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Gallery Wrap

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Welcome Back, Cross Mackenzie Gallery Rebecca Cross, gallery director of Cross Mackenzie, has opened the doors of her gallery's new location in Dupont Circle. Her current offerings, featuring the work of local painter Tati Kaupp and sculptor Charles Birnbaum, bring exuberance and taste together for a vibrant but peaceful exhibition that deserves to be seen.

In her earlier work, the intense color palette of Kaupp reflected the light from her childhood years in Mexico and the southwest. And while her recent paintings are considerably darker—they look like the skies just before the storm breaks—they still look celebratory. There is a sense of lightness and air here: circles, floating shapes, dots and squiggles, which rise to the top of her canvases with weightless effervescence.

The paintings are layered with quilt-like patterns that dance across the surface of the canvas—compositions in some cases literally jump over onto adjacent canvases, creating an unusual and wonderful diptych effect. While at first they may seem almost too free, perhaps even childlike, it is soon replaced by a wonder that is likely shared by the artist. I warmed up to the paintings quickly, feeling simultaneously calmed and electrified, like watching a summer thunderstorm through the window.

The extravagant sculptures of Charles Birnbaum are made up of undulating and intertwined shapes that resemble deep sea coral and anemones, but with curiously sensual undercurrents. Patterned elements are stacked and layered, with protruding, tapered appendages and sensuous tendrils reaching dangerously away from the safety of the massed center.

Birnbaum uses paper in his clay to give the porcelain more tensile strength and flexibility to hold up to the delicate and taxing methods employed by the artist. He presses the clay into surface textures, then folds, bends, pulls and twists the elements into expressive forms that even those studied in the techniques of ceramics are unable to understand or replicate. With no reflective clear glaze, the white porcelain sculptures take on a bone-like quality, absorbing light as opposed to reflecting it. The final result is a body of work that reflects a beautiful struggle of abandon and control, the unrestrained indulgence of the undulating forms versus the technical discipline of working and taming the material. The works of Tati Kauppi and Charles Birnbaum will be on display at Cross Mackenzie Gallery, 2026 R Street, NW, through Jan. 5, 2012. For more information visit CrossMackenzie.com

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