



Anders Ruhwald  
Marie Torbensdatter Hermann



Anders Ruhwald  
***You will see***

Thursday, March 3  
to Saturday, April 9, 2011

Anders Ruhwald, *Cone, Version 3*, 2010, glazed earthenware, 30" x 17.5" x 17.75"

*Conditioned Lamp, Version 2*, 2010, glazed earthenware, wood, lampshade, metal tubing, electrical components, 71" x 30" x 22.1"

*Detail, Version 1*, 2010, glazed earthenware, 16.5" x 32.5" x 3"

*Section, Version 2*, 2010, glazed earthenware over plywood, 37.25" x 37.25" x 6.6"



Anders Ruhwald, *Piece of Furniture #3*, 2010, glazed earthenware with Fibreglas markers, 37.25" x 20" x 12"



Anders Ruhwald, *Cone, Version 5*, 2010, glazed earthenware, 37" x 17.25" x 17"  
*Barrier/Frame, Version 1*, 2010, glazed earthenware, 22" x 34" x 1.75"



Anders Ruhwald, *Breakdown, Version 2*, 2010, glazed earthenware, 12.2" x 11" x 1", 19.3" x 7.9" x 4.4"  
*Conditioned Lamp, Version 1*, 2010, glazed earthenware, wood, lampshade, metal tubing, electrical components, 73.6" x 23.6" x 34.25"

## Object Relations

Gertrud and Otto Natzler, Lucie Rie and Hans Coper, Bernard and Janet Leach: in the recent history of ceramics, there have been several significant partnerships or close working collaborations. Now there is a new pair to add to the pantheon: the young Danish-born, U.S.-based couple Anders Ruhwald and Marie Torbensdatter Hermann, who met in London at the Royal College of Art, where they both earned their M.F.A. in ceramics (albeit in different cohorts), and married in 2009. While maintaining ties to London and Denmark, they now work from studios in the northern suburbs of Detroit: Marie in Pontiac, and Anders at Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills, where he is an artist-in-residence and head of ceramics. This exhibition at the Gahlberg Gallery is the first time they have exhibited together, and, if it's anything to go by, each one is on the cusp of a new phase in their work.

Marie's work is at the intimate scale of the hand-held and to date has dealt primarily with recognizable vessel forms. It commands quiet contemplation, a beholding of objects presented in frontal or aerial tableaux, on purpose-made shelves or floor surfaces. She enjoys multiples and the power of amassing objects with very slightly variations. Her color palette is typically pale, delicate, bordering on not-there-at-all, in the realm of the visible spectrum reserved for fondant icing and sugared almonds. Lately, however, she has allowed herself to break out of the smooth, symmetrical perfection of her thrown pieces with some exciting new hand-built forms that seem almost the work of a different artist. More on that, later on.

Anders has for some years been exploring the liminal zone between sculpture, architecture, furniture and ceramics. In his installations, multiple pieces are carefully positioned, like props, within a space, or secreted within sub-chambers therein, demarcated by ribbon curtains — sensuous, semi-transparent enclosures. His forms typically engage their host spaces like species of seasonal bugs: attached, limpet-like, to some otherwise unremarkable patch of wall, clinging to an uppermost corner, leaning against the wall, dangling from the ceiling, perched precariously on a forest of spindly legs. Never a shrinking violet, Anders will happily anoint his works in acid greens, sour yellows, lurid purples, as if reveling in the now-unfashionable hues of a half-remembered 1970s — the decade he was born.

In his most recent body of work, however, the color palette is brighter than before, even garish: orange, white and black (with a tiny bit of green, for the lamp stand). Referencing the livery of the German Autobahn (and, for Ivy Leaguers, of Princeton University) this is a palette associated with road works, cordoning-off, emergency traffic situations. That ubiquitous symbol of diversion, re-routing and disruption — the traffic cone — is here reproduced in clay, rather than *bounce-back-if-bumped-into* PVC. And not just in fluorescent orange: also in black, which takes the form toward the witch's hat, and white, although the white glaze (similar to one used by Lucy Rie), chosen for its tendency to pinhole, further distances these pieces from the sheen of their mass-produced plastic precursor.

Anders' formal vocabulary by now includes several signature elements. The *super-smooth surface* with practically an automotive sheen, thanks to hours of diligent sanding. The *hollow frame* or *grille* suspended in mid-air via fine white string, almost levitating. The *dangling detail*, perhaps a fabric tassel or, in this show, a solid "drip" of clay, like a molten candle drip caught in mid-descent, or a blob of runny glaze. *Stripes, candy-cane supports* and *ribbon curtains*. *Blips of illumination*, perhaps an electric light bulb or wax candle, alluding to a time before the ubiquitous glimmer of the computer screen. The gridded surface, seen in pale aqua blue in his solo show, *You In Between*, at Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (MIMA) in England; here in orange, black and white, suggestive of a game board, a puzzle, or an airport warning sign. Oversized and pixilated, perhaps it's a three-dimensional barcode of some sort, but how to scan it? To this repertoire are added amorphous molten forms, in clay, that drape themselves, like Salvador Dali's pocket watches, over the mint-humbug striped wooden bases of normal standard lamps, complete with their normal canvas shades.

