

Art in America

Kathy Butterly at Franklin Parrasch

Kathy Butterly's tiny ceramic vessels are abstract and intensely associative, most often evoking aspects of the body. They recall the convolutions of George Ohr's pots and Robert

Arneson's mugging faces and twisted figures, as well as the finesse of Adrian Saxe's gew-gaw-ornamented vases. Her playful tone echoes these predecessors, but with a coyness that seems distinctly feminine.

Size is one of the reasons. The 14 works in the show, all dated 1999, ranged from 5 to 6½ inches tall. Butterly's forms were once compared with cups, but that word seems too limited now. They have elaborate feet that often resemble the carved stands on which Chinese ceramics or scholar's rocks are displayed; rising up from the base is a central cylinder as soft and curvy as folds of skin, surmounted by some sort of constructed or layered cap. Together these parts establish a happily chaotic contemporary inclusiveness of reference, as if descended from Rauschenberg's accumulative imagery and kin to Christian Schumann's bright, weightless cartoon figures. The smoothest and pinkest works, such as *Peek*, also inspire thoughts of Mae West's good-humored voluptuousness. The diminutive forms can make imposing statements.

Butterly declares a figural reference in some of her titles, such as *Soprano*, and the influ-

ence of children's playthings in one like *Nerfana*. But generally a viewer needs no clues to enjoy the visual experience of these works. One's eyes slide down the syrupy blue contours of *Inward/Outward*, interrupted by two protruding flat-top "shelves." Atop this piece is a cap that appears to be crocheted with strands of clay—impossible!—which fade from orange at the center knob through gold and yellow to near white, and then warm up to orange again toward the tips of a hanging fringe. The whole is inexplicable yet engaging. In *Swimmin' Hole*, Butterly builds a little landscape at the top of her twisting cylinder. It features a rounded plane of blue-green and three stacked Arpian curved forms that suggest a Deco diving platform, all this on a cylinder graced with gloppy yellow pendants like absurd multiple uvulas.

Butterly's glaze colors are exquisitely controlled, and the delicacy of her workmanship is extraordinary. Besides the "crochet" there are pearly toothlike petals, raspy surfaces like loofa and other unusual textures. Pleasure without predictability is the happy effect in these tiny whimsical objects that radiate a vitality far beyond their proportions.

—Janet Koplos

Kathy Butterly: *Inward/Outward*, 1999, porcelain, earthenware, glaze, 5½ by 2½ by 2½ inches; at Franklin Parrasch. (Review on p. 124.)

