

## ARTFORUM

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## Sarah Crowner

Nicelle Beauchene Gallery

Suzanne Hudson

For her first exhibition at Nicelle Beauchene, held in 2009, Sarah Crowner juxtaposed two bodies of work: a series of unglazed ceramic vessels and a group of "paintings" sewn together from remnants of discarded fabric. Both revealed a distinctive handmade quality. The former featured mottled surfaces, gently misshapen necks, and generally uneven forms, while the latter betray imperfections of alignment that open up pockets of space, holes amid the justmismatched seams. Those paintings, with their insistent tactility and crisp, highkeyed geometric designs—they broadly referenced the fabric works of Sophie Taeuber-Arp and Blinky Palermo, among others, and were sometimes directly appropriated from specific compositions—presaged the artist's subsequent production. So, too, did the pots set the tone for more recent developments: the ceramics lacked bottoms, and were therefore nonfunctional. There is use and then there is use under the sign of the exhibition, and underscoring this distinction seems to be very much the thrust of Crowner's project.

Crowner's recent show "The Wave," her third at this gallery, was built around a shimmering turquoise parquet, a mosaic of glazed terra-cotta tiles set into a pattern by Josef Hoffmann. Elevated as a false floor, it became at once a stage and a kind of purposeful abstraction, along the lines of Wade Guyton's 2007 intervention at Petzel Gallery, where he laid down a black plywood floor, or Jorge Pardo's long-term project at Dia's old space in Chelsea, installed in 2000, for which he paved the lobby and bookstore in sunny ceramic blocks. (In fact, Crowner had the tiles fabricated at the same studio in Guadalajara, Mexico, where Pardo had his turned out for Dia.) A group of paintings lined the perimeter of Crowner's tiled surface—five panels hung on the adjacent walls and two were supported by freestanding structures—and to see them, viewers had to step up onto the raised area. Together, the paintings and the floor effectively constituted a room within the larger container of space, yet while Crowner evidently conceived of the installation as a cohesive entity, she refused the illusionism (as much as the illusion of totality) that is the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Viewers could step off the platform at the far side of the entrance, only to turn around and see the backs of the two unattached paintings, strings hanging, easel armatures foregrounded, looming like unseemly, naked totems.

Like the material distinctions—of color, sheen, and edge—between the various tiles, the paintings, too, contain leftovers from the process of construction. And, like the platform, they were produced part by part, from different elements put together to create a quilt-like whole. Most involve large sheets of hot-red and orange fabric cut into squiggles and stitched to raw canvas fields, while a painted pair features a fragment of a 1970s textile design by interior designer Alexander Girard—the motif of a silhouetted hand holding a spray of leaves and flowers—which Crowner has mirrored and cropped. Here, the body—suggested in the anthropomorphism of the standing paintings-cum-sculptures—is pictured rather than implied, which has the effect of making its absence more profound.



View of "Sarah Crowner," 2014.  
Wall: *The Wave (Flame)*, 2014. Floor:  
Platform, *Hot Blue Terracotta*, 2014.