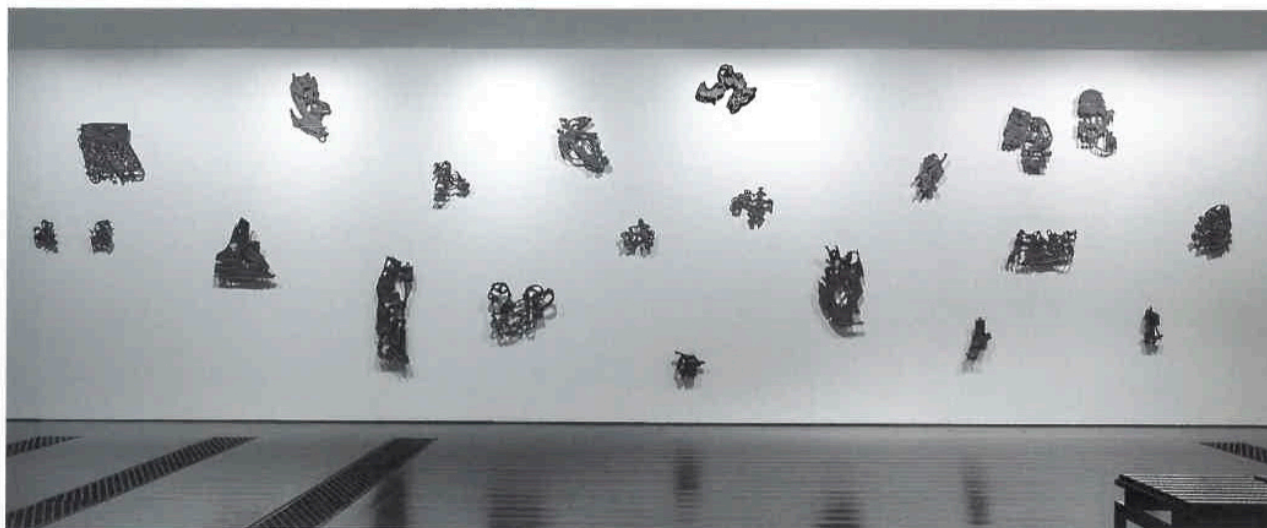


reviews



HELSINKI Adel Abidin

Ateneum Art Museum

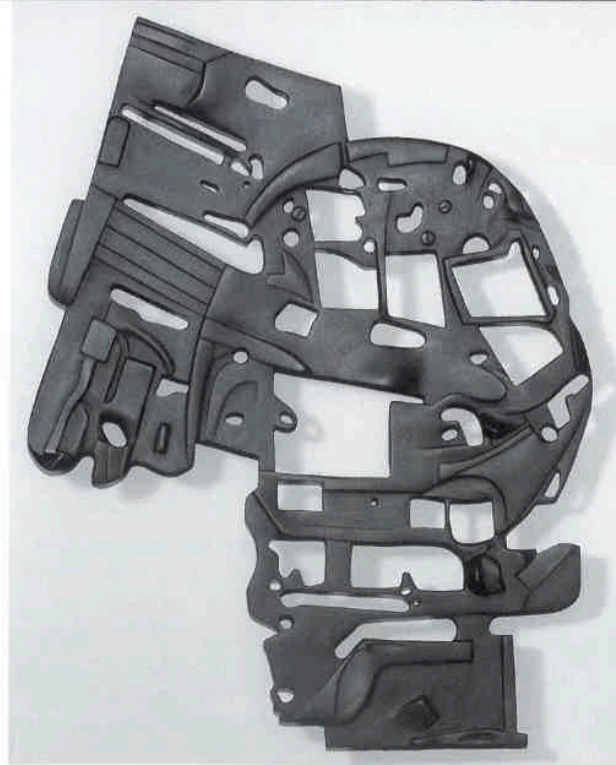
"History Wipes," a survey of Adel Abidin's recent sculpture and video, confronted unpalatable events with works that ranged from the elegiac to the distressing. Set within the stately confines of the Ateneum Art Museum, which is dedicated to historical Finnish art, the show juxtaposed the century-old Finnish Civil War with much more recent happenings in the Middle East, blending personal experience with echoes of notable art historical antecedents. The idea of cleansing featured prominently, and Abidin tackled this issue from multiple angles. An unexpected humorous streak, though sporadic, tempered some of the most appalling scenarios with pathetic ridiculousness.

A video projection, also titled *History Wipes*, displayed the most biting humor. Inspired in part by Rauschenberg's *Erased de Kooning Drawing*, it resembles a TV commercial for a cleaning product that will wipe away the bad spots of history so that you can breathe, breathe,

Above: Adel Abidin, *Relics*, 2017. Mixed media on PVC foam, installation view. Right: Adel Abidin, *Relics*, #9, 2017. Mixed media on PVC foam, 50 x 39 cm.

