

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tony Marsh

Cauldrons & Crucibles: in search of the sublime

March 28 – June 8, 2019

Opening reception: Thursday, March 28, 6–8 pm

Lora Reynolds is pleased to announce *Cauldrons & Crucibles: in search of the sublime*, an exhibition of new ceramics by Tony Marsh—the artist's first presentation at the gallery.

Tony Marsh's newest work belongs to two series he calls Cauldrons and Crucibles—nonfunctional, cylindrical ceramic vessels that can be as small as a can of paint or as large as a barrel. Their surfaces are punctuated by globular protrusions and encrusted with thick glaze that bubbles, cracks, and drips. Although the underlying shape of Marsh's sculptures is a restrained and minimal constant, their color seems to know no bounds—lending each unique artwork the feel of matte-black volcanic rock, a glowing chunk of lapis lazuli, a shiny block of sulfur, or a full-blown igneous rainbow. Looking down into some of his works, one might discover a solid egg of glaze, reminiscent of a pearl growing in the mantle of a mollusk.

The vessel has been the primary subject of Marsh's work since the late 1980s; he has found it to be an inexhaustible source of historical and metaphorical potential. Ceramic vessels have played an important role for the entirety of humankind—from the earliest tool-bearing peoples until today, all around the world—holding, preserving, presenting, protecting, offering, commemorating, ritualizing, beautifying. And the metaphorical significance of vessels, of *containers*, is equally rich—they point simultaneously to the body and the mind, fertility and reproduction, boats and exploration, architecture, even perhaps international boundaries.

In addition to functioning as homages to cultural history, the textures and colors of Marsh's work make it seem to be of the earth, rather than the human hand. The elements, mechanics, and products of geology are remarkably similar to those of ceramics. Clay *is* earth. Glazes are made from silica, metal oxides, and powdered minerals—all of which are extracted from the ground. In a kiln, clay and glaze subjected to heat and time produces objects that can last millennia. But on bigger scales of space and time, the results of heat plus earth include Mount Fuji, the Mariana Trench, and continental drift. Although he avoids making forms that point too directly to ceramics from any culture or period—"I always try to work between the cracks of history," he says—the ideas, images, and feelings of earth science are easy for Marsh to embrace.

This refusal to conform to history includes rejecting the long-held (and often dogmatic) protocols for making ceramics—and comes from the creative potential Marsh finds in formal contrarianism. The rules that describe the correct way to work with clay are many. Marsh shapes his pieces with glaze, a practice that would seem alien to most ceramicists. (Shaping

is normally done with clay.) He applies glaze so thick that, when fired, on occasion, some of it sloughs off onto the kiln shelf—a disaster to a traditionalist. He scrapes the globs of glaze off the shelf, reattaches them to the form he is making, and fires it again—just to see what happens. He argues with gravity, too: the primary difference between Cauldrons and Crucibles is that he fires the former upside-down, so when exhibiting them right-side up their glazes appear to drip upwards. And because he does not take notes when mixing or applying glaze—or firing in the kiln—the colors in his finished works (often magnificent) are always elusive and mostly unrepeatable (which is to say he even subverts his own virtuosity). “The only way to find something wild is to be a little wild,” he says.

Part alchemist, part scientist, part shaman—Marsh says he is always looking for magic in his work, and he hopes there is “at least something small of an eternal truth encoded in what I make.” Crucibles are fixtures of science, cauldrons of sorcery. Truth and magic, science and sorcery—with his Cauldrons and Crucibles, Marsh is asking questions, making connections, and solving problems that are as old as thought itself.

Tony Marsh, born in 1954 in New York, lives and works in Long Beach. Early in his career, he undertook a three-year apprenticeship with the late Tatsuzo Shimaoka, a master potter who was named a Living National Treasure of Japan. Marsh is the Director of the Center for Contemporary Ceramics at California State University, Long Beach, where he is also on the teaching faculty in Ceramic Arts. His work is in the collections of the Contemporary Museum of Honolulu, Everson Museum (Syracuse), Long Beach Museum of Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), Minneapolis Institute for the Arts, Museum of Art and Design (New York), Museum of Contemporary International Ceramic Art (South Korea), Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Newark Museum, San Jose Museum of Art, and Taipei Ceramics Museum.