

HESSE FLATOW

Fawn Krieger, *Mouth of the Cave*

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"[Two is] the unofficial numeral of interrelation." —Darby English¹

If it were possible to locate Fawn Krieger's work within a lived sense of time, it might be the moment just before the flash of recognition that rewards the process of learning: when a strange word coalesces into familiar meaning, a permutation of numbers returns the anticipated calculation, or a puzzle becomes decipherable. We work through complexity, uncertainty, and contingency to arrive at a threshold of discovery that hinges on bridging fragments of knowledge recently gained as well as ancestral or hereditary. In *Mouth of the Cave*, the fusion, adjacency, and holding together vital to meaning-making are manifest in equal measure as the convergence, bonding, and abutment of form. In Krieger's wall sculptures, small ceramic volumes in slightly off-kilter geometric shapes of triangles, semicircles, and rectangles nestle within a chunky concrete substrate. Krieger constructs and slipcasts the forms, which she then underglazes, creating gridded, polka-dotted, brushy, hazy, mottled, outlined, and checked families of pattern. After firing these ceramic forms, she bonds them together with pigmented concrete using varying degrees of pressure. Given the material conditions of wet concrete, Krieger has about ten minutes to negotiate the compositions, a process she captures from a camera standing over her working space that results in videos, not on view here, situating the act of making as both performance and archive.



//11, 2021, fired clay, underglaze, concrete, vermiculite, pigment. 9.5 x 11 x 3 in.

The works simultaneously read as newly made and as fragments of architectural ruin. Concrete, for instance, is the material of Roman empires as well as contemporary urban paths, while the black and white checkerboard of //13 recalls the patterning on mid-century missiles. An alizarin and pale blue rectangle at its lower left references meter scales used in archaeological digs—those portals to distant pasts that are, in their own way, still becoming. Within the art historical realm, Krieger's works hold a deep, almost molecular knowledge of modes of making as divergent as ancient Iranian clay waterskins with urn-like necks transfigured into anthropomorphic feet or the humorous but deadly-serious energy of Mike Kelley's performances and crystalline grottos. Krieger likewise dialogues with the indexed pressure of Susan Weil and Sari Dienes, as well as Sylvia Palacios Whitman's proclivity for the pedestrian turned statuesque: a smoking coffee cup, giant green hands, untrained participants. Beneath all this lies a reverence for Dada's chance procedure and the unexpected power of putting things in relation to each other. In many of these practices, time is mutable; as Simone Forti proffered apropos of her 1961 dance construction *Huddle*, the work's duration should be "long enough." Krieger's art forges a shifting non-teleological temporality that is not defined by historical time but generates its own ahistorical universe of referents.

This is no small feat for a body of work that indexes its own making and, in this sense, could equally be said to address process. Often, Krieger's pigmented concrete oozes up past the ceramic vessels laid into it, ossifying the somatic pressure of her hand and marking its own history. Krieger calls these sculptures "*caesurae*," denoted as double oblique lines (//), after the metrical or musical notation that designates a pause in a verse of spoken content. Following this nomenclature, each artwork is titled // before a number indicating the sequence in which it was made. For Krieger, the // is a remarkably open and even reversible concept: in holding apart, it brings together. That these sculptures hold themselves up, hold themselves relative to each other, and hold themselves together with their spatial surround on their own terms is all the clearer when compared with Krieger's preceding series, in which neatly-

¹ Darby English, "Two of a Kind: Darby English on *Figure 2*, 1962," *Artforum* 60, no. 5 (January 2022), 114.

arranged forms align within a ceramic frame that clearly demarcates the work's predetermined external limits and spatial structure. Indeed, because the notation // visualizes time (a period of silence) as the space between its two lines, it is already a sculptural term, not simply a temporal or aural one. Neither separate nor attached, the // is both a single entity and two distinct parts. By standing in relation to, // bridge whatever surrounds them.

As a graphical notation, the // opens Krieger's work to the mystery of how form becomes legible. Krieger's cast ceramic volumes are often multiples, so the same rhombus is repeated in //2 and //10, for instance. Although we lack the tools to transform Krieger's as-yet unknown sign system into spoken communication, we still puzzle alongside its indecipherable shapes. Like a text needs a reader, the // need viewers to act as containers for the reciprocal transfer of meaning. Occasionally, the artist reveals the metaphor of the works as vessels. Witness //11, whose arctic-white central volume faces us like an open box alongside twelve others that appear closed, since their absent side faces the wall. As pocket-sized vessels, these shapes could be carried with. They entertain the nomadic possibility of carriage. As such, they function as proposals for survival and world-making through which lessons from non-synchronous temporalities meet. This, perhaps, is not so much *learning* as it is *unlearning* in Gayatri Spivak's sense of recognizing that Western systems of thought are not the intellectual keys to understanding the world. It is waiting, slowing down, stopping oneself from the tendency to correct, teach, appropriate, inscribe, enlighten, or to presume that time proceeds in a straight line. Unlearning is another way to perform *being with*, for whatever duration we choose when we happen upon a //.

— Elizabeth Buhe

Fawn Krieger is a NYC-based artist. Her work has been exhibited at The Kitchen, Art in General, The Moore Space, Von Lintel Gallery, The Rose Art Museum at Brandeis University, Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, Human Resources, Fleisher/Ollman Gallery, Soloway Gallery, and SE Cooper Contemporary. She earned her BFA from Parsons School of Design, and her MFA from Bard College's Milton Avery Graduate School of the Arts. Her work has been written about in the *New York Times*, *Artforum*, *Art in America*, *Sculpture Magazine*, *NY Arts*, *Flash Art*, *BOMB*, and *Texte zur Kunst*. Krieger is a 2019 Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Biennial Award Fellow.