

OPENING CEREMONY NEW NEWS



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What Are Little Girls Made Of? Jessica Stoller at PPOW

by Clarke Rudick

As the saying goes: "Sugar and spice and everything nice." If Jessica Stoller had it her way, it might be something a little more like: "Lobster claws, six-inch fingernails, and nipple macaroons." Stoller "nerds out," in her words, over ceramics, creating mind-bogglingly intricate works of clay ranging from delicate figurines that you might find on your grandmother's mantel to complex still life installations that take years to complete. All of it examines the equally intricate and complicated nature of what it means to be female.

In her show now on view at PPOW gallery, Stoller serves up a wacky buffet of feminine fodder: cupcakes, candies, and flowers that on closer inspection are made of breasts and vaginas, as well as darker objects like skulls. The juxtaposition is grotesque, but that's the point: making something as traditionally pretty and feminine as a pink macaron grotesque can be a way of transcending stereotypes. "There's an inherent freedom [in that]," she said before her opening last night.

In a contemporary art market littered with head-scratchers that require less artistic skill than they do intense conception, Stoller's work is a welcome return to a time when you didn't need a personal press release and a gallery aid to figure out what was going on at an opening. "In terms of accessibility, that's why a lot of times I don't title things. I feel like there's a lot there. If anything, there's way *too* much there," Stoller joked.

And it's certainly more fun to describe her sculptures than it would be to simply recite some witty title. "How about the one with the two almost Siamese faces with the conjoined braid?" I asked. Stoller was inspired by facial augmentation and reconstruction, she said, and a woman she read about online who was addicted to plastic surgery. "They wouldn't do any more work so she started injecting her own face," she said. "That's kind of extreme, but those were reference points."

Stoller brings a myriad of influences to her work—both non-academic as well as scholarly—but is open to multiple interpretations: "I'm not trying to tell you what to think. I'm kind of pulling you in with the surfaces and the color. I'm trying to entice you to look closer and to investigate the work." Considering I found myself leaning dangerously close to her pieces in an attempt to get a closer look at the exquisite craftsmanship, I think Stoller has accomplished just that.

Through February 8 | Photos by Clarke Rudick

PPOW GALLERY

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