

ARTFORUM



Jessica Stoller, *Untitled (frosted bust)*, 2012, porcelain, china paint and luster, 8 x 10 1/2 x 6 1/2"

Critics' Picks:

Jessica Stoller

P.P.O.W

535 West 22nd Street, Third Floor

January 9–February 8

Jessica Stoller's sensual ceramic works illustrate how harmony can be found through opposing extremes, pairing saccharine gluttony with the sadomasochistic tug of bondage and allusions to death's possibility. The works—which showcase Stoller's expert hand at manipulating porcelain using antique ceramic techniques such as German lace dripping—are fetishistic celebrations of Rococo ebullience: grotesquely decadent, with richly layered textures, and a delicate, grandmotherly aesthetic. A centerpiece, *Still Life*, 2013, packs together an opulent spread of pastel Thiebaud piped cakes layered with blooming roses and hydrangeas as well as tiers of pastries and fruits—a grand couvert of Meissen-like porcelain. On double take, the macarons become pink nipples; the sweet rolls are tan breasts; and chains, buggy skulls, and long, curled fingernails invade the display.

The show's title, "Spoil," alludes to a smug reveling in flesh and kink, as well as to decay. Two busts, *Untitled (Balance)* and *Untitled (Frosted Bust)*, both 2013, vivify this duality: *Untitled (Frosted Bust)* depicts a woman fortressed in layers of feminine confectionery materials and winding chains that fasten at the sides of her open, gasping mouth. In *Untitled (Balance)*, a basket of ripe fruit rests on a ghostlike bust covered by a white sheet; a fat slug hangs to the side of an apple. The effect is ghoulish, and the work stands out: It is a macabre memento mori that helps guide the show's gothic undercurrent. Stoller's works often feel narrative, with the gendered allegorical figuration seen in works by Kiki Smith or Amy Cutler. And yet the salty-sweet surrender of Stoller's nutant, fleshy objects to punitive play yields an existential balance.

— Anne Prentnieks