

Ann Agee

*Madonnas and Hand Warmers*

June 18 – July 23, 2021



P·P·O·W is pleased to present *Madonnas and Hand Warmers*, Ann Agee's third solo exhibition with the gallery. Showcasing the latest wares from the "Agee Manufacturing Company", the fictitious enterprise that has motivated Agee's three-decade career in ceramics, this tour de force exhibition will be comprised of more than one hundred unique works that form two elaborate series of aesthetically and materially diverse sculptures. Alongside Kathy Butterly, Arlene Shechet, and Annabeth Rosen, Agee is a leading member in a pioneering generation of feminist ceramicists. Since her residency at the Kohler Arts Center in 1991, Agee's practice has focused on replicating objects by hand, a process employed to simulate mass production and engage ambiguous delineations between fine art, design, and craft; histories of cultural appropriation and exchange; and the range of women's lived experiences.

Inspired by late-17th and early-18th century Italian folk salt cellars in the collection of the Davanzati Palace in Florence, Agee's series *Madonnas of the Girl Child* depicts women and girls. Made from a variety of clays, formed with different techniques, modeled in myriad sizes, glazed in numerous patterns, and fired in multiple kilns and at various temperatures, these sculptures realistically or abstractly engage motifs of the divine infant. Unlike the ubiquitous invocations of the Christ Child, all Agee's offspring are female. Whether being breastfed, cradled, or corralled, these girls are held up by their mothers and endowed with aptitude and virtue, regardless of their appearance. The sheer panoply on view will showcase Agee's mastery of the medium and her delight in experimentation.

Agee's figurative sculptures will be complimented by her ongoing series of *Hand Warmers*, which she began in 2016. Also inspired by Italian folk pottery, these vessels reference footwear and were historically meant to be filled with hot water and clasped to warm one's hands. When such objects were in fashion, Florence was plagued by violence and upper-class women lived most of their lives in chilly palaces, resigned to pursuing the arts or domestic labor. Preceding the *Madonna of the Girl Child* series, *Hand Warmers* exemplifies Agee's deft technical skill; sophisticated synthetization of cultural histories; and ingenuity with color, pattern, and form.

Each of Agee's sculptures bears some text – "Agee Manufacturing Co.", "Agee MFG", or simply "Ann's" – a signature-cum-logo that dates to Agee's earliest works, including her Lake Michigan Bathroom, 1994. Rendered in enamel overglaze or in red or black slip, this brand creates the impression that each work is a multiple and that another size or a different color could be fabricated back at the factory. *Madonnas and Hand Warmers* parodies an object's trajectory in cultural status from utilitarian commodity to rarefied artifact, placing Agee's practice in the boundary-defying traditions of Claes Oldenburg, Ken Price and Betty Woodman.

Ann Agee (b. 1959) lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. She earned her BFA from The Cooper Union School of Art in 1981 and her MFA from the Yale School of Art in 1986. Her work has been included in notable group exhibitions, including: *Bad Girls* (1994), The New Museum, NY; *Dirt on Delight* (2009), Institute of Contemporary Art, PA and the Walker Art Center, MN; and *Conversations in Clay* (2008), Katonah Art Museum, NY. She has received a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship, The Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation Award, and a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, among others. Her works are included in the permanent collection of notable institutions including The Brooklyn Museum of Art, NY; The Philadelphia Museum of Art, PA; The RISD Art Museum, RI; The Los Angeles County

Museum of Art, CA; The Henry Art Museum in Seattle, WA; The Kohler Art Center in Sheboygan, WI; and The Museum of Contemporary Art in Miami, FL.