

## **At The Noyes House:**

*Blum & Poe, Mendes Wood DM and Object & Thing*

### **Alma Allen**

(b. 1970, Heber City, UT, USA)

Like a Brancusi with a twist, a happy marriage of a classical column and an expressionist brush-stroke, Alma Allen's pleated bronze sculpture stands at over eight feet in the courtyard of the Noyes House. It is almost the same height as Black Beast II, the site-specific steel sculpture that Noyes commissioned from Alexander Calder in 1957. (Another of Allen's works sits indoors; in both cases, the polished surfaces reflect the architecture of the house and the landscape beyond.) This use of his work as a visual locus for the exhibition could not be more appropriate – for the career of this self-taught artist has been one sustained act of focused attention. He began his practice by carving salvaged materials into small objects, for a time selling them from an ironing board on the street in SoHo. After almost a decade in New York, by which time he had a devoted following, Allen relocated to Los Angeles, where he began designing furniture and creating large-scale sculptures. After injury from continual carving left him unable to use his hands for extended periods, he built a robotic system out of spare assembly line parts, dramatically extending the scale of his practice. Allen's sculptures are embodiments of his own personality: experimental, expressive, direct, and entirely original.

### **Megumi Arai**

(b. 1989, Portland, OR, USA)

Japanese boro textiles have been at center stage in New York this year, thanks to an exhibition at the Japan Society. Boro (meaning "rags" or "tatters") technique is comparable to the celebrated quilts of the American South - which are also often made with salvaged textiles - but have a very different compositional sensibility, featuring collage-like overlays. Megumi Arai has brought this tradition into the 21st century incorporating her own naturally made dyes, as part of a multidisciplinary practice that also includes photography and performance. Her work at the Noyes House occupies seemingly domestic formats. One of her textiles serves as the cover for a low-to-the-ground bed; another lies over the back of the living room sofa, in place of a Noyes family blanket. These gestures are humble, yet Arai's works are also arresting abstractions, with individual patches floating atop one another to create a dynamic visual field.

## **Lucas Arruda**

(b. 1983, São Paulo, Brazil)

If any place has atmosphere, it's the Noyes House. Memories pervade the space, as does the sheer intelligence of its designer. But it's when you stand in front of the paintings of São Paulo-based Lucas Arruda that you see just how deep and rich an atmosphere can be. His landscapes are more mental than actual, participating in a tradition of perceptual painting that goes back centuries in art history. In Arruda's contribution to this lineage, the mediation of light, as it meets the gaze, becomes a criss-crossed terrain; abstraction and figuration, apparition and emptiness, dissolve into cohesion. His images would be haunting and powerful anywhere, in their sublimation of temporality, the suggestion that matter has been slowly deposited onto their surfaces. But they take on a particular resonance here at the Noyes House, in the quiet stillness of a place long lived in.

## **Lynda Benglis**

(b. 1941, Lake Charles, LA, USA)

Name a new freedom that has come into artists' hands over the past fifty years, and you will likely find that Lynda Benglis was one of its first claimants. She initially became known in the late 1960s for her poured latex and foam works, which both mocked and outclassed most of the Process Art and Minimalism of the day – works that were, of course, made mostly by men. Her abiding interest in physical experience led her to help invent whole new domains of art, including installation and video work. Her sophisticated understanding of the politics of representation made her a bellwether figure in the history of Feminism. For good measure, Benglis also poked and prodded at the arbitrary separation between sculpture and decorative art – a line of thinking that hovers, somewhere or other, in the background to the ceramic works she began making in the early 1990s. At a time long before this material was in vogue in the art world, her use of clay was charged with intent: once again, she dared people to look at her work and relegate it to second-class status, or indeed, judge it to be anything but incredibly powerful. For At the Noyes House, two of her ceramic works sit on the furniture, transforming a table and a piano top into plinths through their sheer presence. Though executed at an intimate scale, in harmony with the domestic space, they explode with energy. Benglis's characteristic ability to make a gesture and hold it is here on full display: her works are perpetually unfolding, and we are fortunate enough to watch.

