

PRESS: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE to all ARTS & CALENDAR EDITORS

June 20, 2017

WHAT: **Olga de Amaral and Ruth Duckworth: *Building on Beauty***
August 18—October 28, 2017
No opening reception

WHERE: **Bellas Artes Gallery**
653 Canyon Road, Santa Fe



Olga de Amaral, *Poblado M*, 2017, linen, gesso, acrylic, gold leaf, 39 ½ x 68 inches. Photo credit: ©Diego Amaral

Olga de Amaral (b 1932) studied architectural design in her native Colombia. After transferring to Michigan's Cranbrook Academy where she studied textile art, Amaral would become a key figure in post-War, Latin American abstraction. The architectural aspect of her work continues to add to the tension between fabric and dimensionality. Amaral likens her art to "painting in space;" her woven walls lay the foundations for a postmodern meta-structure that collides undeniable loveliness with an intense degree of craftsmanship.

Ruth Duckworth (1919-2009), like Amaral, was not born in the United States, though both artists have achieved great success here. Duckworth escaped to Britain from Nazi Germany in the 1930s, and settled in the U.S. in the mid-'60s. Having investigated the more traditional mediums of stone and bronze while studying sculpture in Liverpool, she discovered clay. There, she "found her true voice as a sculptor," according to Martin Puryear. He wrote in the forward to *Ruth Duckworth: Modernist Sculptor*, published in 2004, "The ... form ... is both a metaphor and a vehicle for the organic feeling which ... reflects [her] own deep empathy for the natural world."



Ruth Duckworth, *Untitled # 18377*, c 1975, porcelain, graphite on Masonite board, 38 x 38 x 4 ½ inches.
Photo credit: James Hart

Early on, Duckworth, like Amaral, exercised an independent mind by using a medium that was not recognized within the pantheon of “high art” and its attendant formalism. Clearly influenced by the Romanian modernist sculptor Constantin Brancusi, as well as deeply moved by the ancient art of the Cycladic culture that preceded that of classical Greece, Duckworth developed her own abstractly elegant language, as has Amaral. Separately, both artists challenged the machismo of mid-twentieth-century Modernism, at the same time that they insisted upon moving beyond its restrictive dualism that allowed for painting *or* sculpture and craft *or* fine art. Together, their artworks inhabit a space that transcends the narrow confines of Modernism into its next phase, that of Postmodernism. Their art feels somehow at home in Puryear’s “natural world,” as if we have stepped into an infinite continuum that encompasses feral beauty and balanced intelligence.

Amaral metaphorically freed the canvas from the frame, revealing a multidimensional structure in space that relies on a high level of craftsmanship to justify its outstanding exquisiteness and rich layers of meaning. Duckworth took advantage of the built sensibility of clay—and our deep familiarity with it as a medium that has signified nature and nurture since prehistoric human times. Using a reductive process that would come to reveal the underlying forms she desired to expose, she employed a highly tactile and organic style that was always abstract, no matter how much it referenced the natural world. She played, with great success, with the tensions inherent in paradox—volume

gives way to negative space, light to shadow, and solidly functional surfaces slip into a deliciously sensuous tactility.

Art historian Edward Lucie-Smith has written about Amaral that, while “there are in fact no equivalents for what she makes in pre-Columbian archaeology, one feels that such objects ought in logic to exist.” Her artworks hang on the walls with the weight and presence of an ancient, pre-contact America. Like Duckworth’s clay constructions, Amaral’s textiles are in fact modern abstractions that focus upon light, tactility, and a process-driven physicality. They are ephemeral and timeless, and therein lies their satisfying tension: Both artists’ works stand in for the past and the future within the context of the present.

In 1964, Duckworth moved to Chicago from England. She settled in Chicago and lived there until her death in 2009 at the age of 90—her indomitable spirit had her sculpting into the last year of her life. Duckworth’s art never settled into one genre; it continued to evolve and change throughout six decades of practice, though she confined herself to three-dimensional work in clay, stone and bronze—creating commissioned wall reliefs in porcelain and stoneware, as well as monumental bronze sculptures, at such sites as government and university buildings, and for banks, private individuals, churches and synagogues.

Duckworth’s exhibition record, both nationally and internationally, is extensive. Among the museums that have collected her work are the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC; the Art Institute of Chicago; the Moderns in Chicago and Tokyo; the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York; the Museum of Arts and Design in New York; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Fine Art Museums of San Francisco; Boston’s Museum of Fine Art; the Philadelphia Museum of Art; the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam; the Victoria and Albert in London; and Germany’s Kestner Museum. A group exhibition, which in late 2016 traveled from the David Owsley Museum of Art at Ball State University to the Snite Museum of Art at the University of Notre Dame, included Duckworth’s work alongside that of Henry Moore and Alexander Calder.

A Guggenheim Fellowship recipient early in her career, Amaral is a member of the Academia Nacional de Bellas Artes of Buenos Aires, Argentina. Her work is in the permanent collections of the Art Institute of Chicago; San Francisco’s De Young Museum; the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art in New York; and the Renwick Gallery of the National Gallery in Washington, DC; as well as in museums and private collections in Paris, Zurich, Kyoto, Zurich, and London, and many others including, of course, her hometown of Bogotá in Colombia. Renowned auction houses Bonhams, Christie’s and Sotheby’s offer her work for sale. A curator at the Nevada Museum of Art has included one of Amaral’s gold textiles for an exhibition titled *UNSETTLED*, a landscape show that is being organized with the participation of renowned artist Ed Ruscha.



Olga de Amaral in her studio. Photo credit: ©Diego Amaral



Ruth Duckworth in Chicago working on a 15-foot high commission for the State of Illinois, 2008

Both artists began showing their work at Bellas Artes in 1986, in an exhibition titled *Art in Craft Media*, curated by textile designer, author, and collector Jack Lenor Larsen, an early and important mentor of the gallery's owners, Bob and Charlotte Kornstein.

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