

Nasher springs ceramic surprise

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levels of the museum. This makes it difficult to evaluate the exhibition as a whole, forcing a serious visitor to run up and down stairs to compare the works of the two Italians in the basement with their Franco-Spanish and American counterparts in the main galleries. That said, the exhibition divides the material as intelligently as it can and is well worth a visit.

There is no doubt that Pablo Picasso's ceramics are the public draw here. Most historians of modern art are ambivalent about the painter-sculptor's ceramics, but Morse and his colleagues have responded by making a rigorous selection of this material, which is placed so that the visitor sees the extraordinary work of Joan Miró and Isamu Noguchi before getting to Picasso. The strategy works well, and Picasso's contributions vary in scale, technique and imagery, revealing a master of the medium.

The Catalan painter-sculptor Miró worked in ceramic with the help of a traditional Catalan ceramic artist, Josep Llorens Artigas. Although Miró aided in both the conception and the execution of the ceramic base, he felt freer drawing, painting and incising the ceramic in a collaboration of artist and artisan. The unprecedented large sculptures in the exhibition give form to the concept of gnarly, and the exhibition is filled with both slightly subtle and over-the-top sexual innuendoes.

By contrast, Noguchi associated ceramic with Japan, the native land of the Japanese-American sculptor's father, and all his ceramic work was made in Japan. Not surprisingly, Noguchi looked carefully at the most ancient traditions of Japanese earthenware, particularly Haniwa funerary ceramics, which he infused with a modernist, international sensibility in the early 1950s.

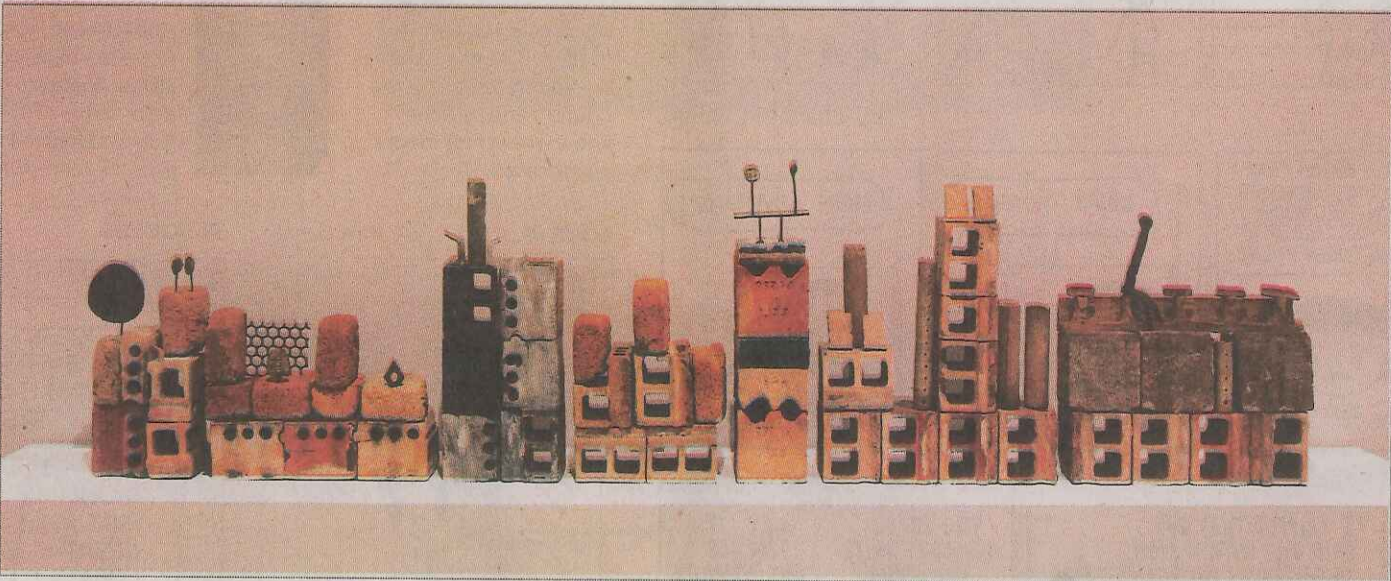
His sparing use of green glaze is wonderfully piquant. In one case, the glaze seems to spill forth in frozen liquid streams from the top of a tall stoneware cylinder.



Spatial Concept, Nature (1959-60) is by Lucio Fontana, whose works are at once fabulous and giddy in their almost tasteless vulgarity.



The Warrior (1949) by Fontana, the show's most interesting artist, is also part of the exhibition.

