



Contemporary art and design and patronage, a sustainable alliance

Tribute to Gisèle de Marignac

An impressive diversity dominates the international ceramic scene. Through this ancestral medium, today's artists endeavour to define a highly personal world, revisiting the traditional ceramic recipient, exploring figurative or abstract sculpture or playing with space through installations. One of the missions of the Musée Ariana, the Swiss Museum of Ceramics and Glass, is to take this diversity into account through an acquisitions policy that aims to strengthen its collections of works by recognized ceramists and to reveal emerging artists. Gisèle de Marignac fully understood the issues of this policy. Other patrons followed suit. Firstly, Csaba Gaspar who, in addition to bequeathing his entire collection to us, also provided the institution with funding for the acquisition of contemporary pieces. Secondly, the artists who, by donating their works to the museum, sometimes through the intermediary of the International Academy of Ceramics, contribute to the development of a reference collection. Finally, collectors and dealers also play a leading role. It is thanks to the generosity of all these people that the contemporary collections of the Musée Ariana are enriched year after year. This exhibition, which presents a selection of works that arrived at the museum between 2006 and 2014, is proof of this.

Philippe Barde (Switzerland, 1955)

Over the past five years, Philippe Barde has been interested in the work of the Genevan ceramist Paul Bonifas (1893-1967). He has examined the original impression moulds kept at the Musée Ariana and revisited with complete freedom a body of work that is now part of the history of Art Deco ceramics. Barde exploits and reconstructs with more organic anti-formalism parts of objects, especially handles, an important decorative element in Bonifas' work. In the process, the artist unhesitatingly goes against the purity and sobriety of the original matt black or cream crackle enamels by creating "over-crackle", a new texture that he pushes to the limits in a fusion of drops and blisters covering the surface. In so doing, Barde superimposes the results of recent research on top of his entire creative approach to sculpture and ceramic installations, which has continued to evolve for the past 15 years, adding richness and complexity to each new series of objects. Most of Barde's works start with a found object: a stone, one of Bonifas' moulds, the top of a human skull or an old moulding of a plant bud. He then decodes this form, deconstructs and manipulates it to better reinvent it, presenting us with highly ambiguous enigmas: a duality between exterior and interior, depressions and protrusions, openings and solids and between symmetry and asymmetry. ING

Claudi Casanovas (Spain, 1956)

The sculptures of this Catalan ceramist are intrinsically linked to nature; fragments that look as though they have come straight out of the earth's magma, with absolutely no human intervention whatsoever. To arrive at this powerful result that is raw, mineral but also highly elaborate and subtle, Claudi Casanovas endlessly pushes back the limits of the material. With a distrust of savoir-faire and tried and tested methods (but thanks to a sound technical background), he takes risks, subjecting the clay to extreme temperatures, overheating it until it fuses or freezing it to make it friable.

Here, the frozen clay has been broken, agglomerated and then supported in a plaster cast for firing until the heat irreversibly fixes its shape. The unfinished impression and the fragility of this dish, whose many layers appear on the point of collapse, fulfils the artist's aim of keeping his intervention to a minimum and retaining an element of chance, as though the work was created of its own accord. ACS

Michael Cleff (Germany, 1961)

Cleff's monolithic sculptures seem almost too easily understandable at first glance. A concentration of simplicity and geometric coherence, this structure composed of blocks with monochrome surfaces or this mural piece resembling a shelf might leave viewers indifferent. However, Cleff's artistic rigour is subtly accomplished. The artist is economical in his range of formal elements, based on known geometric components such as the line, curve, rectangle, trapezium, ellipse or circle. But the lines are never straight, the corners appear gently rounded, the planes are inclined and the surfaces curved. By juxtaposing, interlocking or combining solid and open forms, rough and polished surfaces and vertical and horizontal lines, the artist opts for near lyrical minimalism in a state of tension. He gives his works depth and a monumental dimension. His minimal palette of sober colours, in a range of pale and dark shades, animates and gives rhythm to the compositions, while at the same time adding an element of mystery to this abstraction. The rich brown rectangles evoke perhaps an opening, a movable element that could be displaced or traversed. The wall

pierced with holes suggests a secret inner place. These discreet escape mechanisms invite us to invent our own imaginary space or even to knock down the walls. ING

Ursula Commandeur (Germany, 1958)

A discreet artist, Ursula Commandeur has been active in the field of ceramics since the 1990s. Producing sculptures as well as utilitarian pieces, she also designs installations.

