



GILES ROUND

Young Team, London

In the little erotic grotto – hidden within a warren of repurposed industrial spaces and lit like an opium den – which was home to 'AGAIN. SORRY. AGAIN! SORRY!' I found myself wondering: 'What's the collective noun for penises? When you go to the zoo you see a streak of tigers or a congress of baboons but here the British sculptor, ceramicist and designer Giles Round supplied what can only be described as an embarrassment of cocks.

Four phallic vases, fat as cigars, inhabited the space like a bunch of tragic bachelors. Four might not constitute an orgiastic quantity, but Round had uproarious fun by using them to make a playful and dextrous apology to Ettore Sottsass, the late Italian designer and architect whose pink, phallic *Shiva Vase* (1971) Round's ceramic creations approximated. As Round explained in a note printed on tracing paper doused in olive oil (*ETTORE, SORRY!*, all works, 2015): 'I made it flaccid.' All but one of the vases on display was a double of this famous original appearing in a different phase of deflation and exuding a clownish pathos.

Apologizing is a hot activity for Round, who has previously said sorry to Kurt Schwitters by printing his plea on a blown-up photograph from a catalogue showing a wonky sculpture by the late dadaist and laying that upon a marbled page (the artist favours convoluted processes).

'AGAIN. SORRY. AGAIN! SORRY!' was a gleeful manifestation of the puzzling over modernism's madly variegated aesthetic legacy that has occupied Round for the last decade. His works are dense with historical references, often comic and materially various. For *Objects of the Neo-Brutalist Home* (2011), he enlisted 'printed upholstery linen' (in a voguish smoky-grey and black redolent of Cold War-era espionage), 'mild steel, stoneware and burnt sage'; he has also produced an absurdist assemblage called *Untitled Structure for Alain Delon* (2005), the French actor and 1960s heartthrob. Alongside

the pieces under his own imprimatur, he has further questioned the divides between decorative and fine art through the formation of the collective The Granchester Pottery, as well as works produced in collaboration with the sculptor Sarah Staton as The SHTIP – they are currently involved in a project on 'the ideologies of social housing' – and the Coniston Secession, a group responsible for fascinating cubist kitchenware.

The fun here lay in following Round's mischievous oscillation between gentle mockery and smitten homage. Like Round, Sottsass was a promiscuous figure who trained as an architect but turned his hand to all number of extravagant creations. His definition of pieces like the *Shiva Vase* as 'small architectures' provides an equally acute account of Round's polyvalent oeuvre.

MORE HELP was the only piece that proclaimed itself engorged and this still looked too fey for an erotic totem because its surface was painted with puffy clouds. Each of the vases was decorated with slick graphic motifs that suggested an eccentric erotic code, such as the dissembled strata of a rainbow (*Sorry. YOU MADE ME!*) or a pure golden river (*REALLY SORRY*).

A lamp titled *STOP* made similar intimations as it was connected to ejaculatory skeins of orange wire and concluded in the discreet surprise of a glowing light bulb. Adding to the show's '1970s seraglio' atmosphere there were also linen curtains and a minimalist metal sculpture that resembles the ultra-moderne furnishings from Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* (1971). Two vases had red tulips flowing from their lips, or – to follow the vase's implied anatomy, flowing from their urethras – in another slick visual pun on ejaculation with a homoerotic history stretching from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (8 CE) to Robert Mapplethorpe via Jean Genet. In the symbolic language of flowers, red tulips are declarations of true love. The rejection was sweetly performed: the first flower was in bloom and the other was wilting like a sick flamingo.

CHARLIE FOX

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Giles Round
'Again. Sorry. Again! Sorry!',
2015, exhibition view