

Detroit Art Review

Tom Phardel @ Simone DeSousa Gallery

Ron Scott

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Tom Phardel, Install image, Photographs by Tim Thayer and Robert Hensleigh, courtesy of Simone DeSousa Gallery

Tom Phardel's exhibition, *Inner Core*, opened at Simone DeSousa Gallery, October 15, 2016. The work continues in a direction that I first viewed when I wrote a review of Phardel's exhibition at [Popp's Packing](#) in May of 2015. Normally I would not write something this close to that period of work. However, this new work demands attention, exploration and, quite honestly, tribute. The strengths in Phardel's work are originality and a preponderance of skillful execution of materials that is not limited to clay, stone, glass or metal, but rather touches on all of these and more. He says in a statement, "It's here, in the inner unseen spaces, that my interest lies, where the wisdom, power, and soul resides."

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444 W. Willis, #112, Detroit, MI 48201
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Tom Phardel, Red-Bi-Lobe "Listening" 2016
Fabricated steel

In *R-Bi-Lobe "Listening"*, which is similar to but refined from an earlier work, Phardel uses fabricated steel to create a perfect form, two ovals intersecting, and an interior oval with two valve-like openings. On a technical level, the work makes the viewer wonder how it was created or fabricated. Then there is a lustrous paint finish and a sanded edge that reveals the metal in a precise way. The object feels like a cross-section, but of what? These are all the qualities that make the sculpture so strong that it leaves the viewer with a longing for an explanation. This quality is what artists seek to find: The Mona Lisa smile quality that brings the viewer back for a closer look, seeking an explanation or understanding.



Tom Phardel, "Inner Mountain" 2016 ceramic

Here, with *Inner Mountain*, we are presented with a clay object thrown on a wheel with a clay object inside. Within this interior mound, there is an indentation of two circles, what this viewer might consider an infinity symbol. This object presents questions: Is it stoneware with a crackle glaze or raku, as the darkened edge suggests, and how many artists are making sculpture that incorporates wheel-thrown forms? There are ceramic artists that have used wheel thrown forms, but Phardel goes beyond that. We know Mr. Phardel has been the Chairperson of Ceramics at the Center for Creative Studies since 1988 and oversees the philosophy of clay-made forms, and now we know why. He demonstrates that we are not limited by the material and its conventional use.



Tom Phardel, "Union of Two Points" 2016, ceramic, granite, glass

In *The Union of Two Points*, Phardel gives us an object that feels spiritual, as it rests on these two pieces of steel (looks like wood) that act as a base. It seems to this viewer that he is using a router to indent the granite in a precise and uniform way. The clay object in a circular indentation creates the illusion that it is levitating. Again, a meditative and spiritual piece of three-dimensional artwork so new in its form, we are left to contemplate the careful selection of material and execution.



Tom Phardel, Tea Wisk & Bolder – "Whispers from the Rock" 2016 Steel, glass & gold leaf

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Above is the large and overwhelming sculpture, *Tea Wisk & Boulder* – “*Whispers from the Rock*,” in which the combination of materials and how they are used is unbelievably inspiring. Mr. Phardel must have spent some time in Far East countries where a small Tea Wisk is commonplace, and he internalized the form and made it his own, not from bamboo, but many times larger and fabricated in stainless steel. What we experience is a face-off between the Tea Wisk and the large stone boulder, only to be moderated by a small vertical opening in the large inch-thick square of plate glass.

In this exhibition of three-dimensional art, Mr. Phardel distills form to its core essence and presents a hidden interior that gives way to the love of making original objects. All great literature, music, dance and visual art appeal to people when they bring their experience to the art form, and this is where Phardel succeeds. Phardel’s focus on meditative and contemplative form separates his work from many artists who work in three-dimension, not just in the Detroit metro area, but also in the world at large. If there is a time when an artist arrives at a place where his or her work demands greater attention, I would say that time has come for Tom Phardel.

If the Detroit Institute of Arts had a contemporary curator, they would, or should be all over this exhibition.

Simone DeSousa Gallery

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