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## REVIEWS

ELISABETH KLEY AT CANADA

BY Barbara A. MacAdam POSTED 02/05/16 9:20 AM

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Elisabeth Kley, 'Ozymandias,' 2016, installation view.  
JASON MANDELLA/COURTESY THE ARTIST AND CANADA

Steadfastly exotic, sensuous in its tantalizing imperfection, decorative, and somehow subversive, Elisabeth Kley's work entices us into the mysteries of the past, the cinema, theater, opium dens, and harems. It does all of that through the arrangement of and repetition of slightly irregularly shaped ceramic vases embellished with traditional-looking Islamic patterns in black on white or the reverse.

Unexpected "flaws" appear at the edges of the designs as the black shapes leak an underlying blue stain, as if from washed fabric, revealing an emotional undercurrent.

Inspired by Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem "Ozymandias," this lively show conjures exoticism and the decline of civilizations (of empires back in time, and of—perhaps—the decadence of democracy now). While Kley often basks in the delights of kitsch and excess, she here also

cants her installation here toward a kind of rough-hewn elegance. Excessive decoration balances a Weiner Werkstatte hand-crafted aesthetic potential of functional objects.

Elisabeth Kley, *Cleopatra R*, 2015, relief print on rice paper, 18¾ x 12¾ inches.

JASON MANDELLA/COURTESY THE ARTIST AND CANADA

The power and romance of ancient days infuse the Byzantine-style patterning on Kley's pottery and as well as in her prints and drawings (six of which are included in the show and echo the ceramics). Kley makes the most of both the works and the long narrow room, with a printed floor-to-ceiling panel on either side and the pots arrayed precariously atop white rectangular plinths. It's hard to walk through this interior "patio" without imagining the strains of flutes and violins and magic at the Kasbah.

Sculptures like the rounded, irregularly shaped glazed earthenware vessel *Large Black & White Flask with Seraphim & Cross* (2015) lure viewers with their roughly symmetrical foliage, their heathen and religious symbols, their evocation of knights and heraldry, their watchful mythological eyes, and their delicate Grecian pillars.

But there's art history here as well, with works like *Flask with Flags* (2015), exhibiting Matissean overtones while others play on Picasso and illustrator-style Victorians including Aubrey Beardsley and John Flaxman.

In the end, Kley unabashedly embraces the exceptional with fascination rather than judgment and generously shares her happily eccentric vision and open-mindedness.

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