fun to witness and ponder what happens when these forms interact.

The answer is almost anything. And that's exactly what happens at "Los Angeles Museum of Ceramic Art," a rollicking and provocative 24-artist exhibition of more than 150 pieces, nearly all made over the last year, at ACME. Organized by artists Roger Herman, whose paintings are currently on view at Jancar Gallery, and Monique van Genderen, the "Museum" gleefully dispenses with hoary ideas of artistic purity.

Tidiness, tastefulness and pretention also fall by the wayside. Playfulness predominates, as does the promiscuous intermingling of art and craft, silliness and seriousness, design and décor. See-for-yourself pragmatism is the show's modus operandi. It pays off in



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spades, leaving visitors with the freedom of DIY discovery.

The vast majority of pieces are made by artists who work in a variety of media, mixing diverse materials in singularly odd objects and jumping from form to format, howsoever they choose.



Twenty big pots by Herman welcome food, drink and flowers. Landscapes, portraits and still lifes cover their wildly glazed exteriors, along with abstract patterns and bits of text. Herman's muscular vessels occupy a towering pair of see-through cabinets, which also function as room dividers, standup sculptures and two-sided paintings with rearrangeable compositions. Van Genderen uses fired clay and glazes to make lyrical abstractions that look just like paintings until you look very closely.

Her largest, titled "Broken Plate Painting," is a whimsical riff on Julian Schnabel's early works, a kinder and gentler and far more ethereal rendition of his ham-fisted mosaics. Michael Reafsnyder's four serpentine mishmashes of clay slabs stand out for their super-saturated palettes and freakish color combinations. Their fusion of Baroque pyrotechnics and innocent delight is ludicrous and satisfying.

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Erik Otsea's matte black forms make understatement speak volumes. Each of his 10 tabletop pieces is too lumpy to be menacing but too weird to be comforting. All that's certain is that it's hard to pull your eyes from them.

Other highlights include Christopher Miles' potent totems; Eika Aoshima's endearing figurines; Anna Sew Hoy's post-apocalyptic tumbleweeds; Danny First's evocative faces; Shoshi Kanokohata's tipsy goblets; Rebecca Morris' casual lanterns; David Korty's re-jiggered wind chimes; and Kelly Breslin's scatological wall sculptures.

There may not be something for everyone in "Los Angeles Museum of Ceramic Art." But there's more than immediately meets the eye and lots that resonates long after you leave.

-- David Pagel