

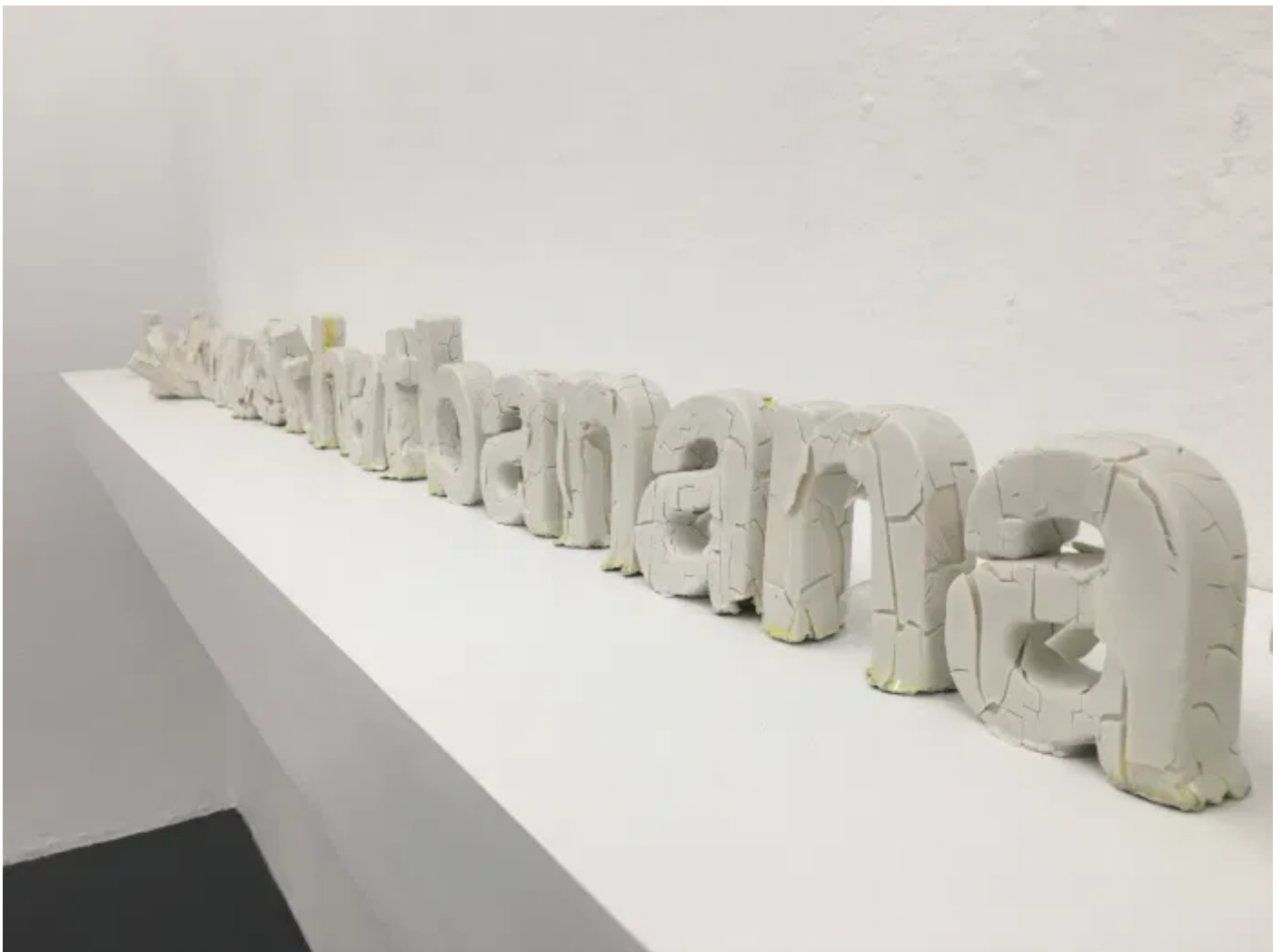
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A Contemporary Art Magazine with a Focus on the Los Angeles Art Scene

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Banana-Flavored Imagination at A-B Projects with Thomas Müller



"Where'd you get that banana?" Thomas Müller. A-B Projects. Photo Credit Evan Senn.

Banana-Flavored Imagination at A-B Projects with Thomas Müller

By Evan Senn

In the realm of contemporary fine art, ceramics often gets a bad rap, especially in L.A., where Finish Fetish still has dominion over art objects. Make it big, make it bright and make it last, right? The craft revival has been fighting the good fight for over ten years as digital dominance and a preoccupation with hi-tech has infiltrated the art world; but, the stubborn, long-lasting mediums of craft have been pushing against the mass digitization and finding popularity and resurgence in its low-tech, hands-on mastery. Thomas Müller is an L.A.-based ceramic artist that has been obsessed with language and lettering for much of his life. Born in Cape Town, South Africa and maintaining a dual citizenship in both the States and in Switzerland, language ebbs and flows with Müller; it shifts and changes, it is heard and seen, it is representative, definite yet ephemeral. "Language is ultimately magical and powerful, yet malleable and fallible. I love those contradictions and the poetry that is created," he says.

