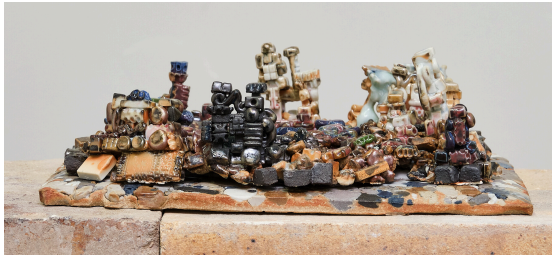


## Trey Ross / Evgenia Ozerova

*Equipped with a magnifying glass I scrutinize a vitreous jewel the iridescence of which is traceable to the licked and secreted mother-of-pearl, or maybe a city tossed up into the sky holding off on landing, the miniature sculptures of Trey Ross.*

—Evgenia Ozerova



**Evgenia Ozerova:** What is the last thing you held in your hands that moved you?

**Trey Ross:** One of my cacti produces these beautiful succulent blossoms and the most recent one was so big that it was pulling the plant over. They only bloom for a day and I cut it off before it began to wilt so that the plant wouldn't feel this weight on it. The plant sprung back up, and I held this bloom in my hand and it was... weirdly sad. You only get to hold a flower as it dies. I didn't want to cut it, but then it was almost hurting the plant. I think it's an uninteresting answer— a flower seems obvious— but maybe it speaks to the way I think about holding these things. (points to the pieces in the gallery) There's something similar to only being able to pick the thing up when it's fired. I'd love to see what these things look

like while melting and see what the glaze looks like in a liquid form. It would be a dream. But you only get this aftermath..

**EO:** I think about firing, the irreversible chemical process of turning clay into ceramics, as petrification of otherwise transient and decaying material. What is it that you want to fossilize?

**TR:** No matter the title of the show, the pieces aren't the future fossils— we are. (gestures to me and him) Fossils have to form out of something that lived, so I don't think any of the works qualify as fossils. I think the role of these objects is to remind you that you're going to be a fossil one day. They exist in this world between life and the earth. The work invites us to explore our relationship to the material and the way we find transcendence within it using fossils as a way of suggesting that dynamic.

**EO:** There's much joy and curiosity in the making process of these, huh.

**TR:** Yes, joy and curiosity become the engine that drives my practice. If anything, I'd like people to leave with more questions. The porcelain paper of the etchings is made with a similar process as the ceramic parts in your cell phone. When you learn that, your relationship to that phone is just a little different. You come to understand how little you know.

**EO:** What's thrilling to me is how you interpret conventional sculpture and printmaking processes through one another, namely transferring etched plates onto a translucent sheet porcelain or casting glaze-clay amalgam into refractory crucible. What interests you in such material gymnastics?

**TR:** It really comes down to my investment in the material. I'm super fascinated by the ceramic transformation and how that relates to functional ceramics. For a long time, it was the best way of making bowls, cups, and storage jars. But in our contemporary world, functional ceramics are heat shields and insulators. Even though the tape cast porcelain sheets are fringing in the ceramics field, they're really driving the ceramic innovation.

**EO:** We are sitting next to a piece that resembles a circuit board or a microchip. Is that imagery you try to evoke?

**TR:** Definitely. (points to a wall piece the size of a tablet device) That one is pretty on the nose with its green background and all these embellished tiles on it. They have resemblance with those microscopic die shots of transistors. They're amazing objects. They're the most produced thing ever. There's 13 sextillion of them, which is an astronomical number. We don't even deal with those figures until we go to space and start doing distances between galaxies. And there are billions of them in a computer and then there are, you know, billions of computers. It's a mass produced thing and

each with its own design. I don't know what the designs entail and how each changes the application of the transistor but they're beautiful, various, and so small. It's something you're never going to see if you don't try to. You go through life depending on these tiny data transmitters– using millions every day, working for you while in your pocket– without knowing how they work. Our relationship to technology nowadays is like our relationship to God, like trying to explain the beginning of the world– you're like, well someone made the Sun and then... you don't actually understand the workings of these things at all.

**EO:** My entrance into your work has been through this feeling I get when attempting to comprehend deep time. Have you ever had a geometric dream? Sometimes kids have those when they have a fever. A whole lot of non-pictorial but defined shapes move simultaneously amongst themselves extremely rapidly while their conglomerate moves almost imperceptibly slowly. Alternating between observing such activity both from within and outside looking onto the shape is the most enthralling and agonizing thing. A similar feeling I often get when I find myself in nature and realize that so much is going on at all times and there is something that is the impetus to all of this, but it's unnamed. Your work is able to induce that mindly sensation which is awesome. From prints, to tiles, to sculptures

the layering of constituent parts are the evidence of the extensive process of material manipulation.

**TR:** There's a tension in the sculptures between freestanding and collapsing. So much of the work is in service of buttressing and propping until it fuses in the kiln and it has to hold up. It's a lot of trial and error learning what structure can secure what block or cluster. Some sculptures are made to collapse by design. Those are loose parts chucked into a clay box that shrinks during the firing and forces everything together. Then the piece is excavated. It's intrinsic to the ethos of ceramics. Industrial excavation and refinement of minerals to make clay and glaze bodies is the manufacturing process we rely on to do ceramics.

**EO:** But then you learn your grandma's house stands on alluvial soil or that the roadcut along your favorite hiking trail reveals this strata of limestone, quartz, and... silty yet clay. Aren't we just borrowing from the process that already and for a long time takes place underneath our feet?

**TR:** One of the things I have come to love about ceramics is that there is an inbuilt problem of waste material. You're never gonna be able to get away from it, but then there is a beautiful solution to it. If you try, you can use every little bit of waste that you make. I save all the byproduct and use it to make pedestals or the waste gets thrown into the sculpture and the sculpture carries its own footprint with itself. I love an object

that has to drag around its own carbon footprint.

**EO:** How would you describe what you start from, what you do to it, and what you walk away from?

**TR:** More recently, I've been trying to do as much as I can on my own. Making my own porcelain has been really rewarding in that I was able to reach unparalleled translucency for my porcelain paper. Maybe one day I will start mining my own minerals. But for now I am seeing what plastic and material effects I can get out of raw materials which are still fairly removed from what comes out of the ground. I have also been utilizing found materials that can withhold or visibly react to high temperatures in the kiln. I've been taking apart and firing a bunch of electronic parts. And they all leach copper. It's beautiful. It's just a fantastic color.

**EO:** The kiln as a time machine allows you to traverse millions of years of continuous cycle of erosion and growth, the weathering and the forming of the earth.



*Future Fossils* occurred Summer 2024 at Long Play Contemporary

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