



Adrian Saxe

at FRANK LLOYD, 8 November–10 December

Steering the ship of ceramic design dangerously close to the rocky shore of artistic frivolity, Adrian Saxe's "Hi-Fibre Magic Lamp" series is a decadent spiral of madcap pottery. Continuing his whimsical yet profound exploration of traditional containers, the works in his current exhibition adhere to a design formula: Earthenware or porcelain vessels sit atop sinewy knots of stoneware; all of them can be lit as oil lamps or incense burners (or both). The low-temperature-fired lamps have a metallic luster, contrasting with the lumpy, high-fired bases. Saxe's virtuosity in manipulating clay and decorating surfaces creates a lyrical cohesion, seductive and likable. Groggily occupying their pedestals, the lamps possess the anthropomorphism of true *pots*, that is, they have heads, shoulders, bodies, and legs.

A frozen column of gritty effluence emanates from the ultramarine porcelain pod of *Hi-Fibre Unscripted Dramatic Pause Magic Lamp* (all works, 1997). It's as if the resident genie were gripped by an uncontrollable bowel movement, or is riding a pillar of magic smoke. Festooning the elongated spout are seed pods and plastic toys, as colored tassels dangle from the filigreed handle. In fact, the doo-hickeys are specific tokens of mock-heroism that impart the pieces' titles. A miniature sci-fi warrior and tiny spaceships swing from the appendages of *Hi-Fibre Crucible of Courage Magic Lamp*; these intrepid attachments defy the proud elegance and authority of their host with miniaturized brashness. Intestinal fortitude is carried further still in *Hi-Fibre Kowabunga Big Wave Magic Lamp*, as King Kong, surfing a plastic shoe, defiantly challenges both his sleek mothership lamp and the oozing clumps of fecal tide. Saxe's

ceramic guts support some gutsy little performers.

The bangles and adornments for which Saxe has become known here twist around each other like rococo drunks combined into examples of ornamental neuroses. Visibly self-conscious about their condition as obsolete clay jars, these ceramic Norma Desmonds are very much aware of their newly useful status. Throughout Saxe's art, lamps, pitchers, and cups are usurped by the very plastic they now wear as jewelry. With these magic lamps, even the role of the beautiful, contemplative object has been upstaged by bits of reanimated tchotchkes.

More so than in Saxe's past work, the usefulness of these lamps for light or mood-incense becomes vestigial and ornamental, while the profusion of found gewgaws invests the trinket-strewn objects with current relevance, mindful of contemporary fashions in body art and accessorizing. Saxe pushes the transition of ceramic forms from function to decoration almost as far as fetishism. As a consequence, the urge to decorate with ordinary stuff is given a vital, prominent utility.

Gordon Haines is an artist living near Los Angeles.

Adrian Saxe
Hi-Fibre 1-900 Menehuni
Magic Lamp, 1997
 Earthenware, stoneware,
 and mixed media
 15 3/4" x 12" x 4"