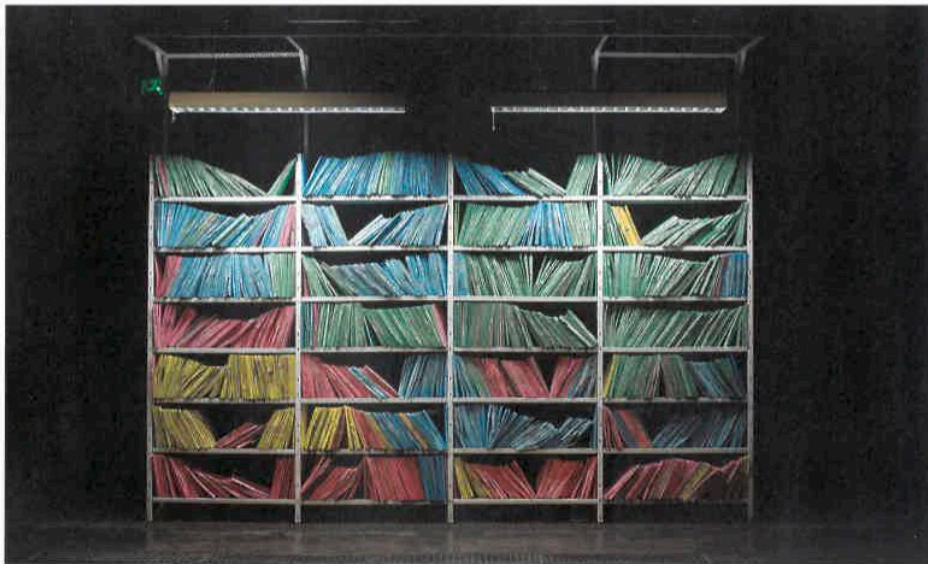
breathe. In *Cleansing*, a video/sculpture installation referencing Goya's *The Third of May, 1808*, fire hoses supplant guns and are used to sanitize a group of miscreants. Viewers, who were kept behind a physical barrier, could only watch and conjecture as to the reasons for this public humiliation. The inherent ambiguity of the work made for a frustrating experience.

The source of *Relics* was not at all obvious. Drawn from a photograph of American troops being transported to the Middle East, this suite of wall-mounted sculptures initially appeared to be an abstract composition. After prolonged scrutiny, however, one began to identify helmets and various kinds of equipment; then came the realization that the sculptures represent fragments of charred wreckage. Abidin's depiction of the potential fate of soldiers is not only plausible, it also stands as



a potent lamentation. *Reward* and *Al-Warqaa* are equally haunting. *Reward* recasts five iron masks—used during the rule of Saddam Hussein to punish unsuccessful Iraqi athletes—as pristine glass vessels. At

once skillfully crafted, distressingly comical, and downright terrifying, they made it difficult not to imagine the pain and humiliation experienced by the wearers of the originals. In contrast, *Al-Warqaa*, which was



TOP: HENRI NURMIKINEN, FINNISH NATIONAL GALLERY / CENTER: HANNU PAKARIKINEN, FINNISH NATIONAL GALLERY / BOTTOM: PATRICIA SWEETOW GALLERY, COURTESY PATRICIA SWEETOW GALLERY

inspired by the poem "Ode to the Human Soul," by the Persian philosopher Avicenna, asserts a unique combination of majesty and disappointment. The illuminated frame of a massive dove soars toward the ceiling, never giving up on its attempts to attain freedom, even though it is tethered to a rock.

Archive, a dense and colorful array of file folders, based on Abidin's experience of applying for a residence permit in Amman, Jordan, was arguably the most evocative sculpture in the show. Installed in a dark space beneath an intermittently

flickering light and accompanied by the disembodied sounds of creaking and shuffling papers, the scenario remained eerily beautiful and evocative. The mystery was heightened by a hidden mechanism that periodically altered the position of a few folders. Despite its subtle beauty, *Archive* speaks of secrecy and the control of information, of lives left hanging in the balance and the torturous process of waiting. It, like much of Abidin's work, recalls the solemn intensity of artists such as Doris Salcedo and Rachel Whiteread. For Abidin, focusing on the burden

of history can make it palpable. In return, history provides what he calls "something that I see almost as sculpture morphing over time."

—John Gayer

SAN FRANCISCO

Toshiaki Noda

Patricia Sweetow Gallery

Toshiaki Noda's clay sculptures present themselves as decorative yet functional works melded back into, or partially emerged from, their organic state. Smashed cans and vessels, egg cartons, and flattened stubs ooze and bubble, as they fold and collapse into themselves. The sculptures traverse a range of glazes and colors, some matte, others glossy. The impression is both familiar (domestic objects in pleasing hues) and disconcerting (like the remnants of a home pulled from the ashes of a fire). Several of the works incarnate their earthen source, shaped like confused rocks or podgy tree stumps, stilled in their effort to achieve form. It is as if Noda is attempting to capture time, solidified in the act of transformative heat, from past to present and back again.

Top: Adel Abidin, *Archive*, 2018. **Folders, metal structure, linear mechanism, and 2 active speakers, 300 x 400 x 40 cm.** **Above:** Adel Abidin, *Reward*, 2015. **Molded Pyrex glass, 28.5 x 25 x 28 cm.** **Right:** Toshiaki Noda, *7N221*, 2017. **Glazed ceramic, 16 x 11.5 x 11 in.**

Born in Arita, Japan, which has been distinguished for its porcelain ware since the 1600s, Noda creates in a manner that at first seems antithetical to a tradition of practical beauty. His disfigured forms break from this past then appear to raze its very foundation. This uncomfortable fissure—a tapping into then distorting of the familiar—makes his work visceral and appealing. The referential shapes and sheens are all there, but somehow they don't fit together; though closer consideration reveals more of an allegiance with the past than an abandonment.

A 2008 graduate of CSU, Long Beach with an emphasis on printmaking, Noda turned to ceramics in the hope of energizing his work with greater spontaneity and physicality. After moving to New York, he broadened his earlier Japanese training in ceramics via self-taught experimentation. He notes that "though he always loved ceramics he [felt] too involved with it growing up and wanted to see a different world." Some of this reckoning with the past is the result of a natural progression in Noda's work (building, severing, shaping, firing

