

# Morph

June 22 - August 11, 2017



**Kathy Butterly**  
**Ling Chun**  
**Future Retrieval**  
**Valerie Hegarty**  
**Cody Hoyt**  
**Heidi Lau**  
**Rebecca Morgan**  
**Joakim Ojanen**  
**Elise Siegel**  
**Anthony Sonnenberg**  
**Guðmundur Thoroddsen**  
**Cristina Tufiño**

**Asya Geisberg Gallery** is proud to present “Morph”, a group exhibition of contemporary ceramic sculpture. Artists include: Kathy Butterly, Ling Chun, Future Retrieval, Valerie Hegarty, Cody Hoyt, Heidi Lau, Rebecca Morgan, Joakim Ojanen, Elise Siegel, Anthony Sonnenberg, Guðmundur Thoroddsen, and Cristina Tufiño.

“Morph” is a snapshot of a resurgence of ceramic sculpture, and a re-contextualization borne of increasing celebration of clay’s malleability and many cultural reference points. Intentionally imperfect forms, unpolished surfaces, and allusions to figuration and traditional ceramic styles are all trademarks of the included artists. Elements of Art Brut hide within even sophisticated presentations. Each artist works in multiple media, signaling that ceramic is no one’s red-headed step-sister. The artists in “Morph” paint expressionistically with glaze, weave in hair, inlay surfaces, squash perfect forms, recombine tchotchkes, and subvert genres heedless of strict boundaries. Like the namesake British TV character, a staple of 1970’s children’s television and claymation icon, the artists in “Morph” twist this famously moldable material into conceptual and visual pretzels - much to our delight.



Joakim Ojanen  
*My Red Round Friend, 2017*

**Kathy Butterly** brings a painterly sensibility to her idiosyncratic ceramic sculptures. To realize her witty, quirky and inventive fired forms, she applies a range of sophisticated glazes and delicate textures. For Butterly the kiln is a crucible of possibilities. With each firing, a playful intuitive sensory dialogue ensues. Over decades she has mastered teasing out highly associative meaning with each additional glazing. Her aesthetic synthesizes Asian ceramics and California Funk. Butterly’s vessels bend and sag into delicate yet strong forms, upending their functional origins in a singular transformation.

**Ling Chun** describes her ceramic forms as “playgrounds for glaze”, and challenges the roles of ceramics by disassociating the material from its stereotypical or culturally accepted uses. Removing still-hot pieces from the kiln, Chun applies liquid glazes to the surface creating a sizzling sound and a haze of steam until the glaze sticks. Hers is an intuitive process - over multiple firings and layers of glazes, her work is born of the spontaneous dripping, sliding, running, climbing and crawling that occurs. Finally, Chun adds bright-colored hair to her finished pieces, which she sees as an extension of the glaze and signifies a progression in how the material is viewed. Chun focuses on the materials’ physicality separating from their stereotype and cultural reference, by questioning their authentic use and redefining them in her language.

**Future Retrieval** is the studio collaboration of Guy Michael Davis and Katie Parker. They utilize three-dimensional scanning and digital manufacturing of found forms that are molded and constructed in porcelain, mimicking the history of decorative arts and design. Their process addresses the conceptualization, discovery, and acquisition of form, to make content-loaded sculptures that reference design and are held together by craft. With an interdisciplinary approach, they strive to make influential historic objects relevant to today. The works in “Morph” were made in Jingdezhen, China while working at an artist residency. The original form was hand carved from a block of plaster, digitally scanned, altered and stretched. The form was 3-dimensionally printed, taken to Jingdezhen and cast in porcelain.

Throughout her career, **Valerie Hegarty** has explored fundamental themes of American history and particularly the legacy of 19th-century American art, addressing topics such as colonization, slavery, Manifest Destiny, historical revisionism, nationalism and environmental degradation in her work. Elaborating upon visual references to the art-historical canon of North America, Hegarty repurposes the ideological tenets of such works into a critical examination of the American legacy-artistic and otherwise. Cloaked within allusions to American classicism, Hegarty's work consistently interrogates the darker ramifications of the American Experiment, ranging from the environmental impact of expansionism to the conflicted and repressed dimensions of collective memory.

Driven by an intuitive sensibility and a process-based approach, **Cody Hoyt** makes his ceramic vessels angular, faceted objects from intricately patterned clay slabs that strike a balance between Brutalist architecture and natural elements like stones and minerals. Originally, Hoyt was drawn to a multidisciplinary form of printmaking. The structural aspect of printmaking, which combines disparate colors, transparencies, and techniques, fueled Hoyt's transition to sculptural work, along with drawings, which he creates constantly. He describes the move to ceramics as a natural evolution and a byproduct of formal challenges that he began to encounter while working in 2D.