## **Sérgio de Camargo**

(1930-1990, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)

Sérgio de Camargo was born in Rio de Janeiro, and trained initially in Brazil, including with the expatriate Italian artist Lucio Fontana. He spent much of his life and career in Paris, however, and was there exposed both to philosophy (studying at the Sorbonne under Gaston Bachelard) and avant-garde practice. This positioned him ideally to synthesize the approaches and aesthetics of Constructivism, Minimalism, and early Cubism. He shared with many European artists of his generation – particularly the Italians who followed in Fontana’s footsteps, like Enrico Castellani and Piero Manzoni – a profound interest in materiality, viewing abstraction not as a means to transcend the everyday experience of objecthood, but rather to reframe it and make it more palpable, more immediate. This viewpoint is of course entirely compatible with that espoused by Eliot Noyes. The Camargo construction shown here, with its dialectical contrast between smooth and jutting forms, compares closely with the opposition of glass and stone walls in the house.

## **Miho Dohi**

(b. 1974, Nara Prefecture, Japan)

*Buttai* simply means “object” in Japanese; perhaps no more specific title would do for the works of the Kanazawa-based artist Miho Dohi. The small-scale assemblages that she makes – rarely more than a foot in any dimension – abide by no obvious rule of construction. They incorporate both natural and industrial materials, sometimes new and sometimes scavenged. Her works do not even resemble one another, necessarily, yet somehow always express the artist’s distinctive sensibility and intense curiosity, conveyed through dexterous compositions and a deep sensitivity to coloristic textural effects. Ultimately mysterious in their intention, illogical in the best sense of the term, they nonetheless feel just right – a perception the artist herself shares: “just when it seems to become clear what is inside and what is outside,” she has said, “they turn completely upside down, and all of a sudden, an object appears quite naturally out of that chaos.”

## **Hugo França**

(b. 1954, Porto Alegre, Brazil)

Like Eliot Noyes, Hugo França was once an industrial designer – but look at him now. Departing his first profession to live in isolation in Bahia, in northeastern Brazil, in the early 1980s, he plunged into a deep and abiding relationship with nature, learning to work wood expressively at monumental size. His motivations were in part to do with environmental awareness, as he was saddened by the tragic waste of the timber extraction industry, and determined to give the felled trees new life. After fifteen years he returned to São Paulo to set up a studio, but his heart is still

out there, in the rainforest. He has made furniture and pure sculpture, as well as many objects that hover somewhat ambiguously between those two categories; At The Noyes House includes one such inventive work, a group of rings made from a single root system. Like a giant's toy, the objects can be stacked or leaned into any desired configuration, echoing at grand scale the interest that Modernists of Noyes's generation (notably his friends Charles and Ray Eames) had in abstract play.

### **Aaron Garber-Maikovska**

(b. 1978, Washington, D.C. USA)

Like most Modernists, Eliot Noyes had an unswerving dedication to clarity. In the conception and execution of his own home, as with everything else he did, he eschewed unnecessary complication, delivering his ideas with a deceptive simplicity that was the product of long thought and digestion. In our own postmodern times, this sort of directness seems enviable; it is easy to feel that we are drowning in complexity and contradiction. Enter Aaron Garber-Maikovska. This L.A.-based artist has made his name by carving out a space for direct physical and spiritual expression, despite all the theoretical thickets that seem to block such a pathway. The serene and elevated surroundings of the Noyes House are not a usual setting for him: he has conducted his vigorous somatic performances in chain restaurants and mall parking lots, a guerrilla practice he often documents in videos. For this exhibition, he contributes a painting that is equally vigorous: executed on the floor, in homebrewed ink and oil pigments, on a large rectangle of fluted polyboard. Its immediacy may bring to mind many art historical references – from Abstract Expressionism to Art Brut to Jean Michel Basquiat – and the sense of hard-won freedom is as acute as any of those precedents. Just as Noyes did in his own time, Garber-Maikovska sees and understands all the interwoven contexts for his own creativity – and finds a way to cut through.

