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If you like political satire and commentary, the current show at Augustana College Art Gallery is a must-see. Confrontational Clay: The Artist as Social Critic will be on display at Augustana College's Centennial Hall Art Gallery through October 21. The show, curated by Judith S. Schwartz, contains excellent examples of political commentary using ceramic artworks, not social commentaries thinly disguised as art.

A statement in the exhibit sums up why I like this show so well: "The best political art is made by artists who never think of themselves as political, but who are triggered by an event or series of events to use their skills to provoke or reveal."

In this show, the works first and foremost generate emotional reactions. That reaction might be laughter, indignation, anger, outrage, or amusement, but you will have a reaction.

The show consists of 48 works by 26 different artists; most of the artists are represented by two works. One of the sets of works was done by a committee of artists, which I find unusual but expected in today's team-driven society. Schwartz, an associate professor in the Department of Art and Art Professionals at New York University, says in the catalog: "The artists represented in this exhibition have produced a body of work that calls attention to and confronts issues that constitute a vital part of our lives. They question, joust, harass, and attempt to use their art to force us to confront reality in ways that are idiosyncratic and often disturbing."

Two of my favorite works in the show are by Lee Stoliar: One of the Ways IX and One of the Ways X. They are terracotta sculptural forms like you would see decorating a Mayan temple as a sculpted cornice. Upon closer examination, you can see a very flowing sensual sculpture of lovers in an erotic embrace. The lines of the sculpture wind and twine but are accurate representations of bodies together. I'm not sure what the political commentary is, but I enjoyed looking at these two works.

Joseph Seigenthaler uses photo-realistic techniques in his Man with a Switch. This man, from the waist up, protrudes from the wall. His skin texture is too real, and his expression is gleefully sadistic. As I looked at it, I had to keep reminding myself, It's just a sculpture, because he appears ready to enjoy administering his next punishment.

For a return to Dada art, John de Fazio has a sacred-heart figurine of Jesus mounted on a toilet with an adoring five-o'clock-shadowed Mickey Mouse gazing on him, along with assorted other pop-culture figures including Bart Simpson. The work is called Dada Throne, and is described in the catalog as a porcelain toilet with cast parts. What makes the piece especially arresting is that each figure, or cast part, is brightly colored in contrast to the white toilet. This work will get a reaction if for no other reason than the juxtaposition of the sacred heart of Jesus alongside Mickey Mouse.

John de Fazio's other work is called Santa Urinal, and the title describes it quite well. If we had bas-relief busts of famous people cast into our urinals, it might make a trip to the men's room more of an adventure. On the other hand, it might cause long lines of people wanting to discharge over particularly notorious figures, leaving others unused.

Have you ever wanted to see what an Isabel Bloom, Hummel, or Precious Moments figurine would look like toting an M-16 assault weapon or a Magnum 457 “Dirty Harry” special? Cynthia Cosentino gives us her version with Figurines. These adorable little girls would look at home in a fine jewelry store except they each come equipped with a massive gun, pointed outward, potentially toward you, the viewer. A quick glance at the figurine grouping might not reveal the weapons, but the second look does.

Cosentino will be giving a public slide lecture on her works on Thursday, October 12, at 7:30 p.m. in Larson Hall of Augustana College; you can express your reactions to her work in person.

There are many reasons to view this show, not the least of which is the consistent high quality of the pieces. Every one of the works transcends its medium. By this I mean that you are aware of only the message the artist is trying to convey, not the medium he or she chooses to express it in. If space allowed, almost every one of the works is worth commenting on, and this review only mentions a few of them. I’ve omitted other great ones such as The Dentist and Obese Trophy.

For any working artist, wanting to see how others have pushed the ceramic medium, this show represents a unique viewing experience. For those of us who enjoy seeing well-executed, entertaining, and provocative art, this show is without parallel. Do make the time to view this show before it closes in October.