

### For ceramicist Morel Doucet, art is political



anger is embedded in these deceptively decorative objects. They are seductive and deadly serious, surreal and grotesque. Ceramic art by Haitian-born Morel Doucet was never meant for your grandmother's china cabinet.

"With a lot of my work, I like to push the medium beyond expectations of what people think ceramic is," Doucet says. "People question whether this is formed by hand, or is it a mold? So that fascination about the material lures viewers into my work. They're captivated by the beauty, by the flora and fauna. They find beauty in it, but then I confront them with issues of the environment, climate change, and global warming."

Such urgent themes underlie his astonishingly beautiful and harrowing exhibit, "White Noise: When Raindrops Whisper and Moonlight Screams in Silence," which closed in January at the African Heritage Cultural Arts Center. It was supported by Doucet's 2019 \$9000 Ellies award from Oolite to create ceramic art for a solo exhibit by exploring thematic connections between coral reef bleaching and the experience of the African-Caribbean diaspora.

## Environmental Colors

Written by Elisa Turner, BT Contributor  
February 2020

---

His approach to ceramics is subtle and sculptural. It flirts with prettiness. In one piece, two tiny hands display an unearthly grace as they emerge from a stack of scalloped sea shells. Fingers arch in space, echoing the shapes of shells that apparently hold their hands hostage. Are they trying to escape? In a similarly bizarre object, two legs extend from exquisitely formed seashells, clustered somehow with delicate floral petals. Are the legs kicking, walking, trying to swim? Do hidden bodies belong to these hands and legs?

Yes, initially these objects appear whimsical and charming. But take another, longer look. They ultimately suggest a future in which human bodies have been engulfed by the ocean. These headless bodily hybrids are bone-white, drained of all color.

For Mikhaile Solomon, who curated “White Noise,” Morel’s art is layered with provocative ideas. “It displays a poetic beauty but simultaneously deals with “some very raw and uncomfortable issues,” she says. As director of Prizm Art Fair, which showcases art of Africa and the global African diaspora during Miami Art Week, she notes that despite resurging interest in ceramics, “I think there is a danger of people thinking about ceramics as decorative art, but Morel takes it a step further.”



## Environmental Colors

Written by Elisa Turner, BT Contributor  
February 2020

---

On the surface “White Noise,” she says, “is about our neglect of the environment, but then it also deals with more insidious issues, like racial disparity and colorism, the idea that people of a lighter hue are favored over people of a darker hue. I place him in a contemporary Caribbean context that deals with issues of decolonization.”

A disturbing issue implicitly tackled in “White Noise,” she continues, is that in the Caribbean as well as other parts of the world, “people chemically bleach their skin so they can look lighter. People have this belief that if you are of a lighter hue, you will be treated better economically and socially. It is really a deep psychological issue that is a byproduct of colonialism and racism.”

Says Doucet: “Now that the exhibit is over, I have a little bit of the [Oolite] money left over to use for the next project. I’m taking a deeper dive into the idea of climate gentrification. I’m drawing people from the black and brown spaces in South Florida.” These include Little Haiti and Allapattah, neighborhoods that have seen rapid development. As a Little Haiti resident, in the last few years he’s noticed Teslas and BMWs on the streets in addition to more common Nissans and Toyotas. The presence of such upscale cars in a working-class neighborhood means, he asserts, that “wealth is coming and displacing people who are renting.”

What’s his response to people who ask how can art bring changes to issues of climate change and gentrification?

## Environmental Colors

Written by Elisa Turner, BT Contributor  
February 2020

---

