

BRENDAN LEE SATISH TANG AND GAILAN NGAN PUSH CERAMICS INTO THE ROBOTIC AND REPTILIAN

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Brendan Lee Satish Tang, "Manga Ormolu" series

Two of our most gifted ceramic sculptors are exhibiting new work concurrently, Gailan Ngan at Monte Clark Gallery and Brendan Lee Satish Tang at Gallery Jones.

Both artists bring a wealth of ideas, insights, and technical knowledge to their practices, and although their art differs widely, both create work with a strong visual and intellectual pull. As well, both Tang and Ngan have recently experimented with new materials, so that it is more apt to describe them as multidisciplinary artists than as ceramists.



Brendan Lee Satish Tang, "Manga Ormolu" series

Tang's show includes seven mixed-media sculptures from his extraordinary, ongoing "Manga Ormolu" series, which combines formal and cultural references to Ming-dynasty porcelain vessels, 18th-century French embellishments of Chinese ceramics, and 21st-century robotics as seen in pop culture, especially Japanese manga and anime. Essentially, he melds what look like historic blue-on-white porcelain vases, decorated with floral, landscape, and dragon motifs, with shiny geometric and mechanistic components, glazed in red, green, or yellow and augmented with plastic cables and metallic bolts.

I've written before about how this mashup alludes to the impact of globalization on cultural identity, and on our perceptions of "self" and "other".

Tang's work also speaks to the ways in which technology is increasingly wedded to the human body—and vice versa. This is evident in the way he treats the surfaces of the vessels as if they were skin, folded and wrinkled around protruding or extruding robotic components. In *Manga Ormolu Version 5.0v*, for instance, the Ming-ish vessel seems to be giving birth, through a number of "vaginal" openings, to shiny blue and distinctly mechanistic pods and tubes. It's a sci-fi nightmare—and one of the most compelling works in the show.

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Also on view here is Tang's "Joss Paper" series, small paper constructions, each worked in watercolour, mounted alongside a single ceramic "match", and mounted in a wood-and-acrylic box. These little sculptures riff on the Chinese Buddhist practice of burning paper objects that resemble desirable items—from money to cigarettes to appliances—as offerings to the dead. Tang's potential offerings depict things he loved as a child and range from a Michael Jackson LP to a Nintendo Game Boy to a VHS tape. Here, we are asked to contemplate relinquishing not only obsolete entertainment technologies but also the objects to which we have attached fond memories—and perhaps a degree of fetishism. Not incidentally, Tang is a very deft watercolourist.

Many of Ngan's new ceramic sculptures are inspired by cosmic bodies and physical phenomena, particularly asymmetrical or misshapen moons and the play of light through Earth's atmosphere. The evocations are lovely, although the artist's deep material and technical knowledge seems directed at challenging conventional ideas of beauty and craft. The clay bodies are roughly textured and the glazes are unexpected in their colours and application. A few pieces, such as *Violet Femmes 1 and 2*, are mounted on the walls; with their inverted U-shapes and multicoloured glazes, they resemble droopy rainbows. The freestanding sculptures are exhibited without ceremony, the smaller, vessel-shaped ones, such as *Mineral*, sitting on a rough wooden bench and the larger "moonlet" ones, such as *Black Side/Silver Side*, on the gallery's bare concrete floor.

Many of these works are draped with glazed ceramic coils, referencing their handmade, coil construction while suggesting snakes or viscera. Others are bedecked with blobs of dark clay that resemble organic matter—rotten fruit, perhaps, or melted chocolate. *Pink Moustache*, a wall-mounted work, is a knotted coil of fleshy pink adorned with a short, dark-green tubular form and long, frayed, grungy-pink rope. Again, it is unexpected, but in a smile-inducing way—as is the aptly named *Smiles for Miles*.

Also on view is a large black-and-white photograph, featuring two orb-shaped images of Ngan's studio conjoined as if they were mirror images of each other. (They're not.) Taken with a pinhole camera, the images, like the clay sculptures, seem to contemplate light and time—and the making of art.

<https://www.straight.com/arts/1247871/brendan-lee-satish-tang-and-gailan-ngan-push-ceramics-robotic-and-reptilian>