Peeping Tom is one of her “organic” creations (the title of this work refers of course to the expression meaning “voyeur”). This sculpture is made up of a hundred elements – made of brown coloured clay modelled into horn shapes with square bases and decorated with a white slip dotted motif. The pieces are assembled with wire after being fired at 1050°C and the work acquires its volume from being filled with newspaper. The whole remains surprisingly elastic!

The shape of this piece is not unlike that of certain sea creatures like polyps. Others recall sea urchins (*Weisse Lade*, *Tentakel*) or magnified microorganisms (*Virus*, *Observation*). Ursula Commandeur’s sculptures can combine up to 400 ceramic elements and often incorporate a multitude of wires of varying lengths, which strengthen their visual impact.

Ursula Commandeur was notably awarded the “Prix des Grands Amateurs du Parcours Céramique Carougeois” (the Connoisseurs’ Prize of the Carouge Ceramic Trail) in 2009. SA

Margareta Daepp (Switzerland, 1949)

The career of the ceramist Margareta Daepp has been shaped over the course of her journeys through time and space, in a rich dialectic between an invitation to travel and an exacting and uncompromising vision of ceramics. She builds on history and tradition in order to question contemporary reality more effectively.

In a series that began with *Lotus*, followed by *Tokyo Line*, created respectively during a stay in Japan and on her return, she sets traditional Japanese techniques such as lacquer against the frenetic urbanity of the Tokyo metro. The simple forms of the stacked cylinders is picked up and developed in the *Hutong* pieces, with their decoration inspired by the layout of the now disappearing narrow streets of old Peking. This wide-ranging series, spanning East and West, completes its world tour with *Bosphorus*, which takes a fresh look at the characteristic geometric patterns and bright colours of the traditional Iznik ceramic tiles decorating the mosques of Istanbul.

The Musée Ariana now possesses the entire series. ACS

Bernard Dejonghe (France, 1942)

Is Dejonghe more a being of clay and fire than of flesh and blood? To say that he communes with clay and the mineral world would be a mild euphemism for someone who regularly paces the deserts of the globe to collect fragments of stone and stardust. Dejonghe favours neither concept, nor material; he defends no particular aesthetic. He has simply chosen clay as his field and basis for experimentation, for reflection on the possible or for exploring a constantly changing universe where “energies” are produced, intersect and meet. His

choices often transgress artistic codes, though that is not his goal. The artist is forever devising new recipes: the mixture and fusion of the different minerals that make up ceramics and glass in search of a new alchemy. Dejonghe is captivated by the effects of geological time. To confuse the viewer, he has entitled his mural work *Areshima*, a Japanese-sounding name but which comes in fact from a Neolithic site in Ténéré (Niger). Suggesting a carapace, a shield or a volcanic bulge, this form is nonetheless borrowed from grooved axes, tools of the same period. This work belongs to the primary forms preferred by the sculptor: triangle or tripodal, square or cube, circle or curve, rectangle or line, which he places flat, hangs up, suspends or positions horizontally or vertically. ING

Gundi Dietz (Austria, 1942)

It takes time to appreciate Gundi Dietz's work. Her female characters, in the form of busts or full-length figures (sometimes just the head), wear a slightly sulky expression and have a closed, introspective attitude; they do not reveal their expression or try to seduce us, even though sometimes dressed in lace underwear.

Gundi Dietz's "girls" have an evident physical connection with their creator. They all look very alike while yet remaining unique. The ceramist starts with plaster moulds that she creates from a clay figure. After casting the porcelain in the mould, the artist works the still damp paste to give each figure its own personality, adding appendages, engraving tattoos and applying slip washes or enamels.

