

HALF-EMPTY HALFPIPES

Amir Zaki explores broken space and empty skateparks in *Empty Vessel*

By EMILY CONKLIN • August 13, 2019

Concrete Vessel 116 (Courtesy the Doyle)

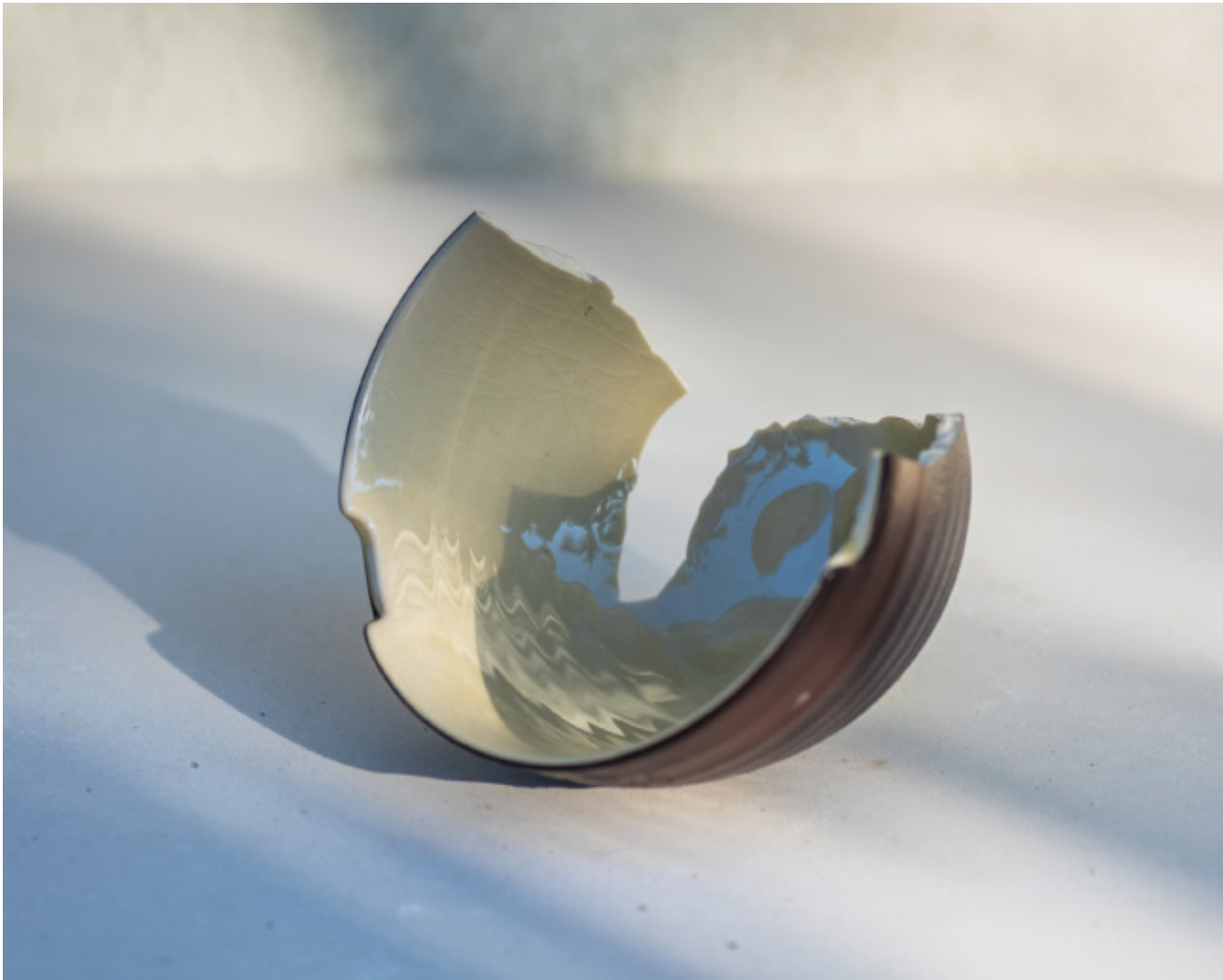


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Photographer [Amir Zaki](#) is turning his lens towards “[California concrete](#)”—empty [skateparks](#)—for his upcoming exhibition at the [Frank M. Doyle Arts Pavilion](#) on the campus of Orange Coast College in Costa Mesa, [California](#). The uncannily clear images of the undulating bowls and ramps of the parks, while ubiquitous in Zaki’s Southern California, exist as alien landscapes outside the expectation of what you’d typically see outside your window.

Zaki unites both his bodies of work, [photography](#) and ceramics, in the upcoming exhibition [Empty Vessel](#), which will run at the Doyle from September 19 through December 5. Using with a [GigaPan](#) attachment, a device that creates the same effect as a long exposure shot on film for his digital camera, Zaki took 50-to-60 photos of a scene or detail, and stitched the disparate takes together into one high definition image. The result is eerie, hyper-real prints, not dissimilar to the multiple exposures taken by architectural photographers to fine-tune the perfection of a space.

Hanging on the walls of the Doyle are these laser-sharp images of skateparks as sculpture or [land art](#), accompanied by images of colorful broken ceramics. Destroyed by Zaki in his backyard, the visual juxtaposition of the different scales of “vessels” in the gallery is intended as a commentary on architecture—spaces and emptiness. The broken ceramics and the early morning, skaterless skateparks are brought out of the context of their accepted usefulness, purely just existing, as Zaki’s lens focuses our eye on the spaces they create. The idea of both the ceramics and the skateparks being vessels has to do with their sunken earth nature—while the ceramics are formed from the earth, fired, and then subsequently broken by the artist on his concrete back patio, when skateparks are devoid of skaters they become just concrete forms sunken into the earth. They are the reverse of high-rise contemporary urban architectures, scooped out forms of concrete instead of soaring roofed structures. However, while skateparks and their odd manmade topologies are not meant to be inhabited, they hold people and culture. While the cracked ceramics can no longer hold water or smaller objects, they still create dynamic, jagged spaces in Zaki’s eye.



Broken Vessel 104 (Courtesy The Doyle)

Shot from the bottom of the bowls and looking up at ramps and rails, the chosen perspective gives the parks an authority over the photographer as well as the viewer. It is as if they are inhabiting the space, taking time to understand and occupy a place that is usually seen as a fleeting blur atop a skateboard. Skateparks were not meant for human habitation or celebration, and neither was his ceramic earthenware.

Zaki has sustained a unique interest in architectural subjects throughout his career, notably in his earlier collection of candy-colored lifeguard towers, titled [Relics](#) (2010). Using digital manipulation, nonhuman scale or horizonless perspectives, Zaki makes his built environments appear subtly irrational, made to be seen not experienced. He presents us with buildings that exist for themselves, not for us.

The juxtaposition of the ceramic shards can be read as a visual way to explore and question the origins of architectural form-making. The skatepark is like a shard of a building, no longer enclosed and warped at the edges. Yet it is still a functional piece, a place where the fringes meet. A broken jar may no longer hold water, a building may not be an office. But architecture can be broken, shattered and reclaimed.

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