

*On the steep incline or the vast expanse towards his/their acquaintance*

[...] It all sounds serious and grim but without a formal encounter with the insignificance of our contribution there can hardly be room for genuine laughter.

Ken Price (1935-2012), an artist whose ceramic work made a permanent dent to the ancient tradition, was born in Los Angeles at a time when great aspirations and self importance were hailed as absolute hallmarks of genius. Having discovered what he loved at a very young age, he joyfully embraced the privilege of insignificance and proceeded to make work through drawings and clay for the rest of his life. He worked like a Zen master's apprentice, combining a beginner's mind approach with a naughty boy's edge. Employing humour devoid of irony, he reluctantly described his gift as a "calling", an ambivalence owed to the knowledge of the less enviable quality of love-at-first-sight: the onset of a terrible, inescapable certainty. Who, given the choice, prefers destiny to chance?

To avoid predictability he took small, meticulous steps that would translate the form of the tiniest sip of liquid into extraterrestrial emulsion. He spoke of repetition as a form of "self-forgery" and playing with pliable earth like an infantile god edging on his own creation, brought the humble household object to a state of magnetic visual intensity, condensing layers and layers of absorbed liminal light while never letting it out of his hands.

Despite being surrounded by a culture of ultravirility or/and its performance -his mentor was Peter Voulkos who he said approached work through a method of "direct frontal onslaught"- Price insisted on the magic qualities of the intimate scale and its capacity for monumental affect. He often cited the artist Joseph Cornell as a direct influence, admiring the latter's encasing devices as well as their delicate content.

While both were composedly distant presences at the fringes of a certain scene, Cornell's distinctly urban work lends itself effortlessly to words and melancholic pensiveness, whereas Price's objects render us speechless, tickled and elated, primarily addressing the body. Their joyful vitality is proportional to time spent in warm, rural climates and the sense of scale is always set in relation to nature and to a body working under the measure of the firmament.

*Pluto ware* (1993-1996), a series of ceramic bowls, plates, cups and vases that depict landscapes being polluted, was made in a rare period in KP's biography, a decade where he returned to his native LA and lived almost exclusively in the city. Named after the mythological ruler of the underworld and protector of seeds, a highly toxic radioactive element and intended as a playful pun, the polluto - *Pluto ware* is a rare instance where humour takes the back seat and gives way to an ominous reality. It is hard not to feel a kind of tautological vertigo at the sight of earthenware depicting oil refineries, smog-ridden horizons and poisonous water in relation to what the nutritional value of the content they're designed to hold would amount to.

Price didn't like to speak often and when he did he used a limited, consistent vocabulary, always cautious not to betray what he often referred to as the mystery of art. In one of his last interviews he says:

*"I'm in a great place to accommodate ideas; and they come! A skill I used to call "the highway to the unconscious" and that's where I like to be, you know, in that place where you're open, your mind goes quiet and before long all kinds of stuff, you know, all kinds of possibilities come"*

( text by A.P. )