### **Tomoo Gokita**

(b. 1969, Tokyo, Japan)

As the career of Eliot Noyes proves – he was a curator, designer, consultant and architect, often several of these things at once – it's totally possible to switch professions while going from strength to strength. This is Tomoo Gokita's story, too. He first became known as a graphic designer, whose style – inspired by vintage magazines, film stills, pornography and postcards – made him a cult figure in the music and fashion worlds. When faced with his images, viewers are left scavenging their memories for cultural indicators or contexts to complete the elusive, often inscrutable narratives. Gokita took up painting and drawing fulltime in 2005, but his style, roughly expressive and executed in a reduced palette of black, white and gray – remained immediately recognizable. You wouldn't necessarily say the same for his painting Looking for a

Lover, which is one of the first works that Gokita has produced in polychrome. And what colors: jewel tones of blue, pink and purple against a looming backdrop of olive green. What remains constant from his earlier work is the atmosphere of eerie anonymity, psychologically charged despite the blankness that seems to dwell at its heart.

### **Sonia Gomes**

(b. 1948, Caetanópolis, Brazil)

There's a good and telling story about Eliot Noyes's relationship with the artist Alexander Calder. In addition to the famous Black Beast II, Noyes acquired two of his friend's mobiles, an unnamed red one made by Calder for a specific location in the Noyes House and another called Snow Flurry. In a 1958 article in *Art in America*, he spoke of his family's affection for the mobiles, albeit in a way that might make a conservator cringe: "We all walk right through one low-hanging Calder mobile, making it swing, and we bat or blow at one another as we walk by." Eventually Noyes came to feel this wasn't entirely safe for the red mobile, and moved it to a more out-of-the-way location near the dining table. But the affable Calder was uncharacteristically upset; he'd made the mobile specifically for that location, and he wanted people to bump into it. Now, on the same hook, hangs a work by the great Brazilian fiber artist Sonia Gomes. It is equally inviting, and like Calder's mobiles, composed of everyday materials – snipped steel in his case, cut fabrics in hers – while also assembling itself into a composition that is so specific, so communicative, that it amounts to an expression in an entirely new language. Also like Calder's work, Gomes' sculpture is essentially abstract, with fleeting flashes of figuration. That body that is mostly unseen or absent, in her work, hails from a very different place and time – the fabric remnants indexing her own experience as a Black Brazilian. Occupying this spot in the Noyes House, it does much to suggest how much our moment in art history has in common with half a century ago, and also how much broader and richer the conversation has become.

### **Green River Project LLC**

(Founded in 2017 by Aaron Aujla and Benjamin Bloomstein in NYC)

Look at archival pictures of the Noyes House, and you will see a simple, slatted set of outdoor furniture in the courtyard, catty-corner to Calder's Black Beast II. When preparing *At the Noyes House*, it made all the sense in the world to put a new suite in its place. Green River Project LLC took on the challenge. Founded in 2017 by Aaron Aujla and Benjamin Bloomstein, this New York City workshop is research-driven, both in its material selection and in its relationship to Modernist precedent – with an emphasis on creative recycling on both counts. Their Noyes House set may call to mind the Z-form chairs of the Dutch avant-garde master Gerrit Rietveld (a frequent reference for them); the material is the same one he sometimes used, common pine, in this case

given gravitas through a subtle shiny finish. As to the table in the center, it is more in the mode of the French autodidact Alexandre Noll, ample in its proportions, with pairs of dowels protruding above each leg, a striking detail that draws attention to the massive joinery of the design. Elsewhere in the house, their Airline Pendant (actually made from found airplane parts) hangs where Noyes once had a lamp; their ebony ashtrays grace many of the house's side tables, and their very first carved stone vessel can also be found. Making such simple objects so memorable is definitely not easy; arguably, the most impressive thing about Aujla and Bloomstein's work is that they make it seem so.

### **Mark Grotjahn**

(b. 1968, Pasadena, CA, USA)

One of America's leading painters, Mark Grotjahn has developed a practice that merges abstraction and figuration, geometry and gesture, rigorous structure and freeform improvisation. One of the absolute highlights of At the Noyes House is his painting, created especially for the wall above the broad hearth – a spot that has been occupied over the years by a Ray Eames sculpture (carved from a plywood splint) that hung at the left edge, and a Pablo Picasso lithograph of a bull, among other works. Grotjahn's painting continues his most recent series, Capri, which features distinctive scraped-out areas of thick paint; the work nonetheless marks a departure in his practice, in that its axis is rotated 90 degrees from his usual vertical format. He has not used this horizontal orientation in over two decades. The shift pays off, bringing in new references both to the artist's own past work (notably, his breakthrough Butterfly paintings of the 1990s, which featured similar radial wing-like compositions) and also, more broadly, to the history of landscape painting. Every Grotjahn painting seems to open up a world; in this case, that marvelous pictorial event registers as an echo of the home's natural surroundings.

