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Medium

Tender Pricks and Present Edges: Elisa D’Arrigo and Cornelia Schulz

by Julia Couzens

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Using paint and clay, Elisa D’Arrigo and Cornelia Schulz bring us to the primordial, basic tipping point between knowing and feeling. They both speak the language of negotiation. Tender, goofy, reckless, and wantonly abandoned, their affecting works invoke humankind’s poignant awkwardness in the world and invite us to think about how we relate to the physical, mental, and spiritual hurdles obstructing our path.

D’Arrigo’s modestly scaled biomorphic ceramic sculptures vogue postures of collapse and provisional support. Their hand-built sagging, curved, and folded shapes evoke torsos or bodies caught between balance and breakdown—those quavering moments where we either get a grip or lose it completely. These are forms on the brink, or as D’Arrigo speaks of their condition, “just paused.”



Elisa D’Arrigo | Both Sides Now 2 | 2021 glazed ceramic | 8 x 9.5 x 7 inches

“Both Sides Now 2,” 2021, is a small, mottled, glaze-bespattered and dappled globule seemingly huddled or hunkered down within itself. A tubular form evoking a sort of arm, extends off the shoulder to the ground in what appears to be a propping gesture of support or leverage in the struggle to sit up. The work pricks tenderness, calling to mind intimate encounters with private rest and recuperation interrupted. “From There to Here,” 2021, suggests misguided aspiration by way of a drooping, outsized, and rudely bulbous appendage unceremoniously plopped down to the floor. The work’s bearing resembles conditions of collapse, exhaustion, or defeat. It is funny, ridiculous, hapless, and utterly endearing. Such provisional stances imbue D’Arrigo’s work with quiet humanity and speak to the body in the humble, off-guarded ways of empathy, embarrassment, and chagrin.



Elisa D’Arrigo | From There to Here | 2021 glazed ceramic | 6 x 8 x 9 inches



Cornelia Schulz | Lip Synch | 2021 | oil on canvas stretched on wood | 19.5 x 12 inches

Schulz distills D’Arrigo’s evocative configuration into precipitous chunks of scraped, slathered, and enfolded paint. It literally embodies the gravitational pull and weight’s consequences to which D’Arrigo’s work refers. Encountering Schulz’s paintings one falls face down into the continuous present of circulating pigment struggling with its edges and working against collapse, becoming storyboards of vigilant painterly interrogation. Kenneth Baker speaks of Schulz’s painting as proffers “to reflect back to us our capacity to originate our own actions: its fluctuations of confidence, energy and luck, its intimate idiosyncrasy.” In works such as “Lip Synch,” 2021, and “Partial Eclipse,” 2021 with their careening, skidding clots of paint are nothing if not close to the body vacillations on how we can fall all over ourselves, participate in our own precariousness, and become willing to dismantle what we know.



Cornelia Schulz | Partial Eclipse| 2021 | oil on canvas stretched on wood | 18.5 x 12 inches

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