



Collectible VII, 18 in. (46 cm) in height, cast and constructed earthenware, glaze, leather, lacing, brass grommets, 2006.

Child's Play?

The Sculpture of Raymond Gonzalez

by Jarma R. Jones

There is no rubber ball to accompany the large ceramic “jacks” in Raymond Gonzalez’ *Collectible VII*. These ceramic forms, coated in slick black glaze and confined by red leather jackets, are not to be snatched up before the ball bounces to end your turn. In addition to the innocent youthful game, this work evokes images of adult play, with its smooth surfaces and leather. While Gonzalez’ ceramic sculptures allude to toys popularized in the 1950s and 1960s, such as metal jacks, plastic pop beads, and miniature

sputniks, their fragile composition and delicate, jewel-like exteriors belie their usefulness as toys. The incorporation of Swarovski crystals, leather, monofilament, and automotive paint into his works provides a contrast to the effects of nostalgia.

Gonzalez finds inspiration in economic and social elements popularized after World War II. The most prevalent reflection of mid-century influence is the concept of mass production, with regard to homes, automobiles, toys, and other consumer

goods. Gonzalez chose two main forms that he reproduces via slip casting en masse for the *Collectibles* series. He makes each one unique through variations in glaze and application of non-ceramic media. Rather than creating identical pieces and reflecting on consumerism, he uses the reproduced form to subvert an association with mass production by creating distinct pieces out of the similar forms.

The *Collectibles* series demonstrates a shift in Gonzalez' work from larger, wall-mounted sculptures. His earlier "toy" sculptures played with the concept of mass-production more overtly, since the different components were simply glazed and could be interlocked with one another in a variety of color schemes and patterns. This

Right: *Collectible X (Miami)*, 12 in. (30 cm) in height, cast and constructed earthenware, glaze, rubber grommet, flocking, 2009.

Below: *Collectible XV*, 6 in. (15 cm) in height, cast and constructed earthenware, glaze, rubber grommet, flocking, Swarovski crystals.





***Collectible XIII*, 12 in. (30 cm) in height, cast and constructed earthenware, glaze, white gold luster, Swarovski crystals, flocking, rubber grommets, 2009.**

earlier series also made a stronger connection with early childhood toys and the innate association between child and adult play. In contrast to his earlier work, Collectibles are carefully arranged groupings of forms. Their colors and textures continue to evoke the idea of play, but the placement of two or more pieces adjacent to one another, but not connected, creates an unfulfilled desire to play with them, to fit them together and pull them apart, to fall into youthful play. Desire is a strong element in Gonzalez' artwork; it evokes desires of interaction, of youthfulness, and of the unattainable.

Gonzalez also looks to Ken Price's surf-inspired sculptures for movement and form, to the bright, bold color palettes of Price, Adrian Saxe, Paul Henry Ramirez, Nora Fok, and also to nature, classic car designs, candy, and graffiti art. Gonzalez, incorporates non-ceramic media to heighten the tactility and hyper-sensuality of his pieces. The incorporation of monofilament in some of Gon-

zalez' pieces, such as *Collectible XVI*, provides an anthropomorphic quality to the piece similar to the addition of hair in works by Jason Briggs. There is an inherent desire to touch the monofilament as one would want to feel the hair on Briggs sculptures. Gonzalez' work fits within this group of artists who use ceramic art and mixed media to explore sensuality of play. While he uses clay as his foundation, the strength of the work is heightened with the incorporation of new media.

Gonzalez' color choices reflect his aesthetic and the influence of his own memory and associations within the pieces. For example, he is drawn to classic car color schemes that exude a slick and powerful sexiness, or the bold and contrasting colors of his late 1970s and early 1980s youth. The classic car imagery of bright, bold colors, classy sheen, and chrome are reflected in a number of his works. The pink surface and white gold luster of *Collectible XIII* is further reinforced by the plain black rubber grommets. It

DYING TO APPLY

becomes easy to imagine running fingers along its cool smooth surface as you would a pristine paint job on a classic car.

In contrast, *Collectible XVII* gives the viewer a subtle reference to the space race of the mid-20th century with its shining LED lights and form that allude to space satellites and more complex technologies. However, the yellow and gold adorning this piece also recall the popular disco era of the 1970s and are jewel-like in their appearance and construction.

Collectible XV creates a duality in its references to wealth and industry. A matte black glaze covers the single piece and is accented by the bling of the black Swarovski crystals. This combination creates a dark sexiness to the work, and the deep richness contrasts with the boldness of *Collectible X (Miami)*. Bright yellow enhances the slipped stippling on the piece. You can imagine caressing it with your hand as you admire the piece from afar. This piece is loud and bold; it is Miami. Whether you are drawn to the glamour of wealth implied in *Collectible XV* or the liveliness of a destination hotspot exuded from *Miami*, each person can find significance with this collection of pieces based on simple forms, exotic surfaces, and memories.

The *Collectibles* provide an outlet for our imagination. Gonzalez' work allows us to delve into the communal past of childhood, while providing unique individual associations with the pieces. The playful works are now represented by the Mindy Solomon Gallery in St. Petersburg, Florida and were on view in the gallery's "Art Spaces," exhibition in 2010.

Raymond Gonzalez lives with his Boston Terrier, Boomer, in Gainesville, Florida where he maintains an active studio and works at the University of Florida. His work is represented by the Mindy Solomon Gallery. To learn more, please visit www.gonzalezstudio.com.

Jarma Jones writes from her home near Sacramento, California. To learn more, please visit www.jonesvorhauer.com.

Raymond Gonzalez applies a variety of media to his ceramic-based forms. The most intriguing is his incorporation of dyed monofilament. Monofilament comes in various weights and sizes, from fishing line in heavier weights down to thinner strands found among sewing materials. Gonzalez uses a multi-step process of dying and applying the monofilament to his glazed pieces. First he heats the ends to create smooth, slightly balled tips. He dyes the monofilament using WashFast Acid Dye, which is dissolved into solution with boiling water. Gonzalez submerges the monofilament and it simmers in the dye solution for 30 minutes. Afterward he removes the monofilament with tongs and rinses it. The strength of the color is determined by the concentration of dye; Gonzalez typically uses a strong concentration of ½ teaspoon of dye to two cups of boiling water. This process needs to be done in a well ventilated area and precautions should be taken to prevent dying of material other than the monofilament. After the monofilament has been dyed and dried, he then adheres the strands into small holes made in the ceramic forms. The brightly dyed monofilament adds yet another element of movement to his playful pieces.



Top: Burning the tip of a piece of monofilament.
Middle: Adding pieces of monofilament to simmering dye solution.
Bottom: Laying out the dyed pieces.

Above: Gonzalez inserting monofilament pieces into *Collectible XVI*.

(MONTHLY METHODS IMAGES TAKEN BY ENRIQUE G. VARGAS.)