I have always thought of Anders' sculptures more as dream images, elements in a private iconography, than as literal critiques or aesthetic comments on contemporary design. His pieces are utterances from a form of non-verbal speech, a language of personal symbols of the kind that makes total sense while you are sleeping but, upon waking, refuses to yield up its meaning, and yet remains powerful in its rebus-like impact. What kind of psychological space do they come from? Let's look carefully at one element that provides a clue.

Anders' hanging frames invite attention not just for looking through (toward other pieces) but as things in themselves, solid objects made of a fragile, breakable material. What is the purpose in this, other than to hint at its own precariousness, its possible collapse, fall to earth? Where is the wall into which this hinted aperture sits? Are we constantly barging through it, as we negotiate around the other pieces in the show? Space is nothing, invisible, until it is caught in the confines of a line, or circumscribed by a coil of clay. A frame hovering in mid-air becomes a signal of what else *might* be there; we cannot see it, only *sense* it. Suddenly this object casts a wider aura than its mere thickness would seem to justify.

Several of the objects in this show exude a similar quality, provoking a heightened sensitivity being in their midst or walking among them — an "on alert" state not dissimilar to the frisson of fear/rubber-necking curiosity that attends a motorway accident scene, or other zone delimited by traffic cones. Anders aims deliberately for this slightly anxious state of consciousness, placing works to steer viewers through and between them, gaining different vantages as they navigate the "obstacle course."

"It's very much about investigating the relationship between the audience and the objects. Suddenly you have a keen awareness of yourself when confronted with the objects around you. They frame, but they also make you self-aware. The audience is tied into the grid of the objects in such a way as to implicate them in the idea of 'warning.'"

Asked in what ways they influence each other's work, Marie points out that they both come from the same part of the world, and grew up with the same aesthetic problems, the same strong attitude to design. "It's very Scandinavian, the whole idea of *Kunsthåndverk*, of function and non-function. But we deal with these ideas in very different ways. I work with more intimate functional objects, while Anders works with the table, the lamp, chairs."

I wonder whether they discuss each other's work. "Yes, we talk about it, but at different stages. I have always been very closed about my work until it's almost finished: when it's at the glaze stage, when there are actual things there. There are periods where I don't let anyone into my studio for months, then suddenly I'll feel ready to and then I'll invite people in." She pauses, reflecting on this rather exceptional stretch of time, in which she has been able to work, quietly, intently and undistracted, supported by several significant grants from Denmark and the sale of pieces through her galleries. "This is not London, so I've never had so much time in my life."

A quality of quiet serenity permeates the recent work, which brings to mind the melancholy beauty of Giorgio Morandi's still life paintings, as well as the ceramics of Gwyn Hanssen Pigott, whose luminous pale pastel porcelain "caravans" of vessels are clearly influenced by Morandi. Marie also cites Rachel Whiteread, the artist best known for her plaster and resin casts of interior architectural spaces and the "underneath" of domestic scale objects, as an inspiration.

But a surprisingly different aesthetic — organic and freeform — has recently appeared, one might even say *erupted*, in pronounced contrast to the platonic simplicity, regularity and multiplicity that have been hallmarks of her work to date. The first signs of this willful mutation appeared in *Shades of Pink*, made in

spring 2010. This is one of several shelf-mounted still lifes in which two or three forms, recognizable in their outlines and proportions as possible vessels (though their closed top surfaces deny such functionality), are placed on a cantilevered clay shelf, glazed, like the objects it supports, in a vanishingly pale shade of pink. Marie describes this tint as being "on the borderline of being a skin color, an 'embarrassed' pink, like when you're blushing."

"It's a telling association, as if these scenes are so intimate they arouse unbidden emotions, maybe not on account of the objects themselves, but of the interactions they represent: the fragile, tender, fluctuating nature of a relationship between two people, the psychic space between them, for which these objects — their calculated spacing, proximities, side-by-side versus diagonal alignments — might be the stand-ins. She thinks of these almost as stolen moments, snapshots from daily life, though at an existential rather than photographic level. "It's this notion of 'what once was,' the ghostly feel of things, the split second of something that was there, of an action — like having a cup of tea."

In *Untitled #5*, five blobby pink spheres are set on a cantilevered square shelf like frozen balls of knitting wool — irregular, carefree, mischievous in their refusal of smooth-surfaced platonic geometry. There's a sense of breathing-out at last: of Marie allowing herself to mess around, to dent and distort, adorn with dimples and furrows, rather than vanquish imperfections.

In *You will*, from the spring of 2010, a wooden shelving unit carries several dozen unique small clay "pebbles" on one shelf, each like a tiny solid cloud with its own dimples and convexities, while three more recognizably bottle/vase forms stand on the shelf above. The lower shelf operates like a sedimentary layer of embryonic idiosyncrasies from which the disciplined symmetry of the three upper forms might, in some scenario, have evolved.

