

# The NEW YORK Sun

April 2007

## ART IN BRIEF

## KATHY BUTTERLY: Between a Rock & a Soft Place

*Tibor de Nagy*

Calling her 10th New York solo exhibition of ceramics "Between a Rock and a Soft Place," the title of one of her pieces, pinpoints several key elements of Kathy Butterly's art: wit, subversion, hominess, materiality, and a sense that art revolves around inherent contradictions.

Ms. Butterly turns on its head the issue of whether traditional clay technology is art or craft: It is clearly art, because her vessels are unusable and demand rarified attention, rather than the insinuation among our environment of familiar things that is the hallmark of craft. And yet her work is wickedly crafty, deriving a good deal of its humor and charm from ingenious, unlikely, and overtly ingenious uses and abuses of materials.

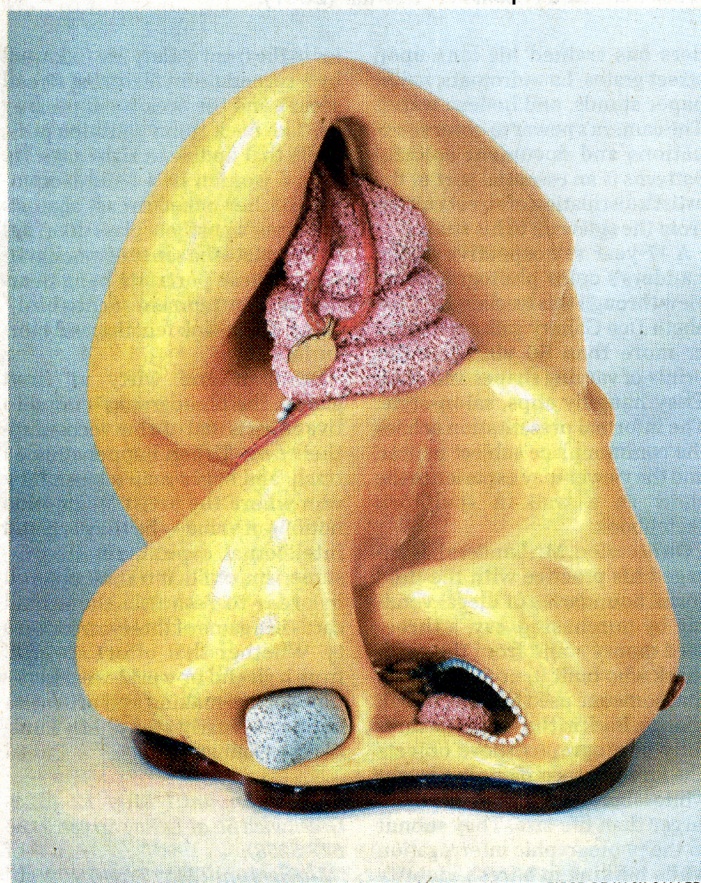
She loves to collide the contrastive textures and surfaces of earthenware and porcelain, having the rough penetrate the smooth almost indecently. In the title work, for instance, folds of voluptuously smooth golden yellow

low porcelain create cavelike openings in which are lodged a porous blue-gray earthenware pebble, a stack of soft pink forms, a necklace, and pearly teeth-like beads.

Each piece is around 7 inches by 7 inches – larger than usual for Ms. Butterly but still diminutive. They tap sources high and low: a Chinese scholar's rock, cartoon animation, modernist abstract sculpture, Meissen figurines. The essential feature of her work is moltenness: The sheen and gloss of porcelain is exploited for its sense of fluidity, motion, and meltdown. But this is almost arrogantly an illusion, because, as everyone knows, the demanding materials can only hold up to their kinky convolutions if structured with impeccable craft. She has scant regard for notions such as truth to materials and finding form through process. You could say her aesthetics are torn between the rock of such modernist sculptural orthodoxies and the soft place of mannerism in which art is all effect – playful, tricky, decadent.

*David Cohen*

*Until May 19 (724 Fifth Ave. at 57th Street, 212-262-5050).*



TIBOR DE NAGY GALLERY

Kathy Butterly, 'Between a Rock and a Soft Place' (2006-07).