
REVIEWS PARIS

Machiko Ogawa

galerie frank elbaz | Paris

By Mara Hoberman 



The title of Machiko Ogawa’s first solo show in Paris, “*Apophyllízo, le bleu de la mer, le bleu du ciel*” (Apophyllite, the Blue of the Sea, the Blue of the Sky), underscored an essential connection to geology and landscape in the artist’s work. In this exhibition, seventeen medium-size porcelain-and-glass sculptures (all *Untitled*, 2025) were presented on pedestals, wall shelves, and, most dramatically, piles of coarse sand dumped directly on the gallery floor. Delicate and hefty, lustrous and rugged, the works appeared to be patently, if obliquely, of and about the earth. The flinty hunks and slightly bowed slabs of unglazed porcelain adorned with pools or protrusions of glass resembled huge sparkling geodes. Considered with a different sense of scale, the sculptures became topographic, suggesting miniature mountain glaciers and crater lakes, their turquoise-blue vitreous elements recalling the blue-green crystals that form on volcanic rock.

Nature is Ogawa’s ultimate muse and sometime collaborator. Certain hallmarks of the porcelain components of her latest works—including hairline cracks, deep fissures laced with snowflake-fine stalactites, and razor-sharp edges—were not the results of the artist’s hand, but, rather, long-term effects of climate and temperature. A decade ago, Ogawa salvaged a stockpile of portable chunks of unfired porcelain from a long-defunct dishware factory in Japan’s Gifu prefecture. After letting these rest in her studio for years, she finally fired the clay ready-mades, thus preserving their inimitable geological qualities. Other aspects of her process are comparatively controlled and hands-on. In order to fuse glass to the porcelain hunks, Ogawa built molds into which she poured glass flakes mixed with quartz and other minerals over the course of multiple kiln sessions. Seven sketches shown as part of the exhibition—a mix of drawings and collages made on top of ink-jet-printed photos of the in-progress sculptures—emphasized and also somewhat demystified the careful engineering required to raise delicate crystalline towers upon foundations that look like calderas and chalk cliffs.



Ogawa's sketches also suggested a link to larger-scale Conceptual environmental artworks by recalling certain of Christo and Jeanne-Claude's preparatory drawings. (Those related to the *Valley Curtain*, 1970–72, project came to mind.) Though relatively small and designed for the gallery space, Ogawa's finished works communicated big ideas related to landscape intervention without actually intervening in any real landscape. From her studio, the artist has an expansive view over the sea, where rock formations peak out above crashing waves. From nearby, she can see Mount Fuji rising in the distance. Clearly inspired by this dramatic scenery, she plays with the main elements—land, sea, and sky—in order to visualize impossible scenarios. Some works looked like chiseled-off mountaintops surrounded by miraculous chunks of blue sky; others suggested excavated sea caves wherein rock and water remained magically bonded.

Ultimately, however, a pervasive fragility kept Ogawa's sculptures rooted in the real world, to the point where one feared that a change in temperature or a strong vibration might cause them to melt or crumble. Notably, this exhibition marked the first time her work had ever been displayed on wall shelves. In Japan, these shelves are not a viable display option due to frequent earthquakes. Even in Paris, with no such imminent risk, the sculptures appeared exhilaratingly on the brink of collapse. Five works from her ongoing "Water Discs" series, 1993–, installed on the floor atop mini dunes (perhaps a nod to Robert Smithson, but actually modeled on the gritty nests Ogawa prepares inside the kiln for certain firing sessions), appeared crushed and crumbling into sand, their shallow concavities barely able to contain the watery-blue glass inside. The sculptures displayed on pedestals and shelves, meanwhile, brought to mind devastating images of glaciers melting into the Arctic Ocean. Equal parts natural wonder and fairy-tale



whimsy, Ogawa's three-dimensional evocations of rock, water, and atmosphere ultimately read as urgent warnings about climate change.

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Ibrahim Mahama, *Beasts of no nation* (detail), 2013–22, wood panel wrapped in wax-print cloth and jute thread, 74 × 48".

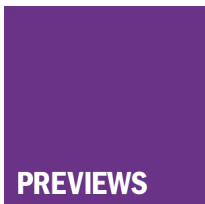
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