

Steinhauer, Jillian, "What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week," The New York Times, April 18, 2018

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Francesca DiMattio's "Boucherouite IV," part of the "Clay Today" show at the Hole. Credit: The Hole Gallery, New York

Contemporary art has been experiencing a ceramics renaissance for several years now, though its full breadth remains underexplored by galleries and museums. "Clay Today," a new exhibition at the Hole, provides a welcome, if not rigorous, introduction to the utterly creative and clever ways that artists are using this material.

The exhibition opens with a showstopper near the entrance: Francesca DiMattio's "Boucherouite IV" (2017), a blue-and-white human-size figure of sorts, whose body is a technical marvel of zigzagging rows of clay fringe. Bulging with appendages, "Boucherouite" incorporates items like a flowered porcelain handle and a Delftware vessel. Traditional ceramics have not been completely abandoned, but rather overtaken by experimentation. This feeling is echoed in Trevor Baird's vases adorned with panels of comics, and in Rebecca Morgan's

gorgeously goofy face jugs. Allison Schulnik's "Rutile Pink Unicorn Vessel" (2017) is a simple, oversized urn whose surface is teeming with miniature versions of the title creature.

In other places, clay looks a lot like something else, as in Diana Rojas's riff on a retail display of shoes. The most compelling of such works hang on the wall: Valerie Hegarty, Thomas Mailaender and Jesse Edwards have turned ceramics into imitations of paintings, photographs and TV sets, with the objects getting flatter as the illusionistic space deepens.

In the show's most exciting art, firm reference points slip away. Two pieces by Shinichi Sawada recall the ritual objects of a lost society. Heidi Lau's "Seventh and Eighth Level of Hell" (2018) evokes an alien, ominous world that incorporates elements of our own. And Roxanne Jackson's "Wild Mineral" (2017) suggests the sawed-in-half skull of a dangerous, mythical creature. These works, grouped along one wall, demonstrate what can happen when clay becomes a vessel for pure imagination. JILLIAN STEINHAUER