Over time, the artist has eliminated all artifice or purely ornamental element, in a constant and subtle ongoing search for the essence of human nature in her figures. The bust without arms, entitled *Emily*, has obvious associations with the sculpture of Antiquity in a timeless continuum. ACS

Carmen Dionyse (Belgium, 1921-2013)

Carmen Dionyse, who passed away last year, is a major figure in the field of ceramic sculpture. She had an unhappy childhood in Ghent. Deprived of affection, she took refuge in an imaginary inner world, inhabited by magical beings, demons and animals, that she enriched through her assiduous reading of historical and mythological narratives. This universe fuelled her creativity and laid the foundations for her artistic vocation.

Although her interest in ceramic sculpture was evident right from the start, she initially explored organic abstraction, in which her subsequent preoccupation with human nature, finitude and decay are already present. In the 1960s, the artist's work took a figurative turn with heads, busts and diverse figures, to which she gave biblical or mythological names.

Carmen Dionyse's creatures lack arms or ears, their mouths are sometimes gagged and their eyes blank. Even so, an intense vital force emanates from these mummified shells, if the viewer is brave enough to confront them. The two small white heads, despite their small size, convey an expressive force imbued with spirituality. ACS

Sophie Favre (France, 1950)

The figures modelled by the artist, although often endowed with the heads of animals, still belong to the human genre. Her dogs, cats and mice are represented in a seemingly precise and even brief period of time: speaking to an invisible other, on a school bench listening to the teacher, thinking of a game, resting, strolling or simply doing nothing. We seem to recognize these characters frozen in a familiar pose, as though they are part of our everyday lives. They are often portrayed in a manganese clay bust, in a calm posture, with total simplicity and spontaneity. But, as the saying goes, still waters run deep. What does this apparent tranquillity hold in store for us? Is the cat tenderly holding the mouse in its paws or will its barely restrained grasp inevitably tighten? The dog, with its neglected appearance, its shirt and stubble, appears lost and disillusioned, perhaps waiting for something that never happens. As for the two gossips, they wear a tight-lipped expression tinged with arrogance, suggesting that whatever they are saying it is not very pleasant. Although Sophie Favre's creatures appear endearing at first sight, they rapidly destabilize us and raise haunting and disagreeable doubts as to a certain perversity. ING

Yoshimi Futamura (Japan / France, 1959)

After gaining a solid grounding in traditional ceramics with the Japanese masters of Seto, Yoshimi Futamura completed her training in Paris. It was there, in her adopted city, that the ceramist found her identity and a freedom that enabled her to express her creativity. In her powerful and demanding individual work, where traditions meet, clay becomes the echo of the cosmos in all the complexity of its manifestations.

From her childhood in the Japanese countryside, Yoshimi Futamura has retained a sense of wonder at the beauty and power of nature, a source of contemplation and inspiration. She has still not lost today, in the urban environment of the French capital, this essential connection with earth. It is also difficult not to allude here to the volcanic turbulence and telluric forces of her native land.

From the primary form of the bowl, this ceramist develops a formal language in which clay, infused with a vital energy and density, swells, expands, cracks and folds over onto itself. The sandstone mixtures that she prepares are sometimes covered, like a skin, with a fine layer of crushed porcelain, resembling the broken crust of bread, the bark of an ancient tree, the crevices of snow-covered rock or the velvety skin of a ripe fig. ACS

Lea Georg (Switzerland, 1963)

The rigour and formal purity of the work of the Zurich ceramist Lea Georg has received recognition through a number of prestigious international awards, particularly in Korea and Japan. It is with white or full-body coloured porcelain, cast in plaster moulds, that the artist constructs her universe.

In her installation *Oktett*, Lea Georg revisits the historical tradition of sets of three, five or seven vases that the Dutch placed on top of cupboards or on mantelpieces. These garnitures, made of Chinese porcelain or Delftware, comprised alternating baluster and trumpet vases. The narrow waist of the latter accommodated the belly of the former in perfect harmony. In the same way here, the ceramist plays on the complementarity of the concave and convex forms that she sometimes complicates by juxtaposing two halves of different vases.