### **Kazunori Hamana / Yukiko Kuroda**

(b. 1969, Osaka, Japan) / (b. 1968, Shizuoka, Japan)

Ready to be impressed? Have a look at the astonishing vessels of Kazunori Hamana, which sit in the Noyes House courtyard like ancient monuments long adrift that have somehow come to rest. Built by hand using a variety of natural clays, sourced from Shiga prefecture in Japan, each is finished with Hamana's own mineral glazes. In their scale, they seem almost to rival the natural environment from which he has so skillfully wrested them. But they are of course deeply cultural, making conscious reference to the traditional Japanese tsubo, a functional clay jar dating back to prehistoric times, used to store and process food. A distinctive aspect of Hamana's practice is the ageing of his great pots. Once fired, the works are placed outside and around his studio on the east coast of Japan where they are left to accumulate a surface with the changing of the seasons.

Hamana collaborates with fellow Chiba-based artist Yukiko Kuroda on vessels that he considers damaged or otherwise imperfect. Kuroda accentuating the imperfections of these works, sometimes adding Japanese lacquer and polishing powder – her interpretation of the celebrated Japanese custom of kintsugi – or by adjoining flaking or cast-off layers of ceramics from other vessels, which are created organically during the pottery process. Despite the much smaller scale of these interventions, the process often takes longer than the time it takes Hamana to create the pot itself.

## **Sheila Hicks**

(b. 1934, Hastings, NE, USA)

The great Sheila Hicks presides over the story of fiber art like a queen of old – though she has never been much interested in holding court. She is an inveterate and curious traveler, much affected by her time in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America, in India, and in Paris, where she now lives and works, among many other parts of the world. Hicks is also a deep student of fiber forms, and it is perhaps unsurprising – given her global view of the subject – that at some point, her eagle eye would have lit upon the prayer rug. One cannot imagine a more spiritually charged textile genre, though she typically made it her own, while respecting the cultural source. The example shown at the Noyes House, from 1978 - a nod to the tapestries by artists such as Henri Matisse and Joan Miró which once were here - adapts the rough composition of a traditional prayer rug. These typically feature arches, evoking the architecture of a mosque, and are laid out with the motif pointing to Mecca, in the direction of worship. Hung vertically on the wall, Hicks's work suggests a broader narrative about spiritual elevation, while also recalling abstract painting, which was her first métier, when she studied at Yale with Josef Albers – not too far from New Canaan.

## **Mimi Lauter**

(b. 1982, San Francisco, CA, USA)

Mimi Lauter is a Los Angeles-based artist whose oil and pastel works present abstracted narratives, drawn from subconscious memory, literature, contemporary events, and classical mythology. Her practice proposes a secular relationship to spiritual traditions, vesting belief in, and devotion to, the act of painting itself. In both her iconography and mark-making, she pays knowing tribute to art history – notably the work of the French Symbolists and Nabis (Odilon Redon, Jean-Édouard Vuillard and Pierre Bonnard). Lauter's work hanging in the Noyes House is titled *Alla Marcia*, 2019, referencing a musical notation of tempo. The painting, from a recent body of work inspired by the composition of symphonies, is an arrangement of radiant colors, a celebration of the human spirit, marking the connections between memories and dreams, personal

stories and myths, landscape and skyscape and birth and death.

