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DA GAUGUIN A MARTINI

Il dibattito dei rapporti tra scultura contemporanea e ceramica non può certamente essere affrontato esaustivamente in questa sede data la sua complessità. Vorrei qui tracciare invece un breve profilo, attraverso alcuni esempi significativi, dell'interesse che si è mostrato, tra la fine dell'Ottocento e gli inizi del Novecento, da parte di artisti moderni, nei confronti della ceramica, mezzo espressivo tradizionalmente relegato nell'ambito delle cosiddette arti minori.

Paul Gauguin (1848-1903) mostrò sempre un vivo interesse nei confronti della prassi artigianale tanto da cimentarsi nell'arte dell'intaglio ligneo e della ceramica. Gauguin fu tra i primi artisti ad avvicinarsi al mondo della ceramica e, in occasione dell'Esposizione Universale di Parigi del 1889, affermò che "la ceramica non è una futilità. Con un po' di fango si possono creare cose preziose (...). Con un po' di fango e un po' di genio". L'interesse, sorto in Gauguin anche per la necessità di realizzare opere da cui ricavare introiti con maggiore facilità, lo indusse a cercare nell'esperienza di Ernest Chaplet, uno dei più importanti ceramisti di livello internazionale, tutte quelle conoscenze necessarie per intraprendere questa attività. Negli anni Ottanta di quel secolo Gauguin produsse una serie di vasi molto originali, ispirandosi anche al mito come per esempio nel caso di Leda e il cigno, oppure ricercando spunti iconografici nel mondo bretone. L'artista francese era molto attratto da un tipo ceramico particolare, il gres, che ben si prestava a tradurre effetti dal sapore arcaico. Ricordiamo ad esempio alcuni versatori, della fine degli anni Ottanta, modellati con le sue stesse sembianze nei quali è visibile un linguaggio di impronta *primitiva*. Va notato inoltre che il gres è per Paul Gauguin il mezzo espressivo più idoneo per tradurre elementi tribali della cultura tahitiana. Un esempio è certamente la figura di Oviri, del 1894. L'attenzione di Gauguin nei confronti della ceramica ebbe influenza su altri artisti come ad esempio lo scultore spagnolo Francisco Durrieu de

Madron, detto Paco Durrio (1868-1940). Certe sue opere sono anche riprese da ideazioni dell'artista francese. Ne abbiamo un esempio in un vaso antropomorfo raffigurante una testa muliebre, realizzato in gres con smalti azzurri tra il 1916 e il 1918. È possibile vedere l'assonanza con un disegno di Paul Gauguin, *Martiniquaise en buste*, del 1887. Ricordiamo, infatti, che Durrio possedeva numerose opere dell'artista francese acquistate nel 1895, in occasione della vendita dello studio di Gauguin. La tematica più ricorrente nell'opera ceramica di Durrio è la figura umana; egli produsse infatti numerosi vasi antropomorfi, come ad esempio quello databile tra il 1900 e il 1905, conservato al Museo d'Orsay, raffigurante un corpo femminile in posizione fetale.

Va ricordato che nel 1900 la ceramica visse un momento molto importante in un evento internazionale: all'Esposizione di Parigi di quell'anno fece infatti la sua comparsa ufficiale come decoro in un edificio, visto che sullo zoccolo del pilastro sinistro della Porta della Concordia, la porta principale di accesso all'esposizione, venne inserito un grande fregio in gres di otto metri di lunghezza e due di altezza. Si tratta del *Fregio del Lavoro* modellato dallo scultore Anatole Guillot e realizzato dal ceramista Alfred Muller.

L'impronta primitiveggiante del gres seduce anche lo scultore olandese Joseph Mendes da Costa (1863-1939), autore che, nelle sue plastiche degli inizi del Novecento, attraverso un modellato da cui traspare una certa rudezza, propone temi spesso legati alla vita quotidiana dove sono protagoniste figure femminili. In Germania, è lo scultore Ernest Barlach (1870-1938) che all'inizio del Novecento, nel 1909, collabora con l'impresa ceramica, Schwarzenburger Werkstätten für Porzellankunst di Rudolstadt, diretta da Max Adolf Pfeiffer. Le tematiche della scultura di Barlach, legata al movimento espressionista, sono centrate soprattutto sulla rappresentazione di contadini e mendicanti, resi attraverso un linguaggio molto schematico. Ricordiamo che già alcuni anni prima Barlach aveva avuto esperienze nel settore ceramico come insegnante. Per la manifattura di Pfeiffer, egli propose la traduzione in porcellana degli stessi soggetti delle sue sculture, anche se temeva che la resa attraverso un materiale così candido avrebbe sminuito la carica di pathos caratteristica delle sue opere. Ovviamente, il risultato raggiunto si dimostrò di alto livello qualitativo.