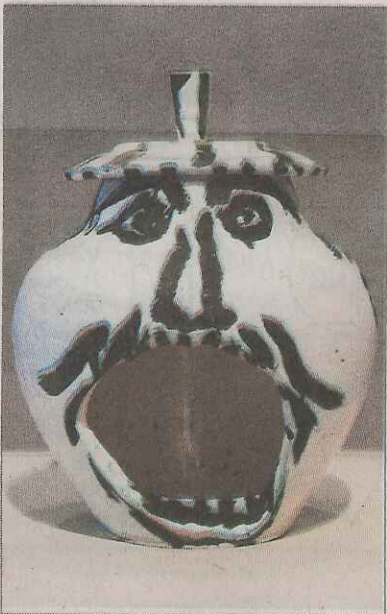


The Grand Canal (1963) is by the Italian artist Fausto Melotti.

Photos by Michael Ainsworth/Staff Photographer



Courage (1956) is by the Catalan painter-sculptor Joan Miró.



Pablo Picasso's Head in the Shape of a Pumpkin is a self-portrait done about 1953.

In another, Noguchi made a green-glazed snake that coils, mouth open, at once ominously and humorously around a wooden divining stick.

The show's most interesting artist is without question Lucio Fontana, whose dramatic neo-baroque ceramic figures line the walls and dominate the pedestals of the gallery downstairs. These works are at once fabulous and giddy in their almost tasteless vulgarity. Shiny or lustrous glazes of deep purple, emerald green and milky whites shot through with acid yellow and sky blue make us marvel at Fontana's technique.

The standout piece for me is by Fontana's lesser-known friend and colleague, Fausto Melotti. Called *Cat Dog*, it represents a lonely domesticated beast with a mute and humbly human head. Having survived a war and a Holocaust and too tired to scream, this hybrid animal sits proudly and defiantly, hoping that no one will break it.

The museum has produced a handsome, well-edited catalog to accompany the exhibition. A minor quibble is that its fine essays on the five subjects are not prefaced by a thoughtful essay on the larger collective issues involved with the exhibition's artists and with the earlier history of artist-ceramicists, from Bernard Palissy through Paul Gauguin. Although it owns one important Picasso ceramic, one hopes that the Nasher will consider purchasing a representative work by these artists for its permanent collection.

Rick Brettell holds the Margaret McDermott distinguished chair in art and aesthetics at the University of Texas at Dallas.

Plan your life

"Return to Earth: Ceramic Sculpture of Fontana, Melotti, Miró, Noguchi and Picasso, 1943-1963," through Jan. 19 at the Nasher Sculpture Center, 2001 Flora St., Dallas. 214-242-5100. nashersculpturecenter.org.

Fleming's comments charm, but artifice conceals her artistry

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Copland, but not as good. Fleming's onstage comments were utterly charming, and nicely leavened with humor. But, as often



