

Shin Sang Ho

Clayarch Gimhae Museum

Gimhae, South Korea

From the poster that advertised it to the exhibition layout, this comprehensive retrospective of Shin Sang Ho's art successfully mirrored the artist's sensibility and working methods. Like the layered glazes of his current "fired paintings," the exhibition reflected Shin's unifying practice of building up and piecing together to form wholes from sometimes odd parts. The very museum in which the exhibition took place – created to explore the relations between ceramics and architecture – is covered on the exterior with the artist's striated ceramic tiles. Shin's recent work with stripes, plaids, and diagonals in a myriad of colorful glazes brings to mind artists as diverse as Irene Rice Pereira and Peter Halley – to say nothing of Barnett Newman and Gene Davis. His glazes are crisp and forward, bringing vividness and vitality to these durable flat surfaces, forging a new direction for painting.

What a sea change this is, in a way, from Shin's past focus on constructed forms – every inch sculptures in the round. Yet these, too, we see, were layered and built from the beginning – parts becoming sometimes incongruous wholes. The separate modules of this exhibition shined light in different and appropriate ways on some of Shin's past and ongoing sculptural work. Whether riffing on Tang horses by giving his multicolored equine creatures forests of legs that look like wooden planks but are in fact made completely from ceramic, or knocking and piecing together the cream-colored rams of his "Dream of Africa" series, with their mesmerizing and expressive faces, Shin is never dull. Whether abstract or figurative, his sculptures are solidly present, and when they refer to animals, they are never cute.

Colored-glass partitions framed the horses in this exhibition, while the rams were stunningly fixed in a great mound of earth in the museum's central rotunda. The sources of Shin's inspiration – whether desert, African masks, his own Asian traditions, or Donald Judd – were invoked by the expansive installations. Abstracted chickens were clustered in an open-form henhouse, and stork-like creatures on constructed platforms were presented in a procession. The cumulative effect illustrated the marvel of this artist's enveloping yet discerning vision and his inspired mastery of material.

Cynthia Nadelman