Extended Family
The School for American Craft has many quality programs and a very fine faculty. Until recently, Richard Hirsch had been a mainstay of the ceramics program but now he has gone on to be named Distinguished Professor Emeritus, and he is also the featured artist in this new installment of "Makers and Mentors" at the Rochester Contemporary Art Center (137 East Avenue). Along with Mr. Hirsch for this show are a select group of former students who have studied with Rick at the Rochester Institute of Technology, and this group makes for a very diverse and professional looking exhibition.

When you enter the galleries you are greeted by some striking forms by Minkyu Lee, and they feature geometric directness and tactile, often colorful surfaces. These forms are like looking into the inside of a geode - a natural mineral occurrence - that is often described as a hollow stone filled with the crystals that grew inside. Minkyu Lee's works are large simple shapes that look like someone took a giant bite out of them, and as a viewer you are drawn in by your own curiosity - what is it I am seeing?
Richard Hirsch is known mainly for his vessels, that have a chunky, rugged look, and his contribution to this exhibition (including the selection of the other artists) is a set of six encaustic paintings along the wall of the gallery that allows the viewer to make some comparisons and ponder the process that brought about this new direction in Mr. Hirsch’s artwork. What causes an artist with over forty years of experience with clay to switch over to a two dimensional "painted" surface? Well, it must offer some lingering challenge. I know in my own paintings, in order to understand the structures better, I often sculpted low relief tiles of terra-cotta to give my hands a new form of knowledge, and I suspect that is what Richard Hirsch is up to. You can catch up with a new book about his work called "WITH FIRE", a Life Between Chance and Design.

Robin Whiteman in "Makers and Mentors"

Towards the back of the show are figurative works by Robin Whiteman that have the impact of a talisman, almost prehistoric animistic doll like figurines. There is a unique combination of animal and human amalgamation going on in these intimate sculptures. Robin Whiteman said she has been attracted to using clay as her medium since she was 12 years old. Her feel for the medium is very self assured, and convincing.

Some other artists in this show stood out including colorful works by Liz Howe, Hojeong Jeong, and Joanna Poag, who gave an artist talk the day after the opening which I found enlightening. Joanna is a recent
R.I.T. graduate and she sees herself as searching for an equilibrium in her artwork in which she finds correlations to music and structures of the body (maybe ribs?). She has one large work hanging in the show (untitled) that is first designed on the computer and then hand built from coils of clay and then fired.

Liz Howe works in "Makers and Mentors"

at RoCo

I was speaking with Robin Cass, who is presently Associate Dean in the College of Imaging Arts and Sciences (C.I.A.S.) at R.I.T. I mentioned to her on opening night that her glass works remind me of the glass flowers at Harvard University and she replied that science including botany was part of her family pursuits as she grew up. The glass flowers deserve a visit if you are in the Boston area. Stop in to the Harvard Museum of Natural History and ask for the Blaschka Glass Models of Plants.
Robin Cass and Bill Klingensmith
"foundlings" a wall ensemble
  glass, felt, wood

The "foundlings" is the name of Robin's show in the Lab Space at RoCo and it was a collaboration with the designer Bill Klingensmith. Frosted and clear glass sometimes with a metallic patina caught my attention as I enjoyed the symmetry and the organic nature of Robin's project which she said has been ongoing for over a dozen years.

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