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# Eye candy on a gigantic scale made with canvas, clay and paint

By David Pagel | July 16, 2019



"Bedroom With Lattice" by Betty Woodman, 2009. Glazed earthenware, paint and canvas, 92 by 85.5 by 15 inches. (Jeff McLane / From Charles Woodman, the Estate of Betty Woodman and David Kordansky Gallery)

The 12 works by Betty Woodman (1930-2018) on view at the David Kordansky Gallery insist on fun first: Vibrant colors, jaunty contours and animated compositions pinball your eyes around the showroom.

Your body follows, helplessly and eagerly, leaving your mind scurrying to catch up with your emotions, which are like putty in Woodman's



Betty Woodman's "Lady and Leaning Vase," 2011. Glazed earthenware, epoxy resin, lacquer, acrylic paint and canvas, 85.5 inches by 43.75 inches by 0.5 inch. (Jeff McLane / From Charles Woodman, the Estate of Betty Woodman and David Kordansky Gallery)



"The Chapel" by Betty Woodman, 2011. Glazed earthenware, epoxy resin, lacquer, acrylic paint, canvas and wood, 105 inches by 86 inches by 13 inches. (Jeff McLane / From Charles Woodman, the Estate of Betty Woodman and David Kordansky Gallery)

hands. It's as though the artist had gone into her studio wanting nothing more than to amuse herself — to surprise her eyes, mind and heart by what she did with her hands.

That's no mean feat, especially for an artist as visually sophisticated — and impatient with conventions — as Woodman was. Her playful works entertain in the deepest sense of the word. They introduce us to feelings and ideas we are otherwise unaccustomed to, and they sharpen our perceptions.

Cloth and mud are the main ingredients of Woodman's category-straddling works. Some, like "The Front Hall" and "Lady and Leaning Vase," hang like paintings or tapestries. To their loosely draped swathes of painted canvas Woodman has attached variously shaped slabs of glazed and fired clay. Like well-chosen earrings, these embellishments enhance the beauty of her compositions.

Others, such as "Red Pitcher Yellow Flowers," "Venus #2" and "His and Her Vases: Life Drawing," rest on pedestals, like vases or vessels. But Woodman has flattened their 3-D volumes, transforming their



Betty Woodman's "His and Hers Vases: Life Drawing," 2008. Glazed earthenware, epoxy resin, lacquer and paint, 38-3/8 inches by 69-5/8 inches by 9-1/2 inches. (Jeff McLane / From Charles Woodman, the Estate of Betty Woodman and David Kordansky Gallery)

utilitarian forms into shallow-relief sculptures that have the presence of gigantic handcrafted medallions or fat, freestanding paintings.

Still others, like "Tuesday Afternoon," "Bedroom With Lattice," "Summer Tea Party" and "The Chapel," hang on the wall and stand on the floor, their canvas and clay components forming tableaux that recall stage sets for intimately scaled dramas.

The fourth — and show-stealing — group of works rest on pedestals over which Woodman has spread unstretched paintings, like tablecloths or picnic blankets. The 2-D surfaces and 3-D forms in "Aztec Vase and Carpet: Mariana" and "Aztec Vase and Carpet #7" flip flop, catching viewers in low-tech yet highly satisfying ambiguity. It's fascinating to circle these pieces, stopping every few steps to compare and contrast their nooks and crannies.

In art historical terms, Woodman's works are painted ceramic sculptural tableaux that function as mini-installations. They can also be called mixed-media collages. In person, they are all that and more: a thrill to see, a thrill to think about.