Müller has shown all over the world, but his latest endeavor ended up at a small project space in Claremont on the campus of Scripps College called A-B Projects, directed by Nicole Seisler. The exhibit, "Where'd you get that banana?" has two large pieces in it, and nothing more. A bare, small, silent space at the far end of a hallway connected to the other large gallery spaces at Scripps, the space feels like a secret, which lends to the odd and inquisitive nature of the pieces on view.

“Where’d you get that banana?” Thomas Müller. A-B Projects. Photo Credit Evan Senn.

The wall piece, titled the same name of the exhibit looks like a melting, banana-flavored ice cream sculpture, with pieces of glaze seemingly flaking off of the light pale yellow porcelain underneath it. Sitting on a solitary shelf, clean and white, the strange phrase is falling apart, or so it seems. It feels like a worn and torn phrase, but what is the story? The open-ended style of these phrases can be frustrating or freeing, depending on your personality at the time of the viewing. The freedom of the

unknown can be magical and creative—to have words and phrases look reminiscent of the fruit they mention is fascinating and whimsical. The words beg you to touch them, but their fragility and their decaying look makes you fearful of damaging the delicate words.

On the floor, opposite from the wall piece, there is a hypnotic bright pink melancholy phrase sitting ominously on the concrete floor. “I think about your death all the time,” it screams. Like a warning sign or the poetic admission of a lost soul, the bright pink raw pigment powder spells out in perfect lettering this secret thought seemingly held captive in this tiny room at the back of the quiet empty building.

Could it be a threat? It feels dangerous and intense. It could be the quiet thoughts I say to myself when I miss my dead friends and how painful it must have been for them to die. It could also be the thought that I try to push down when I remember that young man who killed himself before my car hit his ribcage on the 405. It could be a cute and ironic love poem, or a missing piece to a conversation with a ghost, or it could even be the brief moment of a serial killer’s private thought before he takes his next victim.

“Where’d you get that banana?” Thomas Müller. A-B Projects. Photo Credit Evan Senn.

I can’t help but imagine the banana as a gun, and someone pointing it at someone else, and this odd and small conversation that takes place following that action. “Where’d you get that banana?” he’d say. “I think about your death all the time, she’d mutter at him. And then, they’d awkwardly chuckle until a hug or light at-a-boy punch in the arm comes out.

The fleeting life of the pink dust words makes it feel weighted, even without a clear narrative told to us. Müller does not often work in pigment dust—as a renowned ceramic artist, he takes great care in creating each letter out of clay or porcelain, and has a masterful level of skill in manipulating his materials is bar none. But his expansion of his practice to include raw pigment and the visual expression of text through different mediums is fascinating and shows that Müller’s only limitations are the parameters he sets for himself.

With his materials’ inherent ability to change—from liquid to solid, from malleable to brittle, from structural to mush, his word choices feel more meaningful and more playful, all at once. The expected significance of the phrases shift with every person, which further reminds us that art is powerful, and the artist offers so much more to viewers than just something to look at. Müller offers us not only a greater conversation about the possibilities of ceramics in contemporary art and the magic of language, but also its role as an art object, as well as the freedom of a conceptual space to play and explore in our imagination with just a few simple words.

“Where’d you get that banana?” is on view at A-B Projects until April 7, 2017. 251 E. 10th Street, Suite 113, Claremont, CA.

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Published by Author

Kristine Schomaker is a new media and performance artist, painter and art historian living and working at the Brewery artist complex in Los Angeles. For over 14 years she has been working with various interdisciplinary art forms including online virtual worlds to explore identity and the hybridization of digital media with the physical world. Whether virtual or physical, the object-based work Kristine creates combines elements of color-based gestural abstraction, animation, pattern and design, neo-Baroque and Populence. Using installation, text, photography, mixed media, video and performance for her ongoing conceptual project My Life as an Avatar, she visualizes a narrative/dialogue with her virtual persona, Gracie Kendal. Kristine then documents her experiences on her blog. In 2012, exploring ideas of community, Kristine turned a local gallery into a modern day creation of Gertrude Stein's salon of the 1920's with a live mixed-reality dinner party merging the physical world with the online virtual world. Over the summer she also performed The Bald and the Beautiful in which she had her head shaved as a statement to challenge society's standards of beauty. Currently, Kristine is working as an Artist-in-Residence through the Linden Endowment for the Arts creating an immersive virtual environment which she is planning to bring into the physical world via sculpture/public art work. [View all posts by Author](#)

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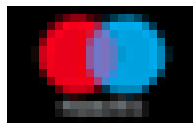
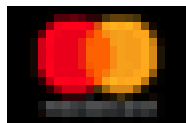
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