



A Review by Janet Koplos

PLACE/SETTING, SAM CHUNG'S INSTALLATION IN THE Jane Hartsook Gallery, consisted of one large low platform occupied by 16 arrangements of biomorphic-shaped plates, bowls and cups around the edge and seven vase-and-plate arrangements in the middle. I wonder if there is some significance to the numbers, but at least the platform is comfortably proportional to the gallery, whose domestic detailing (mouldings, fireplace, tall windows)

support the sense of the installation as a communal festive occasion.

All the dishes are soft white. Their narrow dark-coloured edges are interrupted by two hyphen-like spots of light, cheery colours – orange, gold and green – that code the position of the stacked elements. Green is always on the base platter, gold on the next level and orange on the tallest pot, whether it is a tea bowl or a soup bowl. Only the tea bowls are round; they resemble proper china teacups but lack handles. My interpretation of the shapes of these dishes is altered by the vases, which feature striking black outlines on protrusions that might serve as multiple, eccentrically placed lug handles on these largest upright forms: they resemble cartoon-like cloud motifs and suggest that the shapes of the plates and bowls are not just generally biomorphic but continue this cloud theme.

Everything looks related and all is reasonably utilitarian but not restricted in function. The plates that hold the tea bowls are without a saucer ring, so they





All photos are of the exhibition Place/Setting

could just as easily take a salad. What this means is that although the groupings are defined (each set has an incised number on the bottom), arrangement and purpose is up to the user, to be determined in an aesthetic exercise before the first bit of food is placed.

The arrangement of multiple inset elements has many referents, from fancy china services to Bobby Silverman's concentric bowls to Asian dishes with their varied forms. The smooth off-white surfaces link to the first, the quantities of parts to the second and the idiosyncrasy and subtlety to the third. The cloud motif, of course, recalls Japanese use of clouds in screens, where they mark space and transitions between activities (place and time). But the clouds on the vases, with their graphic outline, hint at cartoon figures similar to those of Keith Haring. This lightness of mood emphasises the playfulness of the whole and relaxes the character of the upright forms, which evoke ancient Chinese pottery and bronzes, broad-shouldered and long-necked, formal and conventional.

It is notable that the objects are presented low, perhaps in reference to Asian eating positions but also making the standing viewer look down at the outlines of the dishes, which do not so much repeat the cloud drawings as gently echo them. It is also possible to read the concentric shapes as contour lines on a map and this idea is consistent with Chung's title, which could encompass a larger sense of place, a topography. In his exhibition statement, Chung links the cleanness of the forms to Scandinavian

design, familiar to him through a 2005 stint at a Danish ceramics centre and the Asian allusions to his Korean heritage. The intimate exchange over a meal is in any case an identifying and bonding experience. The installation is motivated by Sam Chung's own intellectual and emotional concerns, but it remains open enough to be accessible to any viewer – and to be the basis of a fabulous dinner party. It is wonderful to see a conceptual work of ceramics that does not abandon function.

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