



Magdalene Odundo

Bunting Biennial in Birmingham



Top, left to right: Magdalene Odundo.

Untitled. 2013. Ceramic. 19 x 9 x 9 in. (48 x 23 x 23 cm.)

Untitled. 2013. Ceramic. 23 x 11 x 11 in. (58 x 28 x 28 cm.)

Untitled. 2013. Ceramic. 23 x 9 x 9 in. (58 x 22 x 22 cm.)

Untitled. 2013. Ceramic. 22 x 11 x 11 in. (56 x 27 x 27 cm.)

Photos courtesy of Galerie Pierre Marie Giraud.

A SMART BUSINESS PERSON KNOWS THAT DIFFERENT businesses need different types of commercial property. Not one size or place fits all. The bottom line in deciding on a location is profit. What would happen, however, if we were to measure profit in terms of conversation, community and friendship instead of cold, hard cash? It might look like the first *Bunting Biennial Ceramics Symposium* held in 2013 at the Birmingham Museum of Art (BMA), which hit a home run. In fact, the art world should take note of something it missed and save the date on a 2015 calendar to attend the next grand slam.

Artist Magdalene Odundo, an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) and keynote speaker, brought into focus the magical and medicinal properties associated with ceramics in historic, traditional African communities. While Odundo's individual vessels have sold for as much as \$100,000 USD she spoke briefly of her own process stating that, "I see ceramic forms in the empty space and everything around me." Odundo added that she also enjoys exploring large scale glass works and collaborating with master glass craftsmen in the process. She hinted that researching ideas and forms in glass is different for her than developing ideas in clay, which raises unanswered

questions about how the choice of art medium affects artistic thinking.

Topics of the symposium, entitled "Clay Embodied: Ceramics and The Human Form", included a scholarly document analysis of Michelangelo's large and small scale sculptural models, discussion of the phenomenology of touch in relation to objects, and interestingly enough, a behind the scenes look at 18th century English celebrity porcelain figures. In the lecture on celebrity porcelain it was suggested that the current business model for movie merchandising may have started when images of famous theatre actors were 'distributed' from a single painting to multiple print engravings and then mass produced as porcelain paparazzi figures.

Adding street credibility to the event was the appearance of Garth Glark, internationally recognised writer and critic, who provided his historical analysis of Native American ceramic art, inspired no doubt by his recent move to Santa Fe, New Mexico, US. He painted a trajectory of a loss of values attached to traditional Native American ceramics which succumbed to pressures and demands of the consumer tourist market.

Article by Andrew Buck

This implied that artistic authenticity could only be found in the work of contemporary Native American artists such as Christine McHorse and Diego Romero whose personal vision and idiosyncratic work has been embraced by the established fine arts market.

The Alabama Clay Conference, which ran



concurrently with the Bunting Biennial Ceramics Symposium, featured noted ceramics artists Kurt Weiser, Gerit Grimm and Dirk Staschke. The back drop for this historic weekend was the Birmingham Museum of Art, a gem 60 years in the making. If nothing else, this event should draw attention to the strong collections and fine scholarship at the Birmingham Museum of Art. For those of you who have not been there, it is worth the trip. The museum might impress you greatly and you may even get a refresher on Southern hospitality and charm.

*Left: Kirk Weiser. **Nightshade**. 2012. Porcelain. 19.5 x 12.5 x 8 in.
Centre: Dirk Staschke. **Consuming Allegory**. 2012. Stoneware with
porcelaneous slip, wood and resin. 75 x 70 x 32 in.
Right: Gerit Grimm. **Leda and the Swan**. 2012. Stoneware.
37 x 43 x 22 in.*

Photos courtesy of the artists.

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Magdalene Odundo was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Florida, College of Fine Arts on 25 April, 2014.