The new work, with its "degraded" surfaces and gestural manipulation of the clay by hand, really took off during a summer residency in Denmark in 2010. The resulting forms have knobby cloud- or rock-like swirls and bumps, irregular contours and freeform arching shapes. In *I will*, from summer 2010, three pure white rectangular blocks lie in parallel, like bricks, except that their smooth geometric shapes are disrupted by sections in which something seems about to burst through from inside.

I ask what's triggered this unexpected departure from her formal language to date. "I have a hunch that it's not about function," she responds, "but about our *relationship* with functional objects — for example, how you hold them. It's about the motion of touch and the relation to the body. These two things got separated in my mind, and somehow I see them coming together. Sometimes when you make work, you say to yourself: 'It doesn't make sense!' But, after a week, or after a month, or three months, you see the connections. In the spring I was making the pink pieces, and in summer, the white pieces. Maybe in this show, they'll come together. 'What comes next?' — that's always the question that drives us, as artists."

— Janet Abrams, 2011

**Janet Abrams** is an artist and writer based in Minneapolis and Montreal. She received her Ph.D. in architectural history, theory and criticism from Princeton University in 1989, and her M.F.A. in ceramics from Cranbrook Academy of Art in 2010.

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Cover: Anders Ruhwald, *Detail, Version 2*, 2010, glazed earthenware, 15" x 8" x 2.2"



Anders Ruhwald  
Marie Torbensdatter Hermann





Marie Torbensdatter Hermann  
***In all my Shades of days***

Thursday, March 3  
to Saturday, April 9, 2011

Marie Torbensdatter Hermann, *We*, 2010, earthenware, 39.4" x 39.4" x 21.25"



Marie Torbensdatter Hermann, *Still night #1*, 2010, earthenware, 13.8" x 9" x 13.8"



Marie Torbensdatter Hermann, *Still night #3*, 2010, earthenware, 13.8" x 9" x 16.1"



Marie Torbensdatter Hermann, *I will*, 2010, earthenware, 39.4" x 39.4" x 21.25"

**Marie Torbensdatter Hermann** (born 1979, Copenhagen, Denmark) lives and works in Detroit and Copenhagen. She moved to London in 2000 and received a B.A. from the University of Westminster in 2003. She then worked as a studio manager for British artist Edmund de Waal from 2003-2007. In 2009, she received an M.F.A. in ceramics from the Royal College of Art in London. Solo exhibitions include *Stillness in the Glorious Wilderness* at Matin Gallery, Los Angeles; *The only thing I can think about is yellow* at Egg in London; *To the legion of the lost*, London; and *A joyful gathering of a defenceless legion*, Los Angeles. Hermann has participated in numerous group exhibitions in Denmark, Italy, China, the United States and Germany. Her work is in the collections of Statens Kunstfond, Denmark, the Jingdezhen Ceramic Art Museum in China and the Rothchild Collection in the UK. She was awarded grants from the Danish Art Foundation in 2009, Annie and Otto Johs, and the Detlefs Grant for Young Experimental Ceramic Artists in 2010. Her work has been reviewed in major publications such as *Artforum.com*, *Blueprint* and *Ceramic Review*. In 2011, she will be exhibiting at the Saatchi Gallery, London; the N'Namdi Center for Contemporary Art, Detroit; and the Denver Art Museum. She is a curator and co-director of Sixpm project space, UK, and recently was one of the jurors at the Biennale Internationale de Vallauris, France.

**Anders Ruhwald** (born 1974, Denmark) lives and works in Detroit, MI. He graduated from the Royal College of Art, UK, in 2005. Solo exhibitions include *The state of things* at Danish Museum of Art and Design, Copenhagen; *You in Between* at Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, UK; several solo gallery shows in New York, San Francisco, Chicago, Stockholm, London, Copenhagen and Brussels and numerous group exhibitions around the world. His work is represented in the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum, UK; the British Crafts Council; Detroit Institute of Arts; National Museum of Decorative Arts, Norway; National Museum of Sweden; Danish Museum of Art and Design, Denmark; New Taipei City Yingge Ceramics Museum, Taiwan; and several other public and private collections. He was awarded the Danish Art Foundation three-year working stipend this year and the Sotheby's Prize in the United Kingdom in 2007. His work has been reviewed by major publications like *The Guardian (UK)*, *Wallpaper (UK)*, *Artforum.com*, *Sculpture Magazine* and *Avenuel* (Rep. of S. Korea). Ruhwald has lectured and taught at many universities and colleges around Europe and North America and has held an associate professorship at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Currently, he is the artist-in-residence and head of the Ceramics Department at Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan.

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The Gahlberg Gallery/McAninch Arts Center would like to thank the artists, Anders Ruhwald and Marie Torbensdatter Hermann, and the writer, Janet Abrams, for their creative vision on this publication and exhibition.

Barbara Wiesen  
Director and Curator  
Gahlberg Gallery

Cover: Marie Torbensdatter Hermann,  
*Still night #2*, 2010, earthenware, 13.8" x 9" x 7.9"

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