

Pale Fire  
Nicole Ondre  
*Primes*  
July 8–August 26, 2023

The concept of *prime* is essentially about time. It brings to mind the early stages of being in words like “primary” and “primordial.” It describes an introductory step in a procedure through the action “to prime,” as well as an advanced stage of a process, such as “in the prime of one’s life.” Its connotation of both *original* and *mature* ties it to ideal figures, evinced by a “prime example.” In mathematics, a “prime number” is divisible only by one and itself. And in topology, a subdiscipline of mathematics that offers plasticity to theoretical diagrams, “prime” denotes a closed loop knot that cannot be divided into multiple knots.

In the studio, Nicole Ondre uses the phenomenon of prime knots as a departure point to explore the temporality of clay. Parallel to the topological strategies of stretching, bending and distorting forms in order to analyze their composition, she manipulates extruded clay loops in ways that test the medium’s resilience. In topology, the negative space surrounding a knot offers equally valuable insight about its logic. Ondre is attentive to how the installation of the works expresses the effects of gravity and compression, elevation and extension on the loops.

The artist’s interest in this procedure evolves from a long-term curiosity about the materials and processes of painting. Her early experiments include making paper prints of oil paintings that she inscribed directly on the wall and floor. She then began sculpting swaths of pliable tissue soaked in acrylic medium into drapes and bows. The absence of a standard support structure in these works inspired site-specific installations in which fabric sutures and clay studs puncture gallery walls. Ondre’s study of stitch formations piqued her interest in textile patterns, which she started modeling in clay. She initially painted them with oil paints before experimenting with ceramic glazing. These complex and delicate compositions were advanced by her discovery of mathematical knots and her research into firing and glazing methods.

The exhibition’s title *Primes*—in the plural—draws attention away from the value of a single material or procedure and toward the multiple influences that inform a studio methodology. It highlights the primacy of formal experimentation, and the role that time plays in shaping emergent discoveries into mature iterations.

Nicole Ondre (b. 1986) lives and works in Vancouver. Recent solo exhibitions include *Heatwork* (2023) at Tanya Leighton Gallery, Los Angeles; *Pirl* (2022) at CSA Space, Vancouver; and *Blood Knot* (2018) at Unit 17, Vancouver. Ondre’s work was included in the two-person exhibition *The Eyes Have Walls* (2020) with Mina Totino at the West Vancouver Art Museum. Other group exhibitions include *And down below the earth shown bright* (2023) at ILY2, Portland; *Heart View Knot Bird* (2022) at Tanya Leighton Gallery, Los Angeles; and *High Anxiety* (2021) at Mónica Reyes Gallery, Vancouver. Since 2010, Ondre has also worked collaboratively with Vanessa Disler as Feminist Land Art Retreat.

Image Credit: Nicole Ondre, *7s* (detail), 2023. Soda-fired glazed ceramic, 10” x 9” x 5”. Photo: Nicole Ondre.