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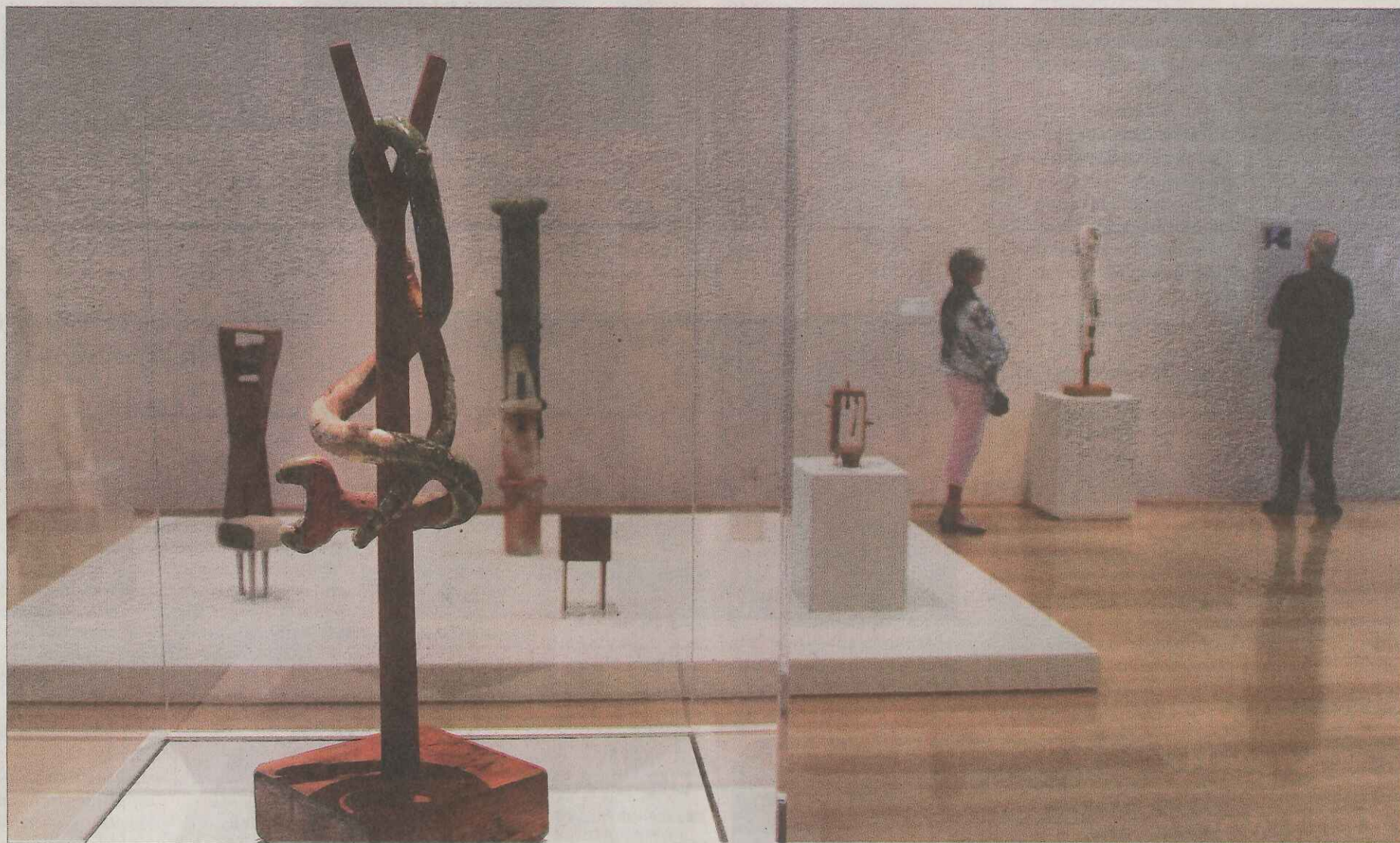
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ART REVIEW

Nasher shows underappreciated works by Picasso, Miró and others



Photos by Michael Ainsworth/Staff Photographer

Snake (1952), a green-glazed ceramic by Isamu Noguchi, is among the works in "Return to Earth" at the Nasher Sculpture Center.

Ceramic surprise

By RICK BRETTELL
Art Critic
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The words *ceramic sculpture* do not set pulses racing; nor does "Return to Earth," the portentous title of the Nasher Sculpture Center's new exhibition. What does intrigue is one or another of three names in the exhibition's subtitle: Picasso, Miró, Noguchi. The other two, Fontana and Melotti, are less familiar to most American art lovers.



Cat Dog (1948) by Fausto Melotti is a standout in the exhibition.

Whatever its title, the exhibition of postwar ceramic sculpture at the Nasher is both a visual pleasure and a real contribution to the history of modern sculpture. It is the first such exhibition ever mounted in an internationally recognized museum.

Jed Morse, chief curator of the exhibition and the museum, has marshaled the forces of three other Nasher Center or former Nasher curators to create the most ambitious in-house exhibition of classic modern sculpture at the Nasher since the Matisse sculpture exhibition of 2007. It is, in effect, a series of solo shows of the ceramic sculpture of five artists from the 1940s to the mid-1960s.

These are arranged in four spaces on two

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CLASSICAL MUSIC REVIEW

Fleming thrills audience with dressed-up performance

America's favorite diva shows off vocal tricks to the point of distraction during DSO gala

By SCOTT CANTRELL
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Dallas swells turned out in fuxes and haute couture Saturday night for the Dallas Symphony Orchestra's annual AT&T Gala

savorites" were promised at the After-Party Experience, complete with dance music.

Resplendent in two different outfits — first a glittery blue dress with a glittery gold shawl and train, then glittery silver dress and shawl — Fleming delivered



co Cilea's *Adriana Lecouvreur*, the beloved "O mio babbino caro" from Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi* and the Bolero from Verdi's *I vespri siciliani*.

Then came numbers from Rodgers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific* and *The Sound of Music* and from Bernstein's *West Side Story* ("Somewhere" and "I Feel Pretty"). Encores included Houston composer J. Todd Frasier's *We Held These Truths* (a