

Erna Aaltonen

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NOSTALGIA

Nostalgia



COLOURED SPHERES RESIDE IN THE LIGHT-INFUSED interior of Hedge Gallery, located near San Francisco's (California) Financial District. Fourteen works varied in size are staged across a banquet-sized matt-white table, accompanied by five others placed nearby. This presentation of reverberating clay forms represent the most recent body of ceramics by the Finnish artist, Erna Aaltonen (born 1951). Titled *Nostalgia*, this exhibition was on view from 27 April to 9 June, 2012 and was the artist's first American gallery exhibition though her work was seen in 2011 at the Dallas Art Fair. Her forms, which bridge the structural and conceptual territory between vessel and sculpture, feature organic spheres, elongated pods, narrow ellipses and two-foot high folds of undulating shape. Together they define this space as a suggestive and timeless realm with an assertive manner. You want to be in this setting to absorb the lyricism these works emit, but there is no room for any other type of work due to their collective force.

Nostalgia is a curious name for this show. It compels the viewer to study the work while cueing into their titles so as to elicit meaning. *Glow*, *Rotko*, *Splash* and *Noki* typify Aaltonen's nomenclature that allude to the universality of nature but also invoke Finnish words and ideas. The show's title is a reference to her

concept of longing for home. It is also acknowledgement of what she considers the crucial touchstone the pot form has served throughout human history. In this respect, *Nostalgia*, Aaltonen believes, is homage to all the fine pot makers throughout time. Her building form through ribbon-like stoneware coils is slow, methodical, and contemplative supporting her connection to other form-builders and vessel makers, especially from the notable Finnish tradition of design. With neither moulds nor potter's wheel, Aaltonen sculpts organic forms whose small openings at the top are sibling to their modest base on which they rest. Fourteen ovoids were on view at

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Hedge Gallery, eleven of them populating the expansive table top *en-masse*. Three amoeboid verticals standing nearly two feet tall were intermingled throughout the show. While representing Aaltonen's connection to water, they especially echo the Finnish designs of Alvar Aalto glass. In form, these are a departure from the abundant roundness of other works, though they share Aaltonen's technical focus regarding surface texture and oxide colouration. Two mysterious pieces, *Ravine* and *Rotko*, are large smoke-coloured ellipses where she dwells in a minimalist ideal both in colour and form.

All of her works are of manageable size yet