### **Patricia Leite**

(b. 1955, Belo Horizonte, Brazil)

Brazilian painter Patricia Leite derives her subjects from photographs collected during her travels. The motifs are recognizable – in this case, as the title *Entre Neuvens* (“Between Clouds,” in Portuguese) signals, a high mountain landscape with the sun hanging overhead in a blue sky. Yet this bare description only begins to capture the feeling of the work, which, if photographic, is so only in a metaphorical sense – seeming to capture that instantaneous moment when ephemeral light is registered and fixed into permanent form. In this sense, the seeming solidity of Leite’s forms feels provisional. It is as if her images could easily slide into some other configuration without losing their graphic and chromatic intensity. As it happens, Eliot Noyes was an avid photographer as well, rarely without his camera, particularly on his frequent international trips. It seems certain that he would have found much to appreciate in Leite’s painting, could he see it today hanging in his home – the expression of a kindred spirit, who looks out at the world, sees the wonder in it, and finds a way to show the rest of us.

### **Pablo Limón**

(b. 1985, Madrid, Spain)

“Today, luxury is not perceived as it once was,” Pablo Limón has said. “We experience two luxuries that do not speak the same language and do not live within the same values.” His own work crosses this divide, hybridizing a relatively orthodox vocabulary of modern design (often featuring planar functional forms) with a street sensibility. The seating furniture he is showing at the Noyes House is from a recent series created in collaboration with the DS Paint workshop in Barcelona. It consists of planar constructions of hard foam, which are surfaced in silver nitrate and dyes, and chromed with a chemical catalyst. The process is repeated across several layers, and then selectively buffed with a circular sander. The result is a polychromatic, reflective surface – very unearthly in effect, like something out of science fiction – but in practice the process is quite painterly, allowing Limón a wide range of graphic possibilities.

### **Philippe Malouin**

(b. 1982, Laval, Canada)

Of all the curatorial moments in *At the Noyes House*, perhaps the most delicious is the juxtaposition of the designer’s Selectrix IBM typewriter – the most famous of his industrial products – with



Philippe Malouin's blue nylon telephone. This blind date between the two objects is a fascinating study in similarities and differences. Most obviously, Malouin's functional landline alludes back to midcentury technology; the French designer created it as part of a suite entitled Industrial Office, which updated various Modernist forms in colorful nylon and simplified lines, to uncanny effect. It's as if one's mental image of a phone had somehow manifested itself in real space, or conversely, as if we were somehow inhabiting a comic book narrative, complete with props. This playful, "meta" quality announces a postmodern viewpoint completely at odds with the earnest functionalism of Noyes's typewriter. Yet, beyond this difference, there is an underlying commonality. Both objects are honed to their absolute essence, achieving an unforgettable charisma. It just goes to show that as much as design has changed over the decades, some of what makes an object great is the same as ever.

### **Tony Marsh**

(b. 1954, New York, NY, USA)

The eminent ceramist and educator Tony Marsh works in several discrete idioms, typically focusing his attention on the vessel form. One of his series is cleanly modeled, white, and perforated; another takes the form of low bowl forms, brimming with curious handmade objects; still another interprets the idea of containment in a more rectilinear fashion, with connections to architecture. The object included at the Noyes House is different from all of these. Sheathed in a spectacular blue glaze with crystalline accretions, it feels geologically extracted rather than hand-built. It is part of his Cauldron series – a term that could equally suggest a volcanic caldera or a witch's brew, and are equally apt associations for the object.

### **Daniel Steegmann Mangrané**

(b. 1977, Barcelona, Spain)

One of the most dramatic installations in At the Noyes House comes courtesy of Daniel Steegmann Mangrané, a Spanish artist based in Brazil. It is a curtain of sorts, made of green aluminum chains, with an organically-shaped cutout. The work articulates the boundary between the architecture and the forest beyond, and also (less obviously) stages a cross-cultural conversation between Noyes and his near contemporary, the Italian-born, Brazil-based architect Lina Bo Bardi; the lines of the cutout are taken from her brutalist masterwork, the Sesc Pompeia, in São Paulo. The chains, made by Kriska, are also a cultural import: widely used in Spain, they are lightweight, often brightly colored and make a characteristic metallic sound when the chains touch. Oscillating between diaphanous screen and semi-solid object, Mangrané's curtain conjures a liminal state in multiple senses at once: marking an actual boundary, as well as a cultural pass-through in which multiple strands of modernity meet, brushing against one another. This

same theme of intersection is also present in the three sculptures made of twigs and stones that Magrané has at the Noyes House, slight in their means but profound in their implication.

