

FARBFELD | Johannes Nagel

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Gallery FUMI presents FARBFELD – new work by the ceramic artist Johannes Nagel in its first solo exhibition for 2022.

The 19 pieces have been made by Nagel over the past two years in his studio in Halle, Germany and show the artist continuing to redefine the form and function of the traditional vessel as he plays with the improvisational qualities of his chosen material – clay.

The show's title comes from the German word for "colour field" and references both post-war abstract painting, as well as his own painstaking work in developing new colour combinations and glazes, resulting from a carefully conducted series of systematic trials.

With a seemingly inexhaustible appetite for experimentation, Nagel's new pieces include hand-built stoneware; porcelain vases created in the sandbox; and the application of the innovative glaze combinations he has spent time developing over the last year. The resulting work is highly resolved and yet filled with joyous, restless energy.

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The stoneware series shows Nagel once again working with clusters of forms, which reference more traditional bronze sculptural groups. More controlled and formal than his porcelain pieces, the mark of the artist is visible. "You can see the layers, the hand, the work," says Nagel. "There are strong traces of the pinching process." One, Cluster/Black #3, sits on its own plinth, like a Giacometti sculpture, clearly defining its space and presence.

Dynamic works in porcelain have twisting arms decorated with vibrant splashes of glaze. In the case of Knot/Holy – a piece which folds in and around itself – Nagel found it had an almost figurative quality after the first firing. "So I applied a deep blue dot pattern," he says. "I didn't want to push the idea of a figure any further."

For other sandbox works, he decided to create cleaner silhouettes, using a template to deliver sharper edges. But while this brings greater precision, Nagel still can't resist the odd improvisational turn, perhaps allowing untamed quantities of porcelain to swell unevenly on just one side of the form.

As ever, Nagel signs his work with a visible flourish, not with the conventionally discreet signature on the underside of the piece. His mission is the questioning and deconstruction of the vessel, but his finishing touch is most certainly that of a painter.

Words by Caroline Roux

