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Playing with Fire

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Risk and experimentation drive ~~the ceramic works of artist~~ Reinaldo Sanguino

[BYLINE]

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When New York-based artist Reinaldo Sanguino entered art school in his native Venezuela, his intention was to become a painter. But ~~it as with most art curriculums, he was required to take courses in other media. It~~ was there, during his rendezvous with ceramics, that his artistic trajectory took a radical turn.

Though Sanguino's pots ~~may do~~ look painterly, he says emphatically, "I'm a true ceramist. I am devoted to the medium. The material I'm using is glazes, not paint. I'm not trying to emulate brushstrokes or anything that's connected to painting. As images they might look very painterly, but in my process, I'm not interested in anything having to do with painting."

Primarily, Sanguino's almost religious conversion to clay from paint had to do with a trio of basic elements: three-dimensionality, tactility and unpredictability. "There's a different space I

have to tackle that has nothing to do with two-dimensionality,” he [saysexplains](#). Somehow the flat surface of a canvas was less alluring, perhaps because of the way it removes the viewer from the full sensorial experience of an object. Painting is not meant to be touched, putting distance between the art and the one who is experiencing it. Paintings also freeze images and the span of hours, days, months required for their creation; it fixes them in a way that [make_s](#) them static.

Conversely, we can approach and interact with Sanguino’s work from 360 degrees and from above—sculpturally, in other words. But that is not an end in itself. That’s where tactility comes in. “My work is very physical,” he observes. “I want to *feel* all that texture.” That is why Sanguino often mixes “chicken grit” (a crushed stone so called because it is often added to poultry feed) and why, he says, “My preference is to have variation between matte and texture. If you run your hand over them, you’re going to find yourself experiencing various textures.”

Lastly, there is the excitement of risk in what Sanguino defines as “that mysterious aspect of ceramics. I’ve been doing this for many years, so I know generally how glazes will behave in the kiln. But even so, anything can happen in there. You cannot have full control, which has kept me doing this work.”

All of this, of course, informs his love of the materiality of clay itself, something he experienced in a workshop taught by the legendary [Paul \(or Peter?\) Voulkos](#) that he attended. “It was incredible to see his connection with clay,” [says-recalls](#) Sanguino. “It’s something that has

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stayed with me forever.” Other clay artists he admires include American craft potter Warren MacKenzie—who encouraged him to come to the U.S. and to attend the Haystack Mountain School of Crafts in Deer Isle, Maine—as well as Japanese-American ceramic sculptor Akio Takamori and figurative ceramic sculptor Rudy Autio (he attended another workshop taught by both men at Peters Valley School of Craft in New Jersey).

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Sanguino’s current body of work includes wheel-thrown vases and stools, as well as larger, more sculptural pieces hand-built from slabs of clay. All involve multiple layering of glazes, a minimum of three firings and, often, five (especially those that require metallic glazes). It is labor-intensive and, also, emotionally taxing. “Everybody thinks it’s so much fun,” he laughs. “But it takes so much out of me just to start.” All the work is spontaneous—no sketches, no testing of glazes, no preconceived notions.

Of course, Sanguino’s art has evolved over the years. The latest series he’s producing out of his Long Island City studio consists of collaborations with various friends outside traditional visual art circles, including a florist and a gym coach who does needlework and knitting on the side. “It’s a completely original way of working because I have no way of knowing what is happening,” he explains. “Some of it feels almost dangerous.”

Sanguino’s work can be seen at The Future Perfect gallery in New York. The gallery will also be showing his work at Design Shanghai in November and Design Miami in December.

The Future Perfect, thefutureperfect.com

