

Between the Moon and the Sun

An exhibition by Helen Gory, 2025

Essay by Aliza Levi

There is something both primitive and poetic about working with clay. A meeting of earth and human hand. The vessel is considered one of the first cultural inventions. Traditional gatherers transformed mud into containers in order to carry, store, cook and stay alive. Pots were primarily made and used by women, whose own bodies were the containers, carriers and bearers of life.

The divergence, from the traditional vessel, was when objects became a form of expression, beyond utility. Pots became equally about art and ritual expression as they were about function. Such is the work of artist Helen Gory, who shifts the vessel away from both the delicately decorative and the functional, transporting us with her rich expressive objects. Inspired by the likes of Cy Twombly, Anselm Kiefer and Joseph Beuys, she works with imagination, inspiration and intuition, turning the vessel into a site of self-reflection. Here, the vessel is at once a sculpture and a canvas.

Yet Gory nods her head to the grand history of pottery, citing the influence of ancient Amphora vessels that hold the ashes of loved ones and the traditional Korean Onggi jars, large and small, made to ferment and store food. She has studied under the disciple of Korean Onggi Master Lee Kang-hyo, and has met the master himself in Korea. Gory embraces tradition while breaking away from it.

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The works are made from stoneware clay, the unique glazes mixed by herself. She deliberately makes her vessels asymmetrical and lopsided, an allegory for life's journey. The shapes oppose the perfection of machinery and remind us of the complex beauty of being human in what she calls 'the flawed and wonderful absurdity of life.' The surface of Gory's pots are a portal to her inner world. Using the Italian technique of sgraffito, meaning 'to scratch,' she carves into the surface with a sharp tool, revealing layer upon layer of oxide, slip and glaze.

Gestural lines, tactile and scarred with energetic marks, become a parable for psychological reach. Surfaces reflect the rawness of time and the exposure of life—its challenges and its joys. In her own words, 'I find my way, between the moon and the sun, doubt and fear, light and hope. Within her gestural mark making, Gory includes phrases and texts from her daily intellectual explorations. Words from novels, poems, essays, songs and film are carved into the dried glaze. At times these are deliberately

obscured and at times they are made visible, surfacing in the same way that a dream, thought or emotion comes to consciousness.

Phrases such as Bob Dylan's 'Don't Look Back' and Leonard Cohen's 'Who by Fire' appear and disappear through the glaze. "Beyond the last thought," a line from poet Wallace Stevens, reflects the very matter of clay and earth on which it is carved. Words from poet Paul Celan have also made a significant impact on Gory, and float beneath the surfaces.

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Gory's vessels constantly tread a fine balance between form and surface. While the bodies of her pots present strength and resilience, the asymmetry, mark making and scratching suggest vulnerability, uncertainty and ambivalence. All of which hold together as one, as life itself. Her vessels do not carry goods, they transport spirit.