Subtle effects of surface treatment and colour reinforce the sense of balance and harmony that emanates from the whole. ACS

Christian Gonzenbach (Switzerland, 1975)

EMADAM RUODAPMOP is in fact Madame de Pompadour written backwards. In 2011, Christian Gonzenbach, a visual artist from Geneva well known for his desire to flirt with the world turned inside-out, created a series of ceramic busts of famous figures. The process is at once simple and complex: after making a silicon mould of a famous plaster bust, the artist turns his mould out like a glove before making a new cast of it in clay. Prominent features such as the nose or ears consequently appear as hollows. The piece thus created, although it retains an affiliation with the original, generates a feeling of unease. The trompe-l'œil effect and sense of intangibility is heightened still further by the glossy silvery enamel. From the series of "reversed" illustrious figures, the Musée Ariana selected Madame de Pompadour, for aesthetic and historical reasons. The Marquess of Pompadour, née Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson (1721-1764), is indeed remembered in French history for being the favourite of King Louis XV, but also for her support for the porcelain manufacture of Vincennes. She persuaded the king to move it to Sèvres in 1756 to bring it closer to Versailles and subsequently to acquire it, putting an end to the financial troubles of the costly enterprise. Gonzenbach's contemporary version forges a direct and original link with a section of the Ariana's historical collections. ING

Adriana Hartley (Switzerland, 1973) and **Katharine Scarfe Beckett** (Great Britain, 1972)

Who would attempt an artistic alliance as improbable as miniature painting and a block of smoke-fired clay? Why, Adriana Hartley and Katharine Scarfe Beckett of course!

"Obscure Histories" is a series of sandstone blocks, with grog added to the clay slabs and smoke-fired by the former and then decorated in gouache and gold by the latter. These sculptures with alternating raised areas and hollows, rough surfaces and smooth planes, reveal painted miniatures, sometimes just in sketch form. The 14th century style of the miniatures suggests an oppressive atmosphere reminiscent at first of the late Middle Ages. This turbulent time in Europe, in the throes of the Black Death, the Hundred Years War and decades of famine, is reflected in the figurative scenes, although these are concerned in this instance with much more recent periods of terror. Viewers have to look all around the clay cube to follow these obscure narratives that develop almost secretly in a recess or around a curve. The astonishing synergy between the imposing, heavy volume and the rough dark surface suddenly illuminated by the delicate decoration, invites visitors to study the object in detail and to stop and take the time to feel the intrinsic beauty of the piece. ING

Louise Hindsgavl (Denmark, 1973)

Recognized internationally, Louise Hindsgavl's tortuous but strangely beautiful compositions are clearly not simply attractive table decorations. Although this ceramist's sculptures immediately evoke Meissen figurines, the harlequins, shepherdesses and ladies of the court are replaced in Hindsgavl's work by a phantasmagorical world illustrating diverse themes whose violence cannot fail to have an impact on the viewer.

Produced with the aid of dozens of moulds for the most complex compositions, Louise Hindsgavl's sculptures thus offer a very contemporary consideration of the porcelain figurine. The artist recycles toys, dolls,

superheroes and cartoon characters, deconstructing them in order to create half-human, half-animal hybrid creatures, mounted on bases that also contribute to the dynamism of these sculptures.

Protection (2009) is a highly original representation of maternal love. On a rocaille base, a mother with a dog's head is gouging out her son's eyes to prevent him from seeing the problems and horrors of the world. The contrast between the softness and refinement of the porcelain and the violence of the mutilations or the obscenity of certain scenes gives added force to the occasionally coarse humour of the artist's vision of the world. Through an entirely personal mythology, the artist highlights aspects of contemporary society and even of the human mind, which are commonly refuted, ignored or hidden. SWB

Audrius Janušonis (Lithuania, 1968)

The ceramist and sculptor Audrius Janušonis divides his time between teaching at the Alytus School of Art and his personal work, devoted entirely to the study of the human figure. Above all other materials, he prefers clay, which he models as a solid form before voiding it for firing. A virtuoso sculptor, his gestures alternate between extreme refinement, particularly in the modelling and smoothing of a face, and the rough, coarse strength of a material handled with vigour, in which he leaves the imprint of his fingers. The sculptures are enhanced with subtly coloured enamels and glazes with surprising textures, which highlight and heighten their expressive force.

