



At Ken Price's 2013 retrospective at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, my companions and I (all full-grown adults) dared each other to reach a finger inside the black openings of his colorful glazed vessels. The voids, so impossibly matte and inky, beckoned a touch to determine if they were real or just an illusion. The ceramics of Kathy Butterly, who counts Price as an influence, are equally seductive to the eyes and hands. But where Price played with depth as a trick, Butterly uses it to expand the amount of painstaking detail in her sensuous pieces.

For "Thought Presence," Butterly tried moving away from the explicit bodily references of her previous work toward open ended organic abstraction. Yet her delight in the corporeal, and in the more feminine aspects of décor, channeled itself through her ceramics' bulges, twists and orifices, all of which were heightened by her vibrant glazes. She uses unspecified commercial vessels to create her plaster molds, into which she pours, then manipulates, wet clay. The resulting porcelain forms – all less than twelve inches high – often bear a resemblance to fashion accessories such as vintage handbags and hats, albeit squished and contorted.

The objects nooks, crannies, and spindly arms provide ample space for the artists' rich color treatment. Sometimes fired as many as thirty times, they bear layers of variously crackled and smooth finishes, ribbons of glaze, and passages both roughhewn and carefully wrought. "You have to work with the material, it is both luscious and forgiving," said the artist about porcelain. "If it cracks, I have to go with the result." Confetti-esque textures of mustard and vermillion adorned the

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top of *Flux* (all works 2018). The form calls to mind a crushed fez. It is a complex thing, with an olive green base that supports a folded yellow middle connected to a white crown, smeared with celadon. It feels like some fantastical dessert from some supernatural patisserie. The sweetness continued with Baked Sale – a mouthwatering pastel concoction whose belly is blown out, striped with black and enhanced with a high gloss interior of kinky pink and skeins of cobalt blue. I stood on tiptoe to peek inside and was rewarded with a juicy blob of paint at the center, like a freshly chewed wad of Dubble Bubble gum in Very Cherry. *Lip Service*, with its hunter green semi-matte glaze, resembled the silhouette of a 1960's bucket bag. Its folds pucker as a frowning mouth would. With the precision of a pastry chef, Butterly has carefully applied pearl-like drops of paint along its edges. Its stately character makes its goldenrod insides, also swirled with cobalt, all the more surprising. The artist continually plays with balance and proportion, adding slim bases to many of the pieces that called to mind chic, squared-off sandals or miniature cake stands.

A side room displayed works on paper for which the artist poured layers of vibrant nail polish on the pages of her own exhibition catalogues, producing a psychedelically marbled effect. Like space-age volcanoes, or preliminary versions of Lynda Benglis's neon pour paintings, they attest to her expertise in color and texture. (It also helps that she studied painting as an undergraduate, before a visit from ceramicist Viola Frey changed everything). In *Work Pearls*, a delicate strand of multicolored beads was affixed to the page; on several other pieces, she collaged strips of paper to mimic her vessels' nonfunctional handles. Everything in the photos was obscured except for her trademark architectural bases. For some sculptors, such works would read as mere sketches. In Butterly's hands, they reveal the pleasure of gestures, when mind and body work to gather to make magic.