### **Jim McDowell**

(b. 1945, Norfolk, VA, USA)

"I am not a folk artist although many have tried to put me into that category," Jim McDowell has said. "I call myself the Black Potter." With this matter-of-fact statement, McDowell takes ownership of his position in a long narrative of great artists – a few whose names are known today, the great majority anonymous. Face jugs of the kind he makes have been created in the American South and elsewhere in the African diaspora since at least the mid-nineteenth century. Research points to strong connections between this form and West African sculptural traditions, which were displaced here along with millions of enslaved people. McDowell's work testifies to this terrible history, while also paying tribute to those artists who contested it – notably the famed David Drake (aka "Dave the Potter"), whose poetic inscriptions McDowell emulates on his own ceramics; and his own four-times-great aunt Evangeline, who was a potter and face jug maker in Jamaica.

In the context of the Noyes House, McDowell's work takes on further critical force. It enacts a rupture in this placid, white, suburban milieu – the kind of neighborhood that very few Black Americans were able to inhabit in the postwar era, thanks to racist red-lining practices – and also casts a clarifying light on the African carvings and other "folk" objects that Eliot and Molly Noyes collected. This was an interest they shared with many other Modernists of their generation (Charles and Ray Eames, for example), who typically did little to preserve the specific cultural history of those artifacts. Yet it would be wrong to see McDowell's work as only oppositional, in this context; it is also tremendously affirmative, emblemizing a realm of creativity that was too often obscured during the heyday of Modernism, and is now finally getting its proper respect. As McDowell reminds us: "My lineage was interrupted, but not lost."

### **Yoshitomo Nara**

(b. 1959, Hirosaki, Aomori, Japan)

The beloved Japanese artist Yoshitomo Nara is something of a contradiction. While his work is extremely accessible, allowing almost anyone (of any age) to relate to it, it is also intensely personal: across his prolific output over the past thirty years, he has consistently portrayed deep emotional terrains that channel his childhood, musical and literary references, and his global travels. The figures portrayed in his paintings are born out of a deep introspection, indexed by extended phases of layering and erasure, with only the elements that Nara considers most sin-

cere allowed to remain. Likewise, Nara's unfiltered thoughts and feelings are vividly ingrained in the rhythm and vigor of the figures and words depicted in his drawings. Several of these, from 2019, hang in the Noyes House.

### **Paulo Nazareth**

(b. 1977, Governador Valadares, Brazil)

Eliot and Molly Noyes were dedicated believers in the simple, well-chosen gesture. When they positioned an artwork in their home, it always felt unforced, its placement seeming obvious in retrospect but marvelously suggestive. The same can be said for the work of Paulo Nazareth. His concerns are quite different – addressing issues of immigration, racism and colonialism in his native Brazil and beyond – but employ a similar economy of means. The notion of encounter is crucial to Nazareth's work. He often cultivates relationships with people he simply meets on the road – often, individuals in precarious financial or legal circumstances – and develops his work in response. He plays with the romantic ideal of the wandering artist seeking universal truths, but brings an acute political urgency to his representations of the unrepresented.

### **Antonio Obá**

(b. 1983, Ceilândia, Brazil)

Go into the intimately-scaled bedroom of the Noyes House, and you will see, hanging just above the bed (splendidly arrayed with a Megumi Arai boro textile), a scene of riveting power: as if the wall had dissolved to allow a view into some other realm. The painting, by the Brazilian artist Antonio Obá, is entitled *Wade in the water II* – a phrase taken from a well-known African-American spiritual. It is replete with other associations, too, from Winslow Homer's haunting late painting *The Gulf Stream* to the recent killing of George Floyd (which occurred as Obá was creating the work). Obá has spoken eloquently of the central figure in the work: "He is not only an alleged survivor of a shipwreck, rather, an allegory between the micro and the macro, the psyche and the landscape. Harmony and power manifest in the waves that seem to be caused by the character who walks on water, like a stone thrown into the placid waters. Master of the seas, a black navigator, master of his journey, knowledgeable about the wave he generates and the waves that seem to follow him, he advances. He does not contemplate the landscape inert. He faces the viewer from a distance, aware that the only route is forward."

