

Review in SCULPTURE MAGAZINE

Santiago and Buenos Aires - Sofia Donovan

by María Carolina Baulo

Stuart Contemporary and Federico Towpyha Arte Contemporaneo

Sofia Donovan, a multifaceted young Argentine-born artist living in Chile, works in photography, video, painting, and sculpture. In her recent work, she has developed an interesting play between form and content, using ceramic to create amazing sculptures that carry a powerful physical presence. Donovan's works investigate the human body and its representation. Over the last couple of years, her search has emphasized the mediated body in its daily environment. A good example, according to the artist, is the body's role in medicine. Donovan questions whether the body still functions as a vehicle for experience and relations with other people or if it has been reduced to a mere object.

Over the last two years, Donovan's road has led her to imposing biomorphic glazed ceramic sculptures that highlight the constant tension between the anthropomorphic and metaphorical worlds generated by the body's formal and material aspects. These Works set up an interesting dialogue. Bodily shapes and textures interact with materials totally strange to the body itself, creating moments of doubt and ambiguity- a fundamental concept in Donovan's work- that suggest or insinuate intimate queries. Nothing is obvious; the viewer's fantasy and intellect construct the sense, and even form of these works.

Most people see organs or phallic forms, but the sexuality is more nuanced, with suggestive curves, "ins and outs" concave and convex, feminine and masculine, and full and empty pairings. Most of this effect is caused by the addition of unexpected materials into the ceramic universe; we must dig into the details to understand the whole story. Industrial materials come in and out, playing alter ego to the natural clay.

Donovan's artifice generates a symbolic structure that surrounds everything and gives the work another dimension. The interaction of opposite forces is a constant in her work, creating an atmosphere that seduces the mind. With a nod to Carl Jung, Donovan says "I'm deeply concerned about these pieces as objects of seduction, I want them to question an unknown area in the relationship of biology and technique, to [probe] through the human body to regions less common, awakening sensitive experiences full of humour and symbolic content in the spectator".

Contemporary art cries out for an audience with an educated eye, demanding intellectual activity. Defying all limits of good taste or decorum and incorporating new themes, materials, forms, and techniques, it creates infinite ways for the viewer to learn. And when the proposal not only introduces new and revolutionary ideas, but also arouses passions and emotions, art trespasses the boundaries of beauty and contemplation to become challenge. Donovan's sculptures generate an immediate attraction or repulsion, many times because of the erotic feelings they may trigger. Yet the sculptures suggest more than they reveal. Our subjective fantasies are responsible for making Donovan's insinuations stand out in a concrete way. Colour, form, size, and texture all cooperate to create an immediate reference to the human body, but even that idea is produced in the mind of the spectator. The most important key lies in the irrational response- profoundly visceral and intimate- of the viewer's body, which allows the mind to enjoy what the senses capture.