



LEFT: A selection of Carlos Otero's ceramic orbs from 2013. BELOW: Otero at his Manhattan home.

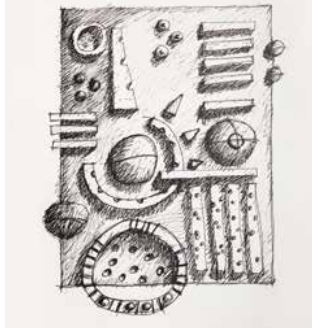


TALENT

TAKING SHAPE

Architect and designer Carlos Otero's playful approach to ceramics has won him a whole new audience

Sketch for an unexecuted mural, 2015.



"Touch is very important," says sculptor Carlos Otero. It's not a surprising declaration for someone who works with clay. But the Manhattan-based Argentinean is referring to his finished pieces, which he encourages admirers to hold. "I make shapes that are just begging to be picked up," he says.

Out of a studio in the city's Chelsea neighborhood, Otero spends his days working with brown clay that eventually becomes the camel-toned ceramic works he gleefully describes as having "no function at all." He takes particular pleasure in the medium's lack of rules and the freedom that comes with having to please only himself. It is a level of liberation only a trained architect and interior designer, as Otero has been for most of his working life, might feel; he has grown tired of staying inside the lines.

In fact, Otero prefers things that stick out.

Of the horned creatures that seem to conjure a Brutalist Dr. Seuss, Otero never begins with a plan; he



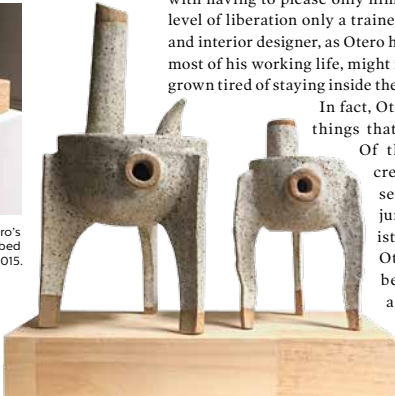
One of Otero's first abstract forms, 2010.

moves the protrusions around as he sees fit, as he did when making Play-Doh sculptures as a child. "I work very quickly, then I obsess about the finer points," he says.

Many of those details—halos, thorns, spikes, crosses—refer to the religious imagery that Otero soaked up during his Catholic education. "I was always looking at scary images of people bleeding!" he says. He points to his architectural studies as well as a love for archaeology as further influences. His series of heads, shaped and pinched as they are, defy definition. Animal or human? Otero resists categorizing them, not to mention turning them into pieces with a purpose. "I work from my head to my hands to the clay," he says. "I never want to justify what I create." **KATHLEEN HACKETT**



ABOVE: Two of Otero's self-described "creatures" from 2015.



LEFT: Ceramic forms from 2012 in Otero's signature off-white speckled matte glaze.