## **Johnny Ortiz**

(b. 1991, Taos, NM, USA)

There's clay, and then there's clay. Johnny Ortiz is the founder of the pioneering New Mexico entity called Shed: an ambitious project incorporating an art and design studio and a restaurant, premised on intensely local ingredients in its every aspect. This holds true for the ceramics he is showing at the Noyes House. They are made of what Ortiz calls "wild clays," foraged from the surrounding landscape. These same materials have been used by indigenous and Latina/Latino potters for centuries, and his continuation of the tradition shares some time-honored traits: an overall dark palette, with glimmers of light thanks to tiny fleck of mica held within the body. Riffing on precedent, Ortiz has developed a laborious and loving process: sanding the pots with sandstone, burnishing them with a river stone, pit firing with red mountain cedar, and curing with elk marrow and beeswax. Each pot is a deep well into its own origin story: "an ongoing meditation of where we live in Northern New Mexico," as Ortiz puts it, "a celebration of its nature and the fleeting of time."

## **Frances Palmer**

(b. 1956, Morristown, NJ, USA)

There is something irresistible in Frances Palmer's practice, which is one level disarmingly straightforward – she makes wood-fired pots, and puts flowers and fruit from her own garden into them – but on another level, wildly ambitious, even visionary. The "still life" arrangements that she creates evoke the lush paintings of the Dutch Golden Age, while her ceramics connect to several currents in international ceramics, among them Chinese celadons and Japanese tea ceremony wares. Palmer synthesizes all of these aesthetic terrains into one lavishly orchestrated whole, optimized for the purposes of the twenty-first century. If you are wary of social media's effects on the more nuanced aspects of art and design, her Instagram feed may convince you otherwise: it transforms your smartphone screen into a rush of ravishing beauty. But of course, it's better yet to experience her pots in person, and ideally hold them in your hands, so as to appreciate every fold and crease in their walls, every drip and layer-line in the glazes. Throughout the exhibition, Palmer will be replenishing the vases with flowers from her garden, ensuring that every encounter with her work will be a perfect moment, captured.

## **Gaetano Pesce**

(b. 1939, La Spezia, Italy)

It's ridiculous, in a way, to put Gaetano Pesce and potted plants in the same sentence. He is arguably the most influential living designer, a geyser of ideas and provocations that has gushed

unabated for over sixty years. Everyone working in speculative, figurative, experimental, conceptual, and process-based modes – which covers almost all of the interesting currents in contemporary design – owes something to him, whether they know it or not. But there's another thing about Pesce. Nothing is trivial in his eyes, particularly when it comes to our built environment. And so: potted plants. They have been an important part of interior furnishings of the Noyes House since it was built, a way of bringing nature indoors, one of the central principles of the architecture. With this in mind, several of Pesce's large-scale, poured resin vases have been set around the rooms (in addition to vases in several other scales, and a table-top shelf piece). They transform this modest dimension of the interior into something dramatic, a meeting of two forms of organic life – that of the plants themselves, and that of the intensely artificial objects, which are made of plastic but have the coursing, form-finding energy of vibrantly living things. Over eighty years old now, and given a seemingly supporting role in the installation, Pesce still manages to steal the show.

### **Celso Renato**

(1919-1992, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)

When the Brazilian self-taught artist Celso Renato died in 1992, he left behind a body of work that is marvelously sensitive in its touch and rigorous in its handling of abstract form. His practice rotated around simple geometries, which he invariably infused with nuance and emotion through his mark-making. The painting shown at the Noyes House, just eight interlocking motifs rendered in acrylic on a panel of rough salvaged wood, is typical of his ability to create a beguiling object out of the simplest means. Some of the energy comes from the dialogue between the painting and its physical support; some of it comes from the slight, characterful divergences of his line; but mostly, it derives from the force of the artist's personality. As the New York Times critic Roberta Smith has written, "Renato worked with an almost reverential consideration of what he was painting on, creating his own fusion of art, nature and the haphazardness of everyday life and adding something of his own to the history of postwar Latin American Modernism."

