

WORLD SCULPTURE NEWS

THE UNITED STATES

Atlanta, Georgia

Amy Pleasant at Whitespace Gallery

Amy Pleasant's elegant, spare sculptures, paintings, and drawings reverberate with echoes both from the past and from the Modernist tradition: the restraint of a Japanese Zen-

inspired dry garden, the progressive abstraction of Matisse's celebrated *Backs*, Brancusi's *The Kiss*. Yet, perhaps the most telling parallel to Pleasant's work is Gertrude Stein's literary style, which rejected narrative and plot in favor of what has been termed a "spatial" manner, identifying characters by pre-conscious habits of movement and speech, aiming at what she called "a continuous presence." Borrowing from Edmund Wilson, one might say that Pleasant's esthetic "impulse," if you will, seems closest to Stein's "echolalic incantations." Pleasant describes her work as "writing a letter on canvas," and even the title of her show suggests a literary analogy, *Writing Pictures*.

Two sculptures fashioned from smooth slabs of fired clay are central to the first gallery. Painted white, *Torso 3* (all works except two, 2017) shows only a single cut indicating the space between an arm and the chest, together with dark circles for nipples, hinting at the nourishing forces of the female breast. Joined at a right angle, the slabs, when seen obliquely, cast a shadow on one side, calling to mind the familiar *yin/yang* symbol. Painted black, *Reclining Torso* (2016), itself trilateral, shows a sloping curvaceous form leaning backwards on an elbow bent against the surface at a sharp right angle. A less regular triangular opening sug-

gests the space between the body and the arm.

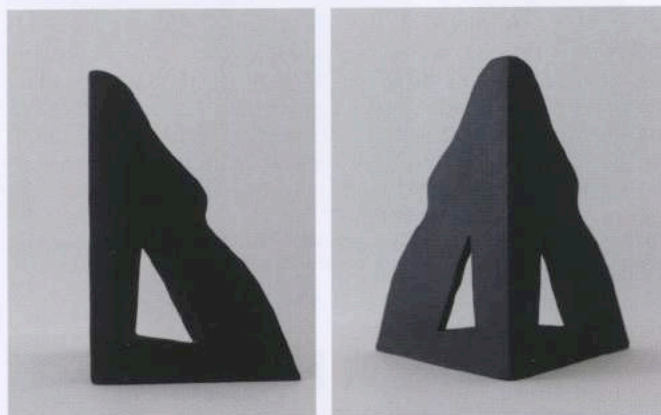
Images on the walls complement the sculptures. The four forms of an oil painting, *Untitled (Heads)* (2016), show on the upper left a shadowy bust in profile, hair tousled, a round for an eye. To the right, a black silhouette leans slightly to the side. Below a more abstracted profile in gray contrasts with a tubular shape in white: a syncopated kind of abstraction in line and in hue, calling attention to the head as the site of intelligence, power, and spiritual values, as opposed to the body which is generally associated with material concerns. Similarly spare are the ink and gouache drawings. *Collection (Busts)* shows dark silhouettes of truncated headless torsos without arms, some in profile; others frontal. In *Untitled (Arms)*, the torsos in gray and in black, though headless, display appendages in a variety of positions.

Contrasting sculptures are also focal to the second gallery. Made from slabs of clay painted black and white, *Head #20* features reiterated undulant lines, inspired by the waving coiffures of Greek sculptures, the lack of facial features calling to mind imaginatively—and therefore more forcefully—the serene beauties of the Classical face. *Head #22* is even more abstracted: irregular rounded slabs of white joined at an angle.

Complementing the sculptures, banners painted in acrylic on canvas with grommets call attention to other members of the body. *Walking, Running, Marching ... II* offers silhouettes of feet, 28 in all: bent at the ball of the foot, leaning back on the heel, flat on the ground. These images bespeak human movement and its attendant emotions, expressed in the words of the full title but in the exhibition omitted and indicated by an ellipsis: “escaping, fleeing, hoping, leaving, burying, reviving,” and on and on, analogous to the stream-of-consciousness technique in literature. The foot, moreover, bears significant symbolism in most



Installation view of **Amy Pleasant's** exhibition *Writing Pictures* at Whitespace Gallery, Atlanta, Georgia, 2017.



Amy Pleasant, Reclining Torso, 2016, fired and painted clay, 15 ¼ x 10 ¾ x ½ inches. Images: Courtesy of the Artist and Whitespace Gallery.

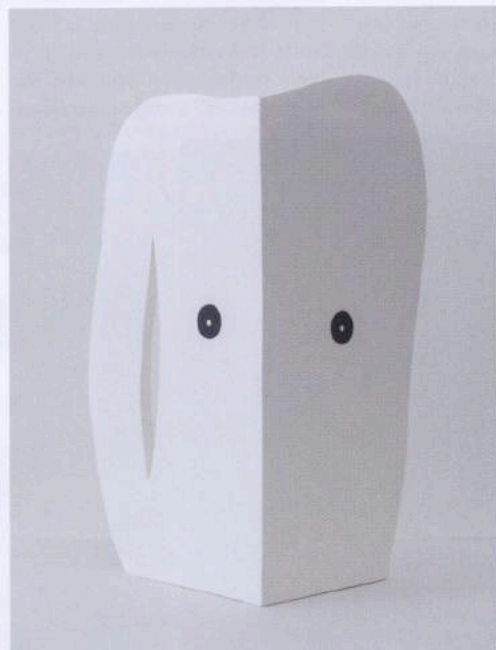
cultures. The human foot, according to Jean Chevalier on page 399 of *The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols* (1966), “... leaves its mark upon the

paths which, for good or ill, are chosen by the exercise of free will. Conversely, the foot bears the marks of the path taken, for good or ill.”

Offering a miscellany of contours, *Collection* shows buttocks (or is it breasts?), legs standing or angled in a yoga pose, a bent knee. And near the center is a striking image repeated from a single work also displayed separately; a headless female figure leans to the left, creating a triangular void with her arm. Another drawing, *My Arm Around Your Neck II*, embodies emotional tenderness. Individuals are merged into a single dark rectangle, their union punctuated by single notch at the bottom and a sliver of space in the upper left.

Wilson's phrase describing Stein's prose was in reality a kind of left-handed compliment followed by the observation that she was essentially unreadable. Though not flattering to Stein, “echolaliac incantations” can be aptly—and more commendably—used to describe Pleasant's exhibition. Might it be that the Modernist vision of Picasso and Braque that Stein was attempting to translate into literature works better in visual terms than in words? Pleasant demonstrates that such imagery can be hauntingly compelling.

Dorothy Joiner



Amy Pleasant, Torso 3, 2017, fired and painted clay, 17 ½ x 9 x 8 ¾ inches.



Amy Pleasant, Head #22, 2017, fired and painted clay, 12 x 11 x 9 ½ x ¼ inches.