

ART REVIEWS

By DAVID PAGEL
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Vessels of Whimsy: One look at **Adrian Saxe's** wacky ceramic vessels at Garth Clark Gallery will make you wonder why the old modernist dictum—that form must follow function—ever seemed like a good idea. Teetering on the brink of utter dysfunctionality, these hollow, stoppered objects and almost impossible-to-use ewers gleefully fuse utility and decoration.

Less anthropomorphic than any of the vessels that appeared in Saxe's spectacular retrospective at

the Los Angeles County Museum of Art two years ago, his new pieces embody qualities more closely linked to animals than to humans.

Seven gorgeously glazed ewers, cast from clusters of ginger root, balance precariously on lava-like globs of porcelain. With mind-boggling virtuosity, Saxe creates the impression that each ewer is a miniature coral reef stuck atop an underwater rock. Fishing lures, sea horses, plastic fish and jewel-encrusted pods dangle from various protrusions, completing the illusion that liquids belong both inside and outside these eccentric containers.

Six larger works, resembling serpentine sea creatures, cleverly

trespass on the hallowed territory of sculpture. Set on pedestals so they tower overhead or stare straight in your eye, Saxe's masterful fusions of porcelain and stoneware have the presence of fashion-conscious eels lurking around their customized lairs.

Sinuuous, sexy and somewhat threatening, these ambitious, jewel-studded pieces appear to contain ample energy to spring from their present positions. Charging their surroundings with a powerful sense of animation, Saxe's uncategorizable masterpieces include viewers in unpredictable scenarios. Here, form functions to facilitate fantasy, and decorative flourishes are absolutely essential.

■ *Garth Clark Gallery, 170 S. La Brea Ave., (213) 939-2189, through Nov. 29. Closed Sunday and Monday, and Thanksgiving Day.*