



Christopher Adams
at Greenwich House Pottery
New York

A Review by Janet Koplos



THAT LONG GALLERY WALL IN THE FORMER SECOND-floor gallery, seductive to so many artists exhibiting at Greenwich House Pottery, was the centre of Christopher Adams' 2013 exhibition that concluded a 10-month residency at the Pottery. Dazzling, I think, is the right word for the untitled display.

In a lucid artist's statement, Adams explains that most of his formal background is in the sciences (he is a dermatologist who first earned a biology degree and once worked as an insect illustrator). He adds that his ceramics works fall into the category of organic abstraction and that recent works (some 5000 in number) "play on the biological speciation concept of adaptive radiation – a phenomenon in which

some pioneering organism enters into a relatively untapped environment and differentiates wildly and rapidly while at the same time not departing too dramatically from its original form." Though it was surely not his intention, this terminology is also a wonderful way to think of variation within standard forms that is the essence of functional pottery.

His body of work has nothing to do with function, however. The objects arrayed across the entire expanse of the wall, numbering in the hundreds, all look like some kind of living thing – an insect when they are slender, a sea creature when they are tubular, or vegetation when they are flattish. Each has 14 appendages by my count, in a more or less radial or symmetrical arrangement. These arms, legs, leaves or



petals might recall a spider or an octopus, a ruffled orchid or lettuce just before it bolts. They vary in size from minuscule to a couple of feet across. The surfaces are beyond summary: Adams uses many different clay bodies, firing temperatures and glazes. He uses a wide range of colours but not bright ones, although

he painted the display wall a powdery orange tone. For his works he favours a spectrum (from A to B, I am tempted to say) from spotty white through tan and gray, coupled with a range of blues ending near black.

Although nothing is specifically descriptive, the link to the natural world is unmistakable. There is



something that feels true to the kinds of patterns seen throughout nature, such as the Fibonacci sequence, that makes us feel that everything is related. The numerous parts can suggest movement such as scuttling or the frenzied panic of an earthworm when the association is animal, but read as flourishing growth when the association is vegetal. The gestures are sometimes amusing, as is his placement of a lone tendril that emerged from the floor by the radiator pipe at one end of the wall. On top of the radiator was a gray-limbed octopus – or a pile of snakes (like this one, other objects evoke thoughts of Medusa).

In addition to this magnificent expanse, Adams showed isolated pieces on the other three gallery walls (which are broken by tall windows, a fireplace and doors). These vary in the number of appendages. One is a graduated arrangement of 10 that seems to form a long tongue joining rosettes at top and bottom. Two are octopi tubular, both glossy gray edged with brown, but one much paler than the other. Two are small weed-like rosettes of nearly circular leaves pinched together like a folded tongue – one aqua, one sandy beige-yellow edged with brown. And two consist of big ruffled leaves with a rib down the centre, each a variation of teal with brown. These are all handsome by themselves; they are baroque forms that recall architectural borrowings from nature such as escutcheons.

This was a comforting, satisfying exhibition as one reflected on Christopher Adams' expression of variability, imperfection and similarity. The whole communicated natural creativity and fecundity. This is what the good world is. May we preserve it.



Janet Koplos, a former senior editor at *Art in America* magazine and guest editor at *American Craft* magazine, is the co-author of *Makers: A History of American Studio Craft* (2010, University of North Carolina Press).

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