

View of Ann Agee's exhibition, showing glazed porcelain sculptures, all 2009-10, on artist-made table, and *Kitchen*, 2006, flashe and acrylic on paper (on wall); at Locks.



PHILADELPHIA  
**ANN AGEE**  
LOCKS

Three enormous, perspectively skewed paintings of brightly colored rooms; hand-crafted platters and bowls mounted on steel armatures to create a trio of wall reliefs; a table loaded with eye-catching parodies of rococo-like glazed porcelain vases and a ledge supporting equally resplendent figurines, several with a characteristically sly, ribald twist, all gleaming white, are the components of Ann Agee's "Rules of the Pattern," her recent solo exhibition of peculiar delights. Together, they reconstruct Agee's Brooklyn home as both a domestic *mise-en-scène* and a site of production for all kinds of (women's) work. Agee sets the stage with murals on paper of two areas in her house—the kitchen and the Orange Room (the latter in two versions)—interiors emblazoned with green or patterned orange walls. Accented by strongly hued cabinets, chairs and carpets, the paintings juxtapose cool with warm. Coolness, however, prevails, the heated colors outlined and restrained by the drawing. The absence of people and clutter creates a sense of emptiness and expectation, as if we are waiting for the inhabitants (or actors) to arrive so that life (or the play) can begin.

Toying with once-ingrained notions of ceramics as a minor art, Agee's porcelain creations are the mischievous, wonderfully misbegotten offspring of sculpture, painting, *objet d'art* and kitschy souvenir, throwing in some

economic, sociopolitical and gender commentary for good measure. The blue and white wall relief *Gross Domestic Product* (2010) conjures a clunkier version of Delftware and the history of import-export trade, Agee exchanging that ware's more refined, at times exotic imagery for the unrepentantly humdrum—dishes drying in a rack, an oven, a washing machine under a staircase. Another wall piece, *Pink Set* (2009)—pink for girls?—is amusingly embellished with pictures of unmade beds, upending the familiar admonition to make one's bed and implying that today's women have so many better things to do with their time. These, with the whimsical, lopsided vases (one suggests an abstract preening rooster) and delicate, cunningly wrought figures, are the heart of the show; Agee gets better and better at her craft while retaining the trace of the slightly imperfect and handmade. The figures themselves are earthy, lively, both sardonic and goofily sweet, updated *commedia dell'arte* types. *Equine Gynecologist* (2009) depicts a vet, hand up a resistant horse's rump, conducting an examination. In *Tree Birth II* (2009), a ponytailed girl clutches a tree, legs astraddle, skirt hitched, the head of an infant emerging, while beneath her a kneeling figure attempts to catch the baby. Rules and patterns, Agee seems to be saying, are made to be considered, then broken—which she does with infectious exuberance and wit.

—Lilly Wei