In Italia, Arturo Martini (1889-1947) è stato l'artefice di un contributo altamente significativo per lo sviluppo della scultura moderna. Nella sua città natale, Treviso, ha modo di maturare una notevole esperienza nella plastica presso la manifattura ceramica di Gregorio Gregorj. Proprio in questa fabbrica prende vita la scultura *Fanciulla piena d'amore*, realizzata in terraglia e replicata in piccola serie. L'opera, strutturata attraverso un linguaggio quanto mai lineare, con influenze della maniera di Amedeo Modigliani, viene presentata nel 1913 all'esposizione di Ca' Pesaro, attirando l'attenzione anche per l'uso della ceramica, mezzo espressivo all'epoca inconsueto nella prassi scultorea. Negli anni Venti, nel suo proseguire ricco di sperimentazioni, l'artista aderisce a Valori

Plastici, movimento fondato sulla necessità di un ritorno all'ordine e anche sulla necessità di un rinnovamento, riprendendo spunti iconografici dall'arte classica e da quella del Trecento. In questo periodo, Martini matura l'attenzione per il mondo etrusco. Va ricordato che nel 1916, durante gli scavi eseguiti da Giulio Quirini Giglioli nel santuario del Portonaccio, presso Veio, erano state rinvenute alcune statue in terracotta, tra cui quella del celebre Apollo. L'evento concentra sul mondo etrusco molta attenzione e nel 1925 viene costituito a Firenze il Centro internazionale di studi etruschi e si organizzano vari convegni anche di livello internazionale. Al fascino di questa antica civiltà non sfugge, appunto, Martini il quale, grazie ai buoni rapporti con Giglioli, ha la possibilità osservare direttamente la coroplastica etrusca attraverso i reperti conservati a Roma nel Museo nazionale etrusco di Villa Giulia. Egli produrrà quindi una serie di sculture in terracotta, anche di grandi dimensioni, realizzate a Nervi nel laboratorio dell'architetto Mario Labò. Nelle sue ricerche, Martini è soprattutto molto attento alla sperimentazione di quelle tecniche antiche, alle quali affianca la sua *vis* creativa concentrata su spunti iconografici, non necessariamente archeologici, tratti dalla vita contemporanea, come si può vedere ad esempio nella *Madre folle* del 1929 o nell'*Aviatore* del 1930. Esplicito riferimento alla scultura classica si ha nel gruppo *Il cielo-Le stelle* modellato a Vado Ligure. In questo caso, è palese la mediazione della scultura di Fidia e precisamente delle figure di Afrodite e di Dione del frontone orientale del Partenone conservate a Londra al British Museum.

Jacques Kaufmann

FROM MATERIAL AND PROCESS TO SPACE

Jacques Kaufmann (Artist and President at International Academy of Ceramics – Geneve)

I consider that the art of the lecturer is similar to that of the storyteller, much more than that of the writer. Nothing is more forbidding for me than to read a text strictly in front of an audience, and my experience as an auditor confirms me in the fact that a significant part of a speech passes through the body language of the speaker, who fact, is proportional to his ability to get out of what is written on his paper.

So please consider the introduction and the conclusion of the text to follow as an abstract.

About the middle part, it will be based on my personal works, and therefore improvisation is totally necessary. I would like to insist here on the main point that I would like to deliver, which is about the principles within the act of creation, taking in account materials, processes, and space, in connection with the identity of an individual.

Dia 1

Jk: Artist, teacher, traveller, dreamer in hybridization, trying to understand the world through one medium practice: clay.

This lecture comes both from my teaching and ceramic artist's practices.

Given the title «From Material to space », I'll address the issue of the material, processes, and space, and if there is some theory, please believe me that it comes from practice, and not in the opposite way.

But I owe you an additional generic introduction word: I believe in the importance of a culture, the one of a material consciousness.

I have organized a Symposium on this subject (Applied art school in Vevey, for the 100 years Anniversary of the ceramic department of this school, in 2013).

In short: thinking and making are actions that are connected (please read Richard Sennett: «What the hand knows »), and also to be connected to a material that itself has an identity. This is what we will see together, and I will provide some examples based on different kinds of works.

Dia 2

If I had to resume my talk in one sentence: I am looking for a poetical energy.

To quote an American poet, Archibald Mac Leish, (1892-1982): **“A poem should not mean but be”**.

Dia 3

Basic elements:

Earth, Water, Air, Fire, in the West.

Earth, Water, Air, and Space or Spirit, in India.

Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal and Water, the 5 phases or “Wuxing”, constitute an important concept of traditional Chinese cosmology.

Indeed, all is connected, by Energy

Hegel: “Le commencement est un Dieu”, «The beginning is a God», quote by Etienne Klein, researcher in Physics.