Quotations and historical, philosophical and literary references abound: the sculptor's work shows influences as diverse as the *Venus de Milo*, Goya's *Caprices*, Aesop's *Fables* and the animal sculptures of Barry Flanagan.

Our attention is irresistibly drawn to the Madonna's hieratic posture and the infinite softness of her expression. It is only afterwards that we spot the Coca-Cola bottle that abruptly demystifies the subject, taking the sculpture back into the prosaic world of the American hegemony. ACS

Rebecca Maeder (Switzerland, 1978)

Rebecca Maeder's aesthetic sphere is concerned with primitive creatures, either animal or vegetal, macro- or microscopic, fossils or meteorites, which are dented, perforated or scarred by fire. Such smoked, raw clay pieces are sometimes replaced by the immaculate whiteness of porcelain, such as when the artist immerses herself in the industrial world of Kahla porcelain (Germany), appropriating the company's moulds and forms to reinterpret them in a completely personal way.

During a residency at Seoul National University, she took as a starting point for her experimentation the forms of traditional Korean ceramic dishes and vases. Entitled *Envol* (Flight) and *Semences* (Seeds), this series is inlaid with scattered blue or green porcelain dots, concentrated on the (unseen!) base of the object and then thinning out over the sides. The immaculate white and highly polished double wall inside the recipient produces a trompe-l'œil effect: is the dish concave or flat? ACS

Gareth Mason (Great-Britain, 1965)

Ceramic life is replete with dramatic opportunity. Its materials, in extremis, are analogous to emotion. Its extremes take me to challenging, liminal spaces. Risk attracts me. Through potting, I find myself orchestrating forces that tweak the limits of my experience. Where these forces coalesce, or collide in the form of completed works, I trust they do so in such a way as to communicate something of my enduring passion (because that's what sustains me after all). Crucially, I want my work to ignite a spark of arousal in the poetic imaginations of those who behold it. Otherwise, what's the point? *Gareth Mason*

These three vases whose titles evoke raw materials, minerals or textures, *Satin Dark*, *Cobalt Fluid* and *Red Acqua*, seem to have emerged straight out of the entrails of the Earth's molten core. Ceramists of course savour the experimental dimension and have always taken advantage of the potential for often surprising discoveries offered by the firing of clay, a crucial aspect of ceramic art. However, for Gareth Mason, fire is to clay what the sun is to nature: an essential driving force for creation and life. His sculptures become vases, jars, urns or pots, for he defends the recipient as a means of artistic expression as essential as "the *haiku*, the novel, the symphony, ballet, sculpture or motion picture". All Mason's art lies in its poetic force that combines consonance and dissonance in an aesthetic union. ING

Myung-joo Kim (South Korea, 1973)

Myung-joo Kim's work is inspired by images of her childhood and by her dreams and nightmares. The piece exhibited was awarded the "Ariana Prize" in 2013 during the Carouge Ceramics Trail (*Parcours ceramic carougeois*). It belongs to the artist's figurative work in which the world of the "fantastic" reigns supreme. Her infinitely poetic but tortured universe recalls the cruelty of Romanticism, where all paths lead love to a state of utter despair. Myung-joo Kim in fact describes her artistic development in similar terms: "Each time I create a piece, it teaches me a little more about who I am, made of light and shadow... my hands murmur the clay". An intense fragility links this work to a feeling of suffering and abandonment. The artist's singular expression harmonizes perfectly with the clay material that she shapes, while her meaningful and modest range of colours reminds us that true emotion draws on the profound and unfathomable depths of the heart. ING

Piece produced at the École nationale supérieure des arts visuels de La Cambre (ENSAV), Brussels.

