

ARTS | LONG ISLAND

# In East Hampton, Art and Craft in Motion

The line between art and craft is relaxed at three exhibitions mounted this season at LongHouse Reserve in East Hampton, a 16-acre sculpture garden and preserve founded by the textile designer Jack Lenor Larsen. Mr. Larsen's own creations have included, among others, curtains for Lever House and seat fabric for Braniff International Airways.

## ART REVIEW

MARTHA SCHWENDENER

On the craft — that is, specifically handmade — end of the spectrum at LongHouse is a collection of African ceramics assembled by the Chicago art dealer Douglas Dawson, who specializes in ancient and historic non-Western art. The exhibition includes more than 30 vessels made over the last 2,500 years by anonymous craftsmen and women. There are beer storage containers from Tanzania and South Africa; a churn from Morocco; a long, tall flask from Mali; and a “double vessel” from Cameroon that rests on two bulbous forms that look strikingly like buttocks.

A few of the objects come from religious shrines in Togo. Here, not only is the line between functional and non-functional in question; so is the one between ritual and aesthetic. Is it really appropriate for us to stand here admiring, purely from an aesthetic standpoint, figures for ritual — possibly sacred — purposes? This, of course, is a familiar concern of art history, and can be applied to European altarpieces displayed in museums as much as to African statues.

Somewhere between handicrafts and recent Western ideas of art lie Ryo Toyonaga's large ceramic forms, which split the difference between vessel and sculpture. Installed in a modest pebbled courtyard, they are made from stoneware and fired to a dark, leathery bronze hue, and include playful touches and trompe l'oeil effects. Organic forms evoking giant seashells or human organs are topped off with mechanical-looking turn-wheels and valves sculptured in clay.

Mr. Toyonaga's works also serve as a nice counterpoint to Peter Voukos's “Ten Stacks,” an installation that made its debut in 2005 and is still on display at LongHouse. Mr. Voukos began as a potter making functional ceramics but later created hulking sculptures out of clay. Looking at his work, particularly in this setting, makes you wonder why he is not included in more histories of Abstract Expressionism.

Three simple answers might be critical support (the critic Clement Greenberg tapped David Smith as the archetypal Abstract Expressionist sculptor); regional issues (Mr. Voukos was in far-off California, while Smith was in New York); and materials (clay is considered “craft”; bronze and steel, the stuff of Art).

The third exhibition that is new this season consists of five sculptures by George Rickey (1907-2002), an artist who followed firmly in the tradition of Art. Mr. Rickey's abstract, geometric works, made of burnished stainless steel, somewhat resemble Smith's “Cubi” sculptures. The striking difference between Mr. Rickey and Smith, however, is that Mr. Rickey's sculptures

are kinetic. Moreover, they are wind powered. “Two Lines Up Excentric Gy-ratory II” from 1998 features two spear-like forms that twist and turn — or thrash when the wind kicks up, looking like a sword fight with no humans to wield the swords.

“Horizontal Column of Five Squares Excentric” from 1993 centers on five steel squares mounted on an armature sunk into LongHouse's manmade pond, while other sculptures use hollow rec-

no singular, static version.

Photographs of sculptures are particularly complicated — which vantage is the “right” one? — and this is even more true for Mr. Rickey's works. A photograph of a piece by Mr. Rickey shows merely one of its possible iterations. Matko Tomicic, the executive director of LongHouse, suggests that the best way to represent one of Mr. Rickey's sculptures might be with a video.

That same slippage between easily defined categories might be applied to many of the works at LongHouse. In the museums and galleries of Manhattan, they might be placed into already known and understood categories: art, craft, design, decoration, functional object. Here, installed on sandy hills and gullies and courtyards carved into the old potato field where Mr. Larsen started his preserve, the distinctions are happily blurred.



MARIA TERESE BARBACCIA



LEONARD NONES



LONGHOUSE RESERVE



ESTATE OF GEORGE RICKEY/LICENSED BY VAGA, NEW YORK

## BLURRED LINES

Works on exhibit at LongHouse include, clockwise from top, ceramic forms by Ryo Toyonaga; “Horizontal Column of 5 Squares Excentric” by George Rickey; “Ten Stacks” by Peter Voukos; and African clay vessels from the collection of Douglas Dawson.