### **Arlene Shechet**

(b. 1951, New York, NY, USA)

Art historical trajectories never really end. They just keep going, accumulating innovations and associations all along the way. But if for some reason you had to draw a line forward from the great modern sculptors – Brancusi, Hepworth, Calder and the rest – and stop somewhere, the work of Arlene Shechet would be a great choice. Ecumenical in her materials (best known for her pioneering reintroduction of ceramic into contemporary art, she also works in wood, metal and other media) and incredibly inventive in her forms, which often develop contrapuntally as

one walks around them, she gives you everything you ever wanted from sculpture, as well as quite a few things you didn't even know you could have. For *At the Noyes House*, she is showing a new work called *Relative*, fairly compact and low to the ground. Made especially for the exhibition, it speaks harmoniously to the setting, with rigid squares intersecting an unfinished wood block – like a core section of the rectilinear building's encounter with the surrounding forest.

## **Faye Toogood**

(b. 1977, United Kingdom)

Faye Toogood has two related careers, either of which would make her one of the most celebrated British designers today. She started out in interiors, initially as a magazine editor for several years; soon after she opened an atelier for the production of furnishings, interiors and subsequently fashion. The two sides of her artistic personality inform and nurture the other; for example, she makes her objects within numbered *Assemblages*, in a rhythm of ongoing creativity and self-disruption that echoes the collection-based logic of the fashion industry. Forms of particular importance are revisited in the different collections, given different material and aesthetic interpretation; Toogood thus has an ongoing creative conversation with herself. At the *Noyes House*, she is showing objects drawn from various aspects of her practice. There is a tapestry from one of her recent *Assemblages*, a quick, sketchy and expressive composition that belies the painstaking slowness required to weave it. Two pieces of furniture are rendered in the extraordinary materials of lithium-barium crystal and sand-cast bronze; they express the qualities of water and the moon, respectively. Finally, a vessel shown evokes the traditional *Moon Jar* of Korean ceramics, inverting its white palette into black; visual and tactile nuance is imparted to the surface by coating the hand-thrown stoneware in a thin layer of rubber.

## **Rubem Valentim**

(1922-1991, Salvador, Brazil)

The Brazilian artist Rubem Valentim (nearly an exact contemporary of Celso Renato, also featured in *At the Noyes House*) organized his works from iconic abstract signs: lines, circles, cubes and arrows. While legible as contributions to Neo-Concrete movement, they were also infused with spiritual meaning. He saw them as emblem reductions of *Orixá*, or deities, from the Afro-Brazilian religions *Candomblé* and *Umbanda*, brought to the Americas by enslaved Yoruba peoples from West and Central Africa. Valentim specifically acknowledges this forced migration in his totems – like the one shown here, which has the presence of an animate being - drawing on inspiration from both African sculpture and Afro-Brazilian art.

## **Daniel Valero**

(b. 1988, Mexico)

Mestiz, a project founded in 2015, is a collaboration between the architect and designer Daniel Valero and various teams of artisans - originally in Saltillo, a city in the northeast part of Mexico, and since then in other regions of the country. Each Mestiz product incorporates handcrafted, traditional elements (or in the case of the chairs seen here, vintage fabrics) placed within a contemporary frame. This symbiotic relationship between past and present is foreshadowed in the presence of vernacular objects at the Modernist Noyes House.

## **Masaomi Yasunaga**

(b. 1982, Osaka Prefecture, Japan)

Ceramics are a vital source of information about ancient cultures – offering our best, and often only, record of their existence. Pot shards, deposited in the earth over successive centuries, help researchers to establish the chronology of the sites they study, as well as yielding insights about their makers' cultural practices and sometimes, their spiritual beliefs. Masaomi Yasunaga, who is based in the historic ceramic center of Iga (in Mie Prefecture, Japan), summons this fundamental connection between his chosen discipline and the deep past. In the late 16th century, Iga potters began making the most experimental of all tea ceremony wares: lopsided vases with lug ears, water jars with walls like landslides, tea bowls like battle remnants, with dents and gouges in their walls. Yasunaga draws on and amplifies this tradition. He builds his sculptures primarily from glaze materials, so that they melt nearly into slag in the kiln; then buries them in sand, soil, or rocks, allowing these diverse materials to adhere to the molten glaze. Finally, when they are cool, he "excavates" the forms – a moment of discovery as revelatory as that experienced by any archaeologist.