

Mordant Tales of Sarcasm and Light Bitterness

Ellen Sylvarnes' seven groupings of alchemy jars sitting on small wrought iron shelves seem to invite some kind of interaction. Were we to draw our hand close to the cold glass, touching its (some) sticky (some) soft surface, would we feel something? Would the contents of these ominous looking jars scorch the flesh, or cool the heat of a burn? It is not determined whether the jars are holding potions that would derange balance of the mind or sooth the irrationalities of life. Yet the sandblasted exteriors, embossed numerals and wrapped fabric exteriors imply some kind of alchemist history. Suggestion is a strong element in Sylvarnes's work. She displays these jars simply as if they were to appear in a chemical lab, or even storage space. The artist does not tell the viewer what to think, reference some terrible chemical event, but suggests the power of these jars, symbolizing at once the in between of scientific miracles, and the threat of the unknown.