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Raphael Weilguni and Viola Relle, *Die Raute kann eigentlich jeder* (Basically Anyone Can Do the Rhombus), 2019, porcelain, ceramic, glaze, plaster, 12 5/8 × 14 5/8 × 8 1/4".

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Raphael Weilguni and Viola Relle

GALERIE RÜDIGER SCHÖTTLE

Raphael Weilguni and Viola Relle's exhibition of their most recent works in porcelain was titled "bring me back to earth," the phrase's meaning as ambiguous as it is to the point: The making of ceramics, after all, is an "earthen" affair, inextricably bound up with our planet and the minerals it brings forth. But the line could also have been lifted from a work of science fiction, spoken by an astronaut yearning to return home from a faraway galaxy. Such ambivalence, between the utterly tangible and the purely imaginary, between real life and unreal phantasmagoria, is also a defining characteristic of the creations of the two artists, who work together every step of the way, continually revising, correcting, and complementing each other's contributions: The works are open constructions that suggest root systems, surfaces of eggshell-like smoothness, and projecting skeletal structures, partly covered with iridescent, sometimes brilliant glazes. These objects are reminiscent of fossils or archaeological finds, though they might come from the distant future rather than the past: The distinction between alien creatures baked to a lumpy mass and shreds of prehistoric pterosaurs is hard to draw.

The titles, meanwhile, root the objects in the present, often with sly humor; many, in fact, read like snippets from the daily press: Die Raute kann eigentlich jeder (Basically Anyone Can Do the Rhombus) (all works 2019) is presumably an allusion to Angela Merkel's signature diamond-shaped hand gesture, but also loosely fits the work's overall appearance. Similarly, Unabhängig von Berlin Entscheidungen treffen (Making Decisions Independently of Berlin) might be a political reference or a jab at the persistent perception that the capital is where cutting-edge art is made. In a peculiar twist, some pieces in the show had titles that seemed to come from the objects themselves, speaking in the first person. This effect imputes a kind of agency to the works, transforming them into a virtual subjects in their own right: Among these were Ich bin nicht der geworden, der ich sein wollte (I Didn't Become the One I Wanted to Be) and Mach dir keine Sorgen um mich (Don't You Worry About Me).

Not only do Weilguni and Relle experiment with different raw materials and with making mineral glazes from scratch, but they have also built their own kiln, effectively reviving the ancient idea of porcelain production as an alchemical practice. Their art brings to mind the work of sixteenth-century French ceramicist Bernard Palissy: Trying to replicate the secret recipes closely guarded by the Italian faience artists, he ran a kind of public laboratory in Paris and in his quest to identify deposits of clay suitable for firing became one of the fathers of modern geology. Weilguni and Relle's exploration of the potentials of alchemical processes in the twenty-first century is thus not to be seen as a reactionary move or a form of esotericism; rather, it is a forward-looking practice that also

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employs today's post-internet DIY and bricolage techniques. The pair's reflection on the medium's historic and contemporary contexts extends to the objects' possible utility, always a concern with work in ceramics or porcelain. Weilguni and Relle foreground it in performances—one of which took place on the occasion of this show—during which the artists, often joined by other artists or musicians, interact with their artifacts. The ritualistic quality of such physical contact is undeniable, but Weilguni and Relle transpose it into the register of a rehearsal of novel forms of unalienated engagement with the material world, probing one dimension of a better future that beckons, "bring me back to earth."

Translated from German by Gerrit Jackson.

— Daniela Stöppel