

NIGHT GALLERY

2276 E. 16th Street, Los Angeles, California 90021

nightgallery.ca

James Trainor, "Up and Coming: Through the Medium of Clay, Sculptor Brie Ruais Lays Herself Bare,"
October, 24, 2014

FEATURED BY ARTSY

Up and Coming: Through the Medium of Clay, Sculptor Brie Ruais Lays Herself Bare

 ARTSY EDITORIAL
10 DAYS AGO

Among the first ceramic works I ever saw by [Brie Ruais](#) was a small collection of simple vessels, an assortment of glazed pinch pots, earthenware jars, and oversize bowls. At first glance they suggested a succession of beginner pottery lessons gone deeply reckless, forlorn, and melancholic. Simple, archetypal forms, sagging, askew, slowly surrendering their stance as functional objects—fruit bowls without bottoms, punctured pitchers with mismatched handles, they bore awkwardly painted messages, like notes scribbled on composition book paper in class, written in haste, to be crumpled and tossed through the air: "Wow You're Amazing" gushed one, "Don't Worry" assured another thoroughly messed-up bowl haphazardly stained and battered, "Finally" uttered a torn, dented and collapsing vessel, barely holding onto whatever original form it had once taken. There is both slapstick poignancy and psychic unease to Ruais' "Affirmation Pots," as she calls this perennial series. The title references the vast wasteland of sentimental truisms exchanged by friends and lovers, and which, like week-old New Year's resolutions, permit one to simply get out of bed on a cold winter morning. Implicit in this is an awareness of the contemporary cliché of pottery making as a therapeutic, life-affirming practice for the skilled and unskilled alike. But also latent in these motley pots is the crux of Ruais' struggle with the sheer overbearing "objecthood" of sculpture—whether high or low, virtuosic or decidedly inexpert—and an indication of her imperative to demand more from the material.



Brie Ruais
"Raked Open, 132lbs", 2014
Galerie Lefebvre & fils



Brie Ruais
"Torn Hole, 132lbs (Blue)", 2014
Galerie Lefebvre & fils

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For 32-year-old Ruais—who hails from Southern California and landed in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, after receiving her MFA from Columbia University in 2011—clay is an unlikely path to safety or self-improvement. Rather it is a way to lay herself bare, put her foot down, and open up the limits of an internal geography undreamt of before the rough, hard work of making the raw matter reveal itself. The great majority of Ruais' clay works assume the scale, and, more crucially, the mass, of her own body. More often than not, using three basic guiding parameters—an amount of clay equal to her body's weight, a specific set of self-imposed instructions, and no tools others than herself—she abuses her material while disabusing it of any illusions of misplaced politesse, serially slamming, punching, punting, smearing, flaying, pummeling, kneading, pinching, ripping, pleating, gouging, bashing, folding and coercing her forms into existence. It is precisely this hard-won, repetitive, labor-intensive process that equals the ultimate form, or multiplicity of forms, fraught things born of intentionality and quasi-athletic endurance that become archeological records of a particular body occupying a moment in time and claiming a certain fluid territory in space. Like her artistic forebears in this confluence of body, matter, labor and a relationship to duration and space—figures like [Ana Mendieta](#), [Mierle Laderman Ukeles](#), [Bruce Nauman](#)—Ruais willingly accepts the sometimes discomfiting consequences of these self-imposed tasks. The things left behind are documents capturing a set of material and emotional circumstances, a living and breathing series of imprinted gestures by turns forceful and tender, deeply vulnerable and intimately resolute.

Fresh from a show at [Marc Selwyn Fine Art](#) in Los Angeles and a two-week summer residency at the Shandaken Project in the Catskill Mountains—in which she turned the entire floor of her small wooden cabin into a makeshift loom, daily fluid territory in space. Like her artistic forebears in this confluence of body, matter, labor and a relationship to duration and space—figures like [Ana Mendieta](#), [Mierle Laderman Ukeles](#), [Bruce Nauman](#)—Ruais willingly accepts the sometimes discomfiting consequences of these self-imposed tasks. The things left behind are documents capturing a set of material and emotional circumstances, a living and breathing series of imprinted gestures by turns forceful and tender, deeply vulnerable and intimately resolute.

Fresh from a show at [Marc Selwyn Fine Art](#) in Los Angeles and a two-week summer residency at the Shandaken Project in the Catskill Mountains—in which she turned the entire floor of her small wooden cabin into a makeshift loom, daily expanding and extending her scrap fabric weavings into a wall-to-wall rug that she could slowly occupy and inhabit—Ruais returns to clay in her current show at Lefebvre & Fils in Paris (on view through December 20, 2014). Entitled "Dugout," a term that refers to the laborious process of hollowing out a log for a primitive canoe and other raw excavations of natural matter (firepits, peat bogs, animal traps, shallow graves), the exhibition will include works marked by the archaic movements and gestures involved in digging, removing, and displacing a mass with one's bare hands. Whether working at a scale referencing external topographies or internal landscapes, Ruais' material artifacts are deeply human in all their apparent flaws and the capacity to endure the indignities of entropy, the laws of physics.

Back on her shelf of household anomalies, "You Can Make It" proclaimed one recent cracked pot from the "Affirmation" series with a peppy aphorism and very little else going for it. However groundless such a promise may seem, ultimately who among us can decide it isn't true?

—James Trainor

"Dugout" is on view at Galerie Lefebvre & Fils Oct. 22–Dec. 20, 2014.

Photographs by Alex John Beck for Artzy



Brie Ruais
"Corner Push, 132 lbs (Metallic)", 2014
Galerie Lefebvre & Fils

