

# Walking the Line by Gary Michael Dault

## Waling The Line 10: Susan Collett

6/11/2006



Waver by Susan Collett at David Kaye Gallery

- 1) I don't know much about ceramics, mostly because the crafty cuteness of a lot of it puts me off, and I've sort of kept away from it
- 2) I find myself liking Susan Collett's stuff quite a lot, though.
- 3) Her exhibition, Amalgam—which I saw on Saturday—is at Toronto's David Kaye Galley. She also has an exhibition called Impluvium at the Burlington Art Centre—which I have not yet seen.
- 4) The eight big earthenware pieces making up Amalgam—let's just come right out and call them sculptures—are essentially vessels, but vessels that

look like something else: like great molded planes of leaf coral, for example, or huge chapattis or matzos that have been dampened and folded up into vase or basket-shaped volumes with high fluted edges at their tops.

5) The earthenware of which her pieces are made is a beige, biscuit-colour, and is punctuated everywhere with hundreds of tiny holes that seem to have occurred naturally in the course of whatever Collett did to her materials, chemically or alchemically speaking. Or maybe not. Collett may well have added some chemical something or other to the matrix before it was fired, which resulted in all these little pops and rents which ventilate and aerate her now pebbly surfaces.

6) I like the fact that the pieces look pushed and pummelled by the artist, but in a way that their resulting bumps and billows seem perfectly likely to have occurred naturally in the process of their making—and maybe they did.

7) I like their sun-baked, dun-coloured colour. And yet just as you've decided the material is essentially an earthy colourlessness everywhere, you see that it actually teems with colour, sparkles and scintillates with it.

8) But not in a winningly decorative way. The colour is a sort of rare treat—like the rainbow iridescence that shimmers atop an oil spill, or on the belly of a fish. By which I mean that Collett's colour is and is not immediately discernable, and seems to depend on where you stand and when and at what angle you peer into the oatmeal depths of these mighty yet fragile, basket-like vessels.

9) I like the hundreds of small holes in them and the way, when the light pours through them from the inside-out or from the outside-in (depending on whether the piece is in front of a window, say, or lit from above, etc.). The pinpricks of light serve to further dematerialize the objects and amplify the feeling of weightlessness, of buoyancy you get from them: surprising in objects so large and heavy.

10) These sculptural objects of Collett's are ur-vessels, but I like the fact that you can't put anything into them. They are porous and permeable and not quite translucent—though they feel translucent. So they will not hold—but will only transmit—either liquid or light.

11) They are like mushrooms, rocks and bread. Like newspaper, clothing, leaves. With those gaping open tops, they are even like mouths and ears: uttering and listening.

Susan Collett's exhibition, *Amalgam*, runs at the David Kaye Gallery at 1092 Queen Street West in Toronto until June 25. 416-532-9075.

<http://www.davidkayegallery.com>