

Philippe Barde +PT Projects

MUSÉE ARIANA, GENEVA | 7 MAY 2009 TO 11 JANUARY 2010

PRESS RELEASE

Geneva, May 2009.– **Philippe Barde (1955) is today one of the few Swiss ceramists whose work, honoured with a number of distinguished awards, enjoys worldwide recognition. He has conceived this exhibition at the Musée Ariana as a sort of assessment, rather than a retrospective: a way of taking stock of his current relationship to the art of ceramics, as recent and even completely new works are primarily those on display. He presents a universe of multiple entries, where the rigour of the message can shift at any time towards the realm of dreams and emotion. His work is thought out and felt in such a way that ideas never take precedence over matter, and vice-versa.**

Barde acquired his basic ceramics training under Philippe Lambercy at the École des Arts Décoratifs in Geneva, an institution he later returned to as an instructor. He is now in charge of the Centre d'Expérimentation et de Réalisation en Céramique Contemporaine (CERCCO) at the Haute École d'Art et de Design (HEAD) in Geneva.

When Barde started on his artistic path at the end of the 1970s, the ceramics scene was dominated by enamelled stoneware, turning and modelling. The density of the substance and the technique of the person shaping it were often emphasized above all. Attracted by transparency and lightness (he initially worked with stained glass), the budding artist yearned for a form of expression that would show his thoughts rather than his hands, his intentions instead of his know-how: a way to understate the hard work in the studio, the complex and fastidious technical aspects of the medium.

Barde soon developed a predilection for porcelain due to its delicate receptivity and discreet presence. Of all ceramic materials, it is the one he judged most apt for interpreting his gestures and revealing shapes with the intended precision. To lighten as much as possible the traces of his own interventions, he began to use casting for his creations with increasing frequency. However, he did not reduce the casting process to a simple duplication procedure, but used it on the contrary to measure the behaviour of the material in its most subtle manifestations, just as it helps later in analysing the form of the object and in focalizing the vision of the observer.

It is striking to note that all the works on display here take their basic shape from a found object: a rock, a mould by the ceramist Paul Bonifas, the top of a human skull, an old cast of a plant bud. The artist's task then becomes to decode, deconstruct and manipulate the model so as to rebuild it with an emotional investment. The ultimate goal is to give the finished shape a heightened reality by relating the vision of the artist who explored it and the fantasies that arose in his imagination, and subsequently in our own.

Barde's work manifestly comprises a strong conceptual component, without turning into a disembodied stylistic exercise in the process. This is because the message and viewpoints of the artist are constantly nourished by his empathic attention to the material and the way it responds to the actions of his hands. The substance not only supports his ideas, it literally inspires them. If Barde's approach bears witness to his enlightened curiosity about the diverse experiments he sees on the global contemporary art scene – as when he brings extra-disciplinary perspectives to his work – it is also true that, now more than ever, he clearly proclaims his identity as a ceramist.

At the heart of the exhibition rises an imposing installation some twenty metres in length: *Disparition* (*Disappearance*), the result of a progressive work begun in 2006. Starting with four old casts, each representing a kind of plant bud, Barde extracted four plaster moulds that he proceeded to saw vertically into four parts. By randomly combining these quarter-moulds he obtained a quantity of new porcelain shapes, vaguely related hybrids that are all different from one another. Following a precise protocol, the quarter-sections were scraped down by a few millimetres over successive times. As the process gets repeated, the shapes become ever more tenuous until only seed-like objects are left in the end, as if the deconstruction of the images brings us back to the very origins of the items.

Barde multiplies the levels of interpretation. *Disparition* takes up first a theme dear to him: that of the subtle differences that insert themselves between apparently identical objects. To this theme are superimposed those of symmetry and asymmetry, of form generated by process, and of the "disappearance" of the shape itself, while in the background there lies the burning and very contemporary question of genetic manipulation.

Over the last fifteen years, Barde has accumulated a large number of artist residencies in Europe, Asia, Africa and North America. Each stay has given him the occasion to discover the local culture and ceramic practices, personal explorations that leave subsequent traces in his output.

Artistic collaborations provide him with another form of stimulation, as with the Japanese artist Toshio Matsui (1955) whom he met for the first time in Seto in 1998. The two personalities quickly discovered some profound affinities, which resulted not only in fruitful exchanges but also in common achievements (PT Projects), notably in Japan in 2006 and Mali in 2007, the latter within the framework of a project ("La Suisse en Lien") directed by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

Barde has involved Matsui moreover in this exhibition with the display of joint creations as well as some of his friend's personal works.

An exhibition catalogue has been prepared for the occasion with publication planned for mid-July.

Exhibition curator: Roland Blaettler, curator

Secretary's office:

T +41(0)22 418 54 55

F +41(0)22 418 54 51

christine.azconegui@ville-ge.ch



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GENERAL INFORMATION

Musée Ariana

Avenue de la Paix 10 | 1202 Genève

T +41(0)22 418 54 50

F +41(0)22 418 54 51

<http://mah.ville-ge.ch>

Open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Closed on Mondays

Admission charged, except for the first Sunday of every month

Preview Wednesday 6 May, from 6 p.m.

Exhibition organisation

Director of the Musées d'Art et d'Histoire: Jean-Yves Marin, as from October 1st, 2009

Exhibition curator: Roland Blaettler, curator at the Musée Ariana

T +41(0)22 418 54 50

roland.blaettler@ville-ge.ch

Cultural outreach:

T +41(0)22 418 25 00 | F +41(0)22 418 25 01

adp-mah@ville-ge.ch | <http://mah.ville-ge.ch/publics>

Press office: Catherine Terzaghi

T +41(0)22 418 26 54 | F +41(0)22 418 26 01

catherine.terzaghi@ville-ge.ch

Secretary's office: Christine Azconegui-Suter

T +41(0)22 418 54 55 | F +41(0)22 418 54 51

ariana@ville-ge.ch

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Mail order : T +41 (0)22 310 64 50, F +41 (0)22 310 64 51, librart@bluewin.ch