

GALLERIES

What's up at Boston-area art galleries

By Cate McQuaid | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT JULY 02, 2013



IAN ALDEN RUSSELL

A view of Kelli Rae Adams's "Breaking Even" on display at the Perry and Marty Granoff Center for the Creative Arts at Brown University.

Having read a bit about Kelli Rae Adams's show "Breaking Even," I approached the installation gamely, thoughts clickety-clacking in my head about Adams's concept: How labor, materials, and measures of value inform production and exchange in an artistic economy.

My thoughts stilled the moment I stepped into the Cohen Gallery at the Perry and Marty Granoff Center for the Creative Arts at Brown University, where curator Ian

Alden Russell has put the show together. The three works there, in concert, have such visual magnetism it doesn't matter what they're about.

On the wall, Adams has set 300 jars of preserves on three long shelves, organized according to palette, from green pickles and asparagus to carrots to the sweet, deep red of strawberries. On the floor, a wending, serpentine curve of toppled, oversized clay dominoes. To one side, clay silver dollars stacked like poker chips, surrounding great jars of cloudy water.

Maybe it's the sumptuous colors of the preserves contrasted against the white clay. Maybe it's the elemental nature of the materials themselves — food, glass, water, earth. Certainly, the three pieces have formal clarity. This installation has an arresting presence that not a lot of art has. Rather than "look at me," it seems to say, simply, "I am enough."

CONTINUE READING BELOW ▼

Adams's conceptual underpinnings drive that. She's not wasteful. Her unbaked porcelain can be recycled simply by adding water. Hence the water jars amid the currency — there's already clay rehydrating in them. Some of the hollow dominoes have broken into shards; surely she will reuse that material, as well. The preserves may shine on their perches like dark gems, but they could also feed a person for several months.

The dominoes represent the artist's product. The food stands in for the energy it takes to make the art. The coins are the funds. We expect art objects to last; these won't. That transience makes the work seem all the more noble and heightens our awareness of the artist's labor. But the concept here is so elegantly expressed there's no need to think about it. It's enough to just be in the gallery; the art says more than words and meanings ever will.



KELLI RAE ADAMS:

Cohen Gallery, Perry and Marty Granoff
Center for the Creative Arts, Brown
University, 154 Angell St., Providence
401-863-1934.

[http://www.brown.edu/campus-
life/arts/bell-gallery](http://www.brown.edu/campus-life/arts/bell-gallery)

Closing date: July 19