

# ceramics

M O N T H L Y

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## 2021 Emerging Artist: Janny Baek

Janny Baek • April 12, 2021 • [Add Comment](#)

Janny Baek, Brooklyn, New York

**Ceramics Monthly:** What role does color play in your work?

**Janny Baek:** I use color to express pleasure, strangeness, and fantasy—and to avoid neutrality, style, and tastefulness—in my work. When I was growing up, I felt an aversion to the color palette and patterns of common traditional Korean textiles that were familiar to me, finding them somewhat unfashionable at the time. Many years later, though I don't directly reference those designs, they are a jumping-off point when I consider color, and I find something very interesting and fruitful in exploring unusual color combinations and rhythms.



**1 Untitled (Pleated Form in Blue), 15 in. (38 cm) in height, colored porcelain, fired to cone 6 in oxidation, 2020.**

**CM:** How do you come up with the forms and surfaces that are prevalent in your work and what forming techniques do you use?

**JB:** When I sculpt, I take inspiration from geometry in nature, figurative sculpture, and puffy cartoon clouds. My aim is to create soft, fluid forms with intricate and structured surfaces that are meant to combine a sense of movement and life with a sense of fantasy and strangeness through texture and color. I would like to create something that is at once familiar, alien, and joyful—possibly some type of speculative matter, entity, or animated substance.

I borrow ideas from the field of textile design in planning the surfaces of my pieces. The ceramic surfaces I create range from flat, two-dimensional patterns in glazed lines or applied nerikomi techniques to raised and pinched textures that are reminiscent of pleated or knit textiles. I am interested in the tension and contrast between the graphic, structured, systematic patterns moving over the amorphous surfaces of the forms and how these may be at odds with one another, revealing or concealing the irregular and dynamic motions of the body beneath.

My pieces are three dimensional, and their forms and patterns change in the round. I hope that viewers feel drawn to move around them in order to sense what they are or could be. Since I'm motivated by my own curiosity, I hope that some of that is transmitted through each object.



**2 Untitled (Form in Blue Twill Weave), 17 in. (43 cm) in height, colored porcelain, fired to cone 6 in oxidation, 2021.**

**CM:** What do you see as the current trends in ceramics and where do you see yourself in that field?

**JB:** First, I think there are a lot of artists working in an interesting space where art, design, and craft intersect, using their investment in material and process to communicate intent through physical, crafted objects, whether functional, nonfunctional, or somewhere in between. As someone who has taken a circuitous route from ceramics and sculpture to design and architecture and back, I feel a personal desire to synthesize these separate categories that have historically existed in an accepted hierarchy.

Also, we live in a time that is characterized by a loss of personal connections, physical presence, and sensory experiences. Clay is such an intensely physical and personal material in its origin, heft, odor, and squishiness. Transmitting some message through the material seems possible. As are many others, I am quite earnestly drawn to it because of these qualities, and the need to stake some small claim against many things about life today that seem cynical, disconnected, transactional, and inhumane. There are many ceramic artists working to address the related issues of social justice and the future of our planet, and who are using their work to question existing power structures. As an anti-racist, immigrant, feminist, and mother, I hope to continue questioning and researching ways to do so in my work.

*To learn more, visit [www.jannybaek.com](http://www.jannybaek.com).*

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