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Balancing Acts: Janet Abrams
30 January 2026 – 2 May, 2026

OPENING RECEPTION

30 January, 5 – 7 PM, atrium

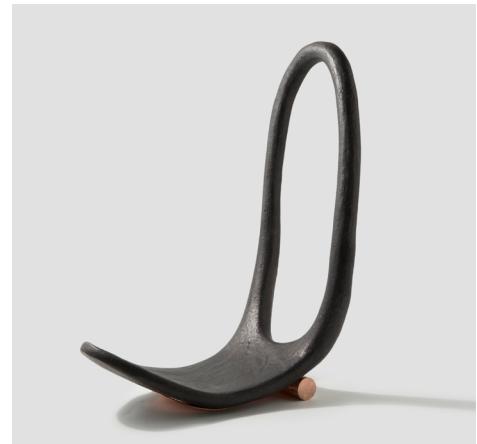
JANET ABRAMS | *Augury*, 2016. Stoneware with copper base
25 x 18 x 12 in (63.5 x 45.7 x 30.5 cm)

Photo by Marylene Mey, courtesy of Zane Bennett Contemporary Art

(Santa Fe, NM) Zane Bennett Contemporary Art announces *Balancing Acts*, the first solo exhibition of Cranbrook Academy of Art alumna and renowned art, architecture and design critic Janet Abrams. The exhibition opens with a reception on 30 January 2026, 5–7 P.M.

Comprising over a dozen sculptures that put clay in conversation with diverse materials—including steel, copper, rawhide, rubber, and wood—the show tracks Abrams's evolving studies of balance, gravity, and precariousness. Drawing inspiration from the work of 20th-century sculptors such as Alexander Calder, Ruth Duckworth, Lucio Fontana, Eva Hesse, Barbara Hepworth, and Ruth Vollmer, her sculptures set opacity and weight in contrast to translucency and levity and reject the convention that ceramic artifacts must be earth- (or pedestal-) bound. Forms and materials are brought together in compositions that seem to harness kinetic energy, conveying a frisson of risk—a condition she describes as "a metaphor for the precariousness of life itself."

Early works from the exhibition, such as *Vicissitude* and *Involution*, show her interest in flowing, organic clay forms resting on rectilinear supports: dangling from a cantilevered copper bar or hanging over a horizontal surface. Later works, like *Gather* and *Kernel*, set the natural hues of high- and low-fire clay bodies against semi-translucent materials, allowing an interplay between the obduracy of solid objects and the muted light that filters through rawhide or urethane rubber.

Zane Bennett gallery director Carina Evangelista notes:

Abrams merges her deep knowledge of architecture and design with her fascination for materials, ignited by touching clay slip at a crafts school during a conference in the early 2000s. That tactile epiphany led her to pivot from her long-established career as a writer to become a practicing artist. Visual witticism runs through her vocabulary of ceramic elements—rods, loops, hoops, tapered or teardrop forms—while their armatures in wood, metal, rawhide and rubber seem like responses to structural riddles. *Balancing Acts* presents an array of objects that hang, perch, or float on their bases, illustrating how the weight and fragility of clay can serve as its own fulcrum. Within the architecture of precarity and acrobatics with gravity of Abrams's work is the spirit of play.

Abrams rediscovered clay in her late 40s during her directorship of the University of Minnesota Design Institute in Minneapolis (2000–2008). Evening classes at Northern Clay Center confirmed her enthusiasm for ceramics, leading to an

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For press or image inquiries, please contact Spencer Linford at spencer@zanebennettgallery.com.

Zane Bennett Contemporary Art | 435 S Guadalupe St, Santa Fe, NM 87501 | info@zanebennettgallery.com | 505.982.8111

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MFA at Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan. There she experimented with clay and unconventional materials, making installations out of spun cotton candy, hot glue strung with dead houseflies, egg yolk in panty hose, and honey dripping through vintage kitchen tools. These forays laid the foundation for Abrams's subsequent practice, which moves freely between a variety of materials and tools, using fabrication techniques acquired at Santa Fe Community College. Abrams views *Balancing Acts* as the corollary materialization of her ongoing interest in the relationship between the "natural" and the "technological," in the creation of the hand-made and attention to tactility in an era of digital disembodiment, and in narratives of finding one's foothold during displacement or diasporic drift.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Janet Abrams, born London, 1959, lives and works in Santa Fe, NM.

Trained in journalism after an undergraduate degree in Architecture, Abrams received her PhD in architectural history and theory at Princeton University in New Jersey on a Fulbright scholarship. Her book, *Daddy Wouldn't Buy Me a Bauhaus: Profiles in Architecture and Design*, published in 2020, is a collection of essays on emerging "Starchitects" and their new buildings that appeared in *Blueprint*. She subsequently served as features editor of *Punch* magazine; director of the Chicago Institute for Architecture and Urbanism; writer-at-large for *I.D. International Design* magazine; and adjunct professor in the MFA graphic design program at Yale University and Parsons School of Design and was visiting associate professor in the School of Architecture + Planning at the University of New Mexico. She has also served as freelance curator/host of conferences on design, technology and culture for organizations including AIGA, Cooper Union, and Parsons School of Design. As editor at the Netherlands Design Institute (NDI) in Amsterdam, she published *IF/THEN: PLAY* (on the digital turn in play) and co-organized NDI's fifth Doors of Perception conference. As director of the University of Minnesota Design Institute, she appointed dozens of emerging artists and designers as DI Fellows to teach new courses, create design prototypes, and publish innovative research, including *ELSE/WHERE: MAPPING* (co-edited with Peter Hall).

During a break in the conference on "Craft and Design: Hand, Mind, and the Creative Process" at Haystack Mountain School of Crafts in 2004, she found her way to the ceramics studio, dipped her hand in a bucket of clay slip, and was immediately captivated. This led to an MFA in Ceramics at Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan, where she experimented with materials beyond clay and discovered artists whose inquiries into physical phenomena such as light, gravity, density, and atmospheric conditions would inform her own practice.

In 2014, a year after relocating to Santa Fe, NM, Abrams won SITE Santa Fe's SPREAD 5.0 competition for visual artists and used the grant award to establish her studio and take sculpture courses at Santa Fe Community College, where she overcame her terror of power tools and became adept at lost wax bronze casting.

A philomath, Abrams has a "mad scientist" curiosity about materials, which she traces back to studying A-Level chemistry and physics at her London high school. She has had residencies at A.I.R. Vallauris in France, the European Ceramic Work Centre in the Netherlands, and MacDowell; and has participated in workshops at Anderson Ranch, Banff Centre, Haystack Mountain School of Crafts, and Ox-Bow School of Art. Her essays have been published in artist monographs, exhibition catalogs, and periodicals such as *Ceramic Review*, *Crafts*, *Domus*, *frieze*, *New York Times*, and *Southwest Contemporary*. In 2020, she co-curated and designed/built the website for [Quartz Inversion](#), a showcase of work made by over sixty international ceramic artists during the COVID-19 lockdown.

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