

**rachel uffner**

**Art in America**

# Hilary Harnischfeger

NEW YORK,  
at Rachel Uffner  
by Julia Wolkoff  
Feb 16, 2016

Hilary Harnischfeger:  
*Harlequin*, 2015,  
ceramic, paper, Hydro-  
Stone, pigment,  
apophyllite and wood, 16  
by 17 by 4 inches; at  
Rachel Uffner.



Rachel Uffner Gallery  
170 Suffolk Street  
New York, NY 10002

+1 212 274 0064  
info@racheluffnergallery.com  
racheluffnergallery.com

There is something duplicitous about licorice allsorts. The English sugar candies delight the eye with their fluorescent-colored stripes and dots, but can taste surprisingly medicinal. The pretty, treatlike sculptures in Hilary Harnischfeger's recent show at Rachel Uffner Gallery conjure those candies, and likewise contain harsh complexities.

Molten layers of pale pink, teal, yellow, beige and black ceramic and plaster are embedded with Herkimer diamonds and other minerals in the 11 wall-mounted and freestanding sculptures (all 2015). Swirling, disjointed patterns of thick clay stripes cover the surface of *Harlequin*, evoking the giddy, slapstick qualities of the checkered stock character from 17th-century commedia dell'arte productions and, more recently, Picasso paintings. A wood post props up a slab of pink, concretelike elements topped with exuberant patterning in *Chandigarh*. The sculpture's pastel hues suggest a fantastical version of the Indian city, which was designed by Le Corbusier. Wonderfully, the exposed back of the piece offers a whole new landscape, where collaged, abstractly painted tiles resemble gemstones.

While the rainbow-caked sculptures have an aspect of girlhood fantasy, they are not just "everything nice." Their distinctly playful and feminine aspects pair with masculine elements like the jagged minerals, making the surrounding molded clay hunks appear like rock formations. The sculptures, though bathed in pastels and adorned with artificial ornament, retain an organic and unrefined look. The gallery's press material cites the Catskills, where Harnischfeger lives with her family, as the inspiration behind the sculptures, though the works' emotional scope surpasses this idyllic origin.

The freestanding *CWJA* has an ominous air. An inky black arch spans a rectangular gray base, the two forming a shallow basket. At the arch's apex is a semicircular protrusion with spikes bursting out around its perimeter and multicolored allsort-style pieces interspersed with pyrite ("fool's gold") clusters filling its center. The base is also lined with the candylike pieces, while muddy clay roils in its chasm. Another arch figures into *Little Delhi*. Here, its marbleized patterning mimics the knots in the grain of the work's wood base, yielding an unlikely cohesiveness. Blue-toned clay enwraps the center of the bridge; an embedded smoky quartz peers out like an all-seeing eye.

With their childlike wonder and rough, blithe enthusiasm, Harnischfeger's pieces have irresistible charm. The gallery's wood-beam flooring and natural light enhanced this effect, inspiring viewers to both examine the works up close and appreciate the sugar-dotted landscape of the whole floor. Beyond offering visual appeal, however, the show presented a curious world almost closed to adults, one that may be reflected on but never again returned to.