

ART WORLD

Crasign? Deraft? At Friedman Benda, Ettore Sottsass Makes a Design-Craft Hybrid

Blake Gopnik, Thursday, October 8, 2015

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THE DAILY PIC (#1407): These are a few ceramic objects made by [Ettore Sottsass](#) in 1964, from among a pile of his rare pre-postmodern works now showing at the [Friedman Benda](#) gallery in New York.

Gopnik, Blake, "Crasign? Deraft? At Friedman Benda, Ettore Sottsass Makes a Design-Craft Hybrid," *Artnet News*, October 8, 2015.

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Besides the fact that they look fabulous, this series of *Offerta a Shiva* dishes by Sottsass is exciting because it doesn't fit our usual categories. The dishes are evidently, even aggressively hand-crafted objects ... that aren't made by the hands of the man whose name they bear. Sottsass designed them, then had them hand-shaped by an artisan named Aldo Londi and then himself brushed on their glazes – supplied and explained, I assume, by Londi, who must have also taken care of their second firing. Although the plates are not billed as a collaboration, they really represent a mash-up of two very separate traditions in object making. You'd have to class them as a pushmi-pullyu called “artisanal design” or maybe “fabricated craft”.

I'm much less fond of a more traditional category that deluxe plates like these tend to be put in: “Ceramic sculpture”. Almost always hung on a wall or displayed flat as *objets* – and probably intended for that by Sottsass – I would just love to see these plates holding food instead, and getting sullied in its consumption. Lots of brilliant ceramicists, including friends of mine, avoid making useable vessels, for both good and bad reasons. But that means they miss a chance to partake in the “relational aesthetics” that have been so hot in recent fine art. Why *wouldn't* they want their objects to get down-and-dirty in the real social mix that all of us inhabit? What better role could art play than as a catalyzing prop in the human comedy?

I can't think that my favorite potters would prefer to be part of the trend that has swallowed Chelsea of late, where sculptors untrained in craft and its history use clay as just another super-sellable *stuff*. (*Image courtesy Courtesy Friedman Benda and Ettore Sottsass Studio, photo by Adam Reich Photography*)

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