When thinking to that thematic as an artist, I mean the relation between materials, processes, tools, energy, forms, time, etc...- it has become clear that the universe is concerned by these notions from the very beginning, and so, it is not surprising that we, as human being, have to deal with this conscious, that constitutes us.

In my personal representation, it is the most ancient memory that we can have, that we share from our common history, common, in the sense of: related to all what exists, alive or not, touchable or not, physical or not, etc...

Of course, I will not develop deeply now, but I can invite each one who can get these kind of perceptions and feelings to make its own investigations.

It happened that I recently read a small scientific brochure, just edited about those topics: time, material, space, and energy, of course from the scientific point of view.

It seems, from this magazine, that 4% of our universe is the ordinary materials, 23% in the unknown, and 73% is energy.

Dia 4

Forms doesn't come just by chance, where does the legitimacy of forms come from?

In fact, there are forces that are in action to establish forms, in relation with materials.

These forces belong to field as diverse as Nature, Culture, Art...

In the link connecting materials and forces to forms, let us begin with materials.

Dia 5

Materials:

- Gaston Bachelard: a French philosopher, has developed a **phenomenology** of the materials and as a phenomenologist, analyses the elements toward a poetic of the matter, including:

Earth (clay), water, air, fire, space, and time...

To give some title of his writings:

“Clay (or earth) and the dream of the will”

“Water and dreams”

“Psychoanalyse of the fire”

“The space of a candle”

“The intuition of the instant”, etc..

More specifically:

- A material has natural or artificial origin
- Its nature is defined by chemical, physical properties (in relation with the size and shape of its particles for ex.), by its surface's qualities. It can be transformed before use, combined, etc...
- It can be used for its specific properties, shaped for specific issues requiring to use specific tools and processes

- It can be related to **values**, as cultural, esthetical, emotional, economical, philosophical, psychological, etc...
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Dia 6

About processes and tools, in the dialogue in between materials and forms.**

The role of serendipity, when working with materials and processes.

- Forms come from “forces”, processes, or actions, sometimes with tools, in relation with materials. These forces belong to the **phenomenology of action**
- We can consider them within 3 domains :
 - Nature: forces of all kinds
 - Culture: social habits, norms, skills...
 - Art: process, skills, tools...
- Processes: compare to vocabulary, are named by verbs of action: we do something, that request at least the body.
- The verbs of actions and processes belong to the “collective”: to cut, copy and/or paste, hit, break or caress, carve, push, clean, but also throwing, coiling, pinching, mould making,... are used by individuals, from a collective and common pot.
- So, the question is: how to go from collective activities to specific qualities and identity of these actions. In vocabulary, we have adjectives, whose role is to provide something about quality.
- In short: processes as well as materials are not neutral: they have psychological, emotional, sensorial, etc... resonances.

One special aspect, when working with process and tools, in relation with materials, is related to the word: “Serendipity”, which denotes the property of making fortunate discoveries while looking for something unrelated, or the occurrence of such a discovery during such a search.

** Process art: artistic movement and world view where the end product is not the principal focus. The ‘process’ refers to the process of the formation of art. Process art is concerned with the actual **doing**. Process art often entails an inherent motivation, rationale, and intentionality. Therefore, art is viewed as a creative journey or process, rather than as a deliverable or end product.

Dia 7

About space

3 categories of spaces:

- Inside
- In between
- Outside

When speaking about space, I don't think only to the "physical space". I include all sorts of spatial domains: social, relational, physical, spiritual, cultural, economical...

So, the question is: what are the different natures of a space I have to deal with, what is the main one that moves me, what about its qualities, properties, what kind of emotions and feelings are already there, what is the space already giving, but also: is there any problem with this space, etc...

These questions allow to take position, in the frame of an art work.

Dia 8

"3+1", as a basement for creation, resumed in a simple sketch: "To have work done, you need an individual who feels/thinks, a material who can incarnate this thinking through processes, including but not necessarily tools, and a space who can welcome it. Just change one element and everything will change".

Dia 75-97

About "Green walls", a response to Urban climate.

Mainly, the problems are:

- accumulation of the heat, a vicious circle of the strong and heavy materials, in the summer in the big cities;
- very few "evapotranspiration" coming from ground and the plants;
- water cannot get into the ground.

Since 2008, I participated to the development of a project of research with Hepia, the University for Engineering, Architecture and Landscape Architecture, in Geneva. The main concerns of the project was about the revegetation of walls in the city, by the development of an ecological constructive system, including ecological functions: rain water, depollution, noise absorption, biodiversity,...

In order to take in account the "Landscape urban functions", this project was possible because of a transdisciplinary team, including: landscape designers, plants and soil specialists, architects, and... a ceramist artist.

We have developed a brick with interconnected porosