



Polly Apfelbaum at Odd-Kin
The World's a Mess; It's In My Kiss
September 10 E. Providence, RI

THE WORLD'S A MESS; IT'S IN MY KISS

Polly Apfelbaum always finds a way to disrupt assumptions of the exhibition floor. In the 90's, the term 'fallen paintings' was first used to describe her unique large-scale installations, which consist of hundreds of delicate hand-dyed and hand-cut fabric pieces arranged in complex patterns on the floor. In 1998, she pushed this idea further in *Compulsory Figures*, which is a touchpoint for this exhibition. *Compulsory Figures* directly references a term for circular patterns that made up a technical segment in figure skating. Composed of two or three symmetrical circles, it is the tracing from a skater's blades that creates the patterns on the ice. Polly's 'figures' were large-scale velvet fabric rectangles, laid out in geometric pairs. The effect is as sculptural as it is painterly and minimalist as it is maximalist; these dichotomies make Polly's work so compelling and joyfully immersive.

When Polly and I first crossed paths 13 years ago, she invited me to contribute to a catalog for her exhibition "Mini-Hollywood" at the Yellowstone Art Museum in Billings, Montana. Brightly colored, heavily sequined fabric pieces were rolled out like psychedelic carpeting throughout the length of several gallery spaces. Holographic hues bounced off the walls and floors of the museum, further activated by walking viewers. This was a boundary-pushing crossover of abstraction, installation, pattern and decoration, and performance, however, the museum's board did not see it that way and canceled the exhibition a week after it opened. Polly and I continued to collaborate over the years, which

gave me the unique privilege of seeing firsthand the ways in which Polly has explored essential interests through a myriad of connecting forms, anchored often in the lens of painting. From large-scale woven rugs and glazed ceramic hands to hand-drawn weaving patterns on textured velvet, Polly's long-held interests in the aesthetics of Feminisms, Craft, installation, utopias, and the 'politics of generosity' have manifested in many forms over her long career. Though she is often centered within a painting conversation, Polly's work often seeks out or prompts these hybrid disciplines. She chooses materials that are historically located in the domestic realm and emphasizes their requisite qualities, especially color, and texture. It is a radical sleight of hand.

"The World's a Mess; It's in My Kiss" consists of several new installations and is the very first time that Polly's ceramics have moved from the wall to the site of the floor. Polly began working in clay in 2010, which has become a critical component of her practice. Taking the form of hanging beads, layered glazed slabs, colorful rocks, functional mugs, and bowls, Polly explores the potential of ceramics through color and form and pushes them into new physical and conceptual sites. The ceramics take their references from nature, color charts, quilts, rugs, and game boards; they have served as instruments in collaborative performances with musicians and they have been gifts handed to exhibition visitors. Polly recently completed a multi-year fellowship in the ceramics department at Arcadia University in Pennsylvania where she developed 160 new colors through glaze experiments with collaborative support from artists Gregg Moore and Rachel Geisinger.

The color charts are visible throughout the exhibition. *Compulsory Figures (slabs)* consists of 100 new colors in unique pairings on 50 glazed terracotta slabs. The *Color Charts* act as maps or compass points to all the work, laying out the glaze experiments on textured tablets. Reminiscent of Polly's earlier hand-dyed floor installation, the 492-piece *Bits and Pieces* is made from cast-off clay, which originated as sketches for Polly's wall works and now function as an installation of intimate fallen paintings. The title is a reference to artist Lawrence Weiner's 2005 text work *Bits & Pieces Put Together to Present a Semblance of a Whole*. The beauty of this work is that it is not 'whole;' these objects move fluidly within Polly's practice and are never installed the same way. The 100 brightly painted paper circles that make up *Hilma Heads*, directly reference a painting by the mystical artist Hilma af Klimt, as well as the very first color samples that Polly began making during her Fellowship at Arcadia. The *Hilma Heads* are a bridge between the early *Compulsory Figures* and the new slabs; they offer another set of color pairings although in gouache and not glaze.

Collaboratively, this new work responds to, references, and cycles back to Polly's forty-year career. It also represents the very first time that Polly's ceramics have been moved to the floor. Through her rigorous tracings of pattern and color, "The World's a Mess; It's in My Kiss" acts as a collaborative road map creating infinite possibilities of complex geometry and moments of focused delight.

-Kate McNamara, September, 2023