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Arts & Style

IN THE GALLERIES

BY MARK JENKINS

Zirma Beiner

On one side of Cross MacKenzie Gallery, a long bench holds more than 50 objects, which clay artist Zirma Beiner calls "Tools for No Purpose." Some of them have knobs, tines or other parts that make them look vaguely functional, but others appear more organic, suggesting gourds or cones. To add to the perplexity, the so-called tools are all made of red-tan clay, but coated with a glaze that has been sandblasted to a seemingly creamy finish, suggesting cream-cheese icing. It's as if the artist raided the kitchen drawers of a psychedelic cartoon.

In the front window are two hulking clay blobs — "blob" is the gallery's term for them — whose contours look soft and random but whose surfaces are hard and glossy. These are the only standalone items. The other, smaller pieces are carefully arranged so that they look like a series of miniature pavilions or 3-D glyphs, spelling out some unreadable word. The blend of organic and faux-functional continues in one set of silver-gray objects that might be roosters in the process of turning into pitchers, or vice versa.

The show also includes a few drawings, mostly in gray and black but sometimes with smears of yellow. These works also jumble tool shapes and architectural motifs for purely whimsical aims. Whether employing clay or lines, Beiner crafts stuff whose only purpose is play.

Zirma Beiner: Tools for No Purpose

On view through March 31 at Cross MacKenzie Gallery, 1675 Wisconsin Ave. NW. 202-337-7970.

www.crossmackenzie.com.