Valda Podkalne (Latvia / Poland, 1951)

Valda Podkalne has always been fascinated by nature. Her earliest ceramics have naturalistic titles. Later, the artist covered the surfaces of her sculptures with a layer of beeswax to soften the coldness and hardness of the porcelain edges. The sculptures from the *Gedankenhaus* series are made using plaster moulds from the Książ factory in Wałbrzych, Poland, that produces porcelain sanitary ware. These fragments of broken moulds picked up indiscriminately (negatives) and randomly assembled are selected as positive forms. In the end result, the (positive) sculpture therefore reveals negative formal elements, alternating smooth surfaces and the breakage marks of the moulds.

These architectonic forms built up around a central void are entitled *Gedankenhäuser* or *Gedankennesten* ("houses of thought" or "nests of thought") by the artist, who also gives them a subtitle (in this case *Pales*). The artist therefore invests her "houses" with her own thoughts, memories, energy, emotions and intentions, which

she seals inside an inviolable shell. Valda Podkalne's sculptures make us want to walk around them in order to take in their different aspects and perhaps to discover their secrets.

This sculpture received an award in the 6th Porcelain Triennial in Nyon in 2001. ACS

Elke Sada (Germany, 1965)

"Colour, movement, fragmentation, working in layers. Intuition, desire, nostalgia" are the terms in which Elke Sada describes her work.

The series to which the vase *Hallstattpiece* belongs is inspired by a large copper recipient at the Hallstatt Museum (Austria) made up of different sections held together by rivets. It is precisely these joints that interest the artist when she assembles the still supple clay sheets to make containers. When the form is ready, the surface animated by these joints is painted with slip and enhanced with glazing, creating drips and large areas of colour with a spontaneity resembling that of the Abstract Expressionists.

The decoration of the *Capriccio* series is achieved using a technique borrowed from engraving: abstract motifs are painted with coloured slip on a plasterboard. The artist then enriches the surface with drawn or engraved lines on the coloured areas. As in the monotype technique, the motifs are then absorbed by the clay poured onto this surface. When it is firm but still flexible, the ceramist cleverly cuts off fragments of the clay with a knife that have taken up motifs from the plaster.

The vase and the dish from the Musée Ariana's collections are a perfect illustration of Elke Sada's work with their raw, direct and lively energy. They are all balance, movement and contemporaneousness. Falling in-between design, utilitarian ceramics and sculpture, the pieces by the German ceramist convey a highly pictorial and immensely expressive language. SWB

Esther Shimazu (Hawaii, 1957)

The English-speaking granddaughter of Japanese immigrants who arrived in Maui (Hawaii) in the early 20th century to work in the sugar cane fields, Esther Shimazu grew up in a multicultural Honolulu suburb and enjoyed working with clay right from her first contact with it at primary school. Later, she studied ceramics at the University of Massachusetts gaining a Masters in Fine Arts.

Esther Shimazu works with human and animal figures and approaches her sculptural volumes through traditional vessel-making techniques: unlike sculptors who cut away the solid clay, this ceramist constructs her figures from sandstone or porcelain around a void, drawing inspiration from the sculpture of Shamanic and Asian traditions, such as Japanese *netsuke*. Naked and chunky, her characters are not encumbered by clothes or hair that would only distract our attention.

However, each of them has small characteristic features and their anatomic details are recreated with great delicacy. The body parts are created by pinching, coiling or from slabs and are then joined together with slip, while the hands and ears and the porcelain teeth and eyes are mainly sculpted separately, cut and shaped until they bring the figure to life.