**Heidi Lau's** sculptures suggest fragile growth formations and biomorphic towers. Often referencing Taoist creation myths and reincarnation stories, her sculptures are enhanced with the supernatural enchantment of the half-destroyed. Lau's ceramics embody tales of disintegration, chimerical and sensual in the act of transforming. A sense of rebirth and survival are hopeful aspects of her work. Lau grew up around ruins, as during most of her childhood in Macau was during a time prior to the handover to the People's Republic of China. Lau describes how Macau, as a colony, was "hidden, in disarray, and falling apart," and she was "drawn to things that were left behind." She describes a tragic feeling as well as the intrigue of exploring abandoned houses that gave shelter to wild animals, dense with plant growth taking over.

**Rebecca Morgan** is from central Pennsylvania, and her paintings, drawings, and ceramics emanate from stereotypes of rural Appalachia. Humorous, benevolent, and savage at turns, her characters touch on truths about poverty, addiction, and off-the-grid living, as well as idealizations of uncultured country life. Morgan's face jugs revive a craft tradition common in the American South and Appalachia of vessels used by slaves to ward off the devil and later for scaring children away from moonshine. Many jugs are glazed using the Raku process, in which the ceramic is taken from the kiln while very hot and quickly cooled in liquid, resulting in a beautiful variegated iridescence. Individual portraiture is replaced by the jug's typecasting, and the contemporary is subsumed in the folkloric.

**Joakim Ojanen's** paintings and ceramic sculptures maintain a sense of humor as they hit an intense spot in the human psyche: the desire to belong. Each of Ojanen's works tells a story about finding one's way in the world and reminds us it's okay to be ourselves. Ojanen entered into the arts through graffiti, then learned how to use animation programs, began to make short videos, and pursued drawing, published fanzines, and organized art shows. After a couple of years, he decided illustration wasn't for him. Ojanen signed up for a ceramics open studio session outside of school, and during these sessions started to make sculptures from his drawings. Ojanen's iconography is reminiscent of a comic book language, and hints at the works of Philip Guston, Keith Haring and the Surrealist paintings of Salvador Dali.

**Elise Siegel's** series of highly expressive ceramic portrait busts vary stylistically as well as in scale, surface and glaze. Drawn from figurative sculptures that had some other cultural function, either in ritual or in daily life, they are influenced by the abstracted features and exaggerated forms of the Jomon dogu figures of Neolithic Japan, the hollow window eyes of terracotta Hanuwah funeral figures from the third to sixth century A.D, Renaissance reliquary busts, and African masks, among others. While squarely within the European tradition, Siegel's figures are not meant as commemorations of great power or beauty, but are fictional portraits meant to evoke a timeless emotion.

**Anthony Sonnenberg** works in multiple arenas to critique the cycle of denial and decadence through the body, the timeless veracity of Greek myth, and excessively ornate Baroque and Rococo aesthetics. Using decadence as a by-product of our attempt to cope with the fear of uncertainty, he builds screens of over-abundance and hides behind fantasies to try and forget a seemingly cruel and unavoidable fate. Crowns and candlesticks -- things made in the moments just before a crash -- are the protagonists of his work. From opulent interiors and aggrandizing portraits in the mansions of the ruling class, to a banal self-indulgence, his work suggests an escape into the comfort of vice when overwhelmed with the anxiety of facing the irrational world.

**Guðmundur Thoroddsen** is from Reykjavik, Iceland, where he currently lives and works. His sly trophy-based ceramics undermine concepts of masculinity, achievement, and the characteristically "macho" need for constant competition. Thoroddsen's clunky messy forms and muted glazes undermine glossy gold of trophies and perfect forms of urns and traditional ceramic. Crudely formed ceramic statuettes are titled as trophies awarded for futile victories, pointing to a farcical and pointless pursuit. Some have names like "Double Naughty Boy" or "Trophy for Longest Pee", while others spout appendages suggesting phalluses or ungainly excrement. With colors in a feminized pastel or Victorian-era tastefulness, the ceramic vessels seem confused about their role, just as the male characters in all of Thoroddsen's oeuvre.

Inspired by consumer goods, industrial debris and autobiographical narratives and objects, **Cristina Tufiño** addresses her practice as an archaeologist hoarder rummaging through a broad cultural system of references, with a particular nod to artifacts and museological aesthetics. Her multimedia works arise from a process of assembling, associating and translating images and ideas inspired by seemingly oppositional languages and spaces. Tufiño's photographic compositions, prints, videos, installations and sculptures, give a new meaning to post-studio practices and the use of social debris in our time.