Both angels and demons, Esther Shimazu's impertinent, intriguing and even disturbing figurines live and operate as part of a mysterious plan. SWB

Gerda Smolik (Austria, 1951)

The porcelain figurines used to decorate formal dinner tables or mantelpieces are a genre introduced by the Meissen manufacture in the early 18th century and quickly adopted by many other European manufactories that prided themselves on their mastery of the art of porcelain. Scenes of gallantry, commedia dell'arte, animal subjects or allegories were among the countless themes produced and successful models passed from one manufactory to another. Over time, the models became static and ossified; the aesthetic of the "dust-catching" ornament, of dubious taste and obvious tedium, replaced the freshness, elegance and inventiveness of the 18th century figures.

In a resolutely contemporary expression, Gerda Smolik takes a critical look at this past in order to subvert it more effectively, through a proposition that combines technical mastery, offbeat humour and a caustic vision of society. For her joyfully impertinent burlesque creations (*Skurrilitäten*), she borrows from her predecessors the pedestals on which she mounts her figures and their accompanying attributes, while at the same time reinventing the theme. The porcelain elements are joined together with metallic elements that allow the figurines to move their limbs like articulated antique dolls. ACS

Akio Takamori (Japan / USA 1950)

After training as a traditional ceramist in Japan, Akio Takamori abandoned the ceramic vessel and has since focused exclusively on the representation of the human figure for the past twenty or so years. This Seattle-based artist produces sandstone figures generally drawn from the cultural identity of his Japanese childhood. The modelled forms are then enhanced with restrained minimalist painted decoration that breathes life into them and gives them a personality. The artist is fascinated by the interactions that develop between these ordinary people, of different ages, sizes and gender, and between them and the viewer.

Looking at these peacefully sleeping figures gives the spectator the ambiguous feeling of intruding uninvited on their privacy. Over and above their apparent simplicity, Takamori's sculptures, a fusion of eastern traditions and the reality of the western world, are imbued with an overwhelming sense of humanity that is deeply moving. ACS

Ann Van Hoey (Belgium, 1956)

In 2006, at the age of fifty, Ann Van Hoey graduated with a degree in ceramics from the Institute for Arts and Crafts in Mechelen (Belgium). Since then, she has taken part in countless ceramic workshops to perfect her technique. Always in search of new avenues to explore, she travelled to Japan from where she returned fascinated by *origami*. The traditional art of paper folding has had a considerable influence on her work: Ann Van Hoey now draws inspiration from it to produce ceramic "folding" and "cutting". She always starts from the same simple, essential and archetypal form: a hemispherical bowl that she creates in a plaster mould from thinly rolled and perfectly smooth pieces of clay. When the clay has dried to become leather-hard, the artist

uses scissors to cut out segments from it, before folding and overlapping it in order to generate a new form. Circles, triangles and squares: geometry is central to her approach. In 2008, she was awarded the prestigious Belgian Henri Van de Velde quality label for her series *Étude géométrique*, (*Geometric Study*) from which *Vessel* is derived, an unglazed piece that preserves the purity of the clay material and its dark brown colour. Ann Van Hoey's work charms us by its simplicity, the clarity of the expression, its pure lines, the attention to detail and its great technical mastery. AQ

Betty Woodman (USA, 1930)

In the early 1970s, after making traditional pots for about twenty years, Betty Woodman adopted a freer and more personal expressive language orientated towards sculpture, though without abandoning the form of the vessel, even if it has no utilitarian function from then on. Dividing her time between Tuscany and New York, two places that fuel her creativity in a complementary manner, Betty Woodman creates highly coloured sculptures full of a delightful vitality and joie de vivre.

As the basis for her sculptures, she throws containers of monumental size on the wheel that are generally cylindrical, with exuberant, cut and deconstructed handles, which are sometimes even removed from the recipient to become mural compositions. The attachment points and throwing marks are left visible. The ceramics are then decorated with various high fire polychrome motifs inspired equally by Fauvism, Chinese painting and Etruscan pottery. Touches of acrylic paint – a sacrilege in the eyes of the traditional potter – further enhance the colourful vivacity of her work.

In the diptych "Montagnes et Soie" ("Mountains and Silk"), painted vases are found between evocations of Chinese mountains and motifs taken from Japanese kimonos in a composition which, as often in the artist's work, oscillates between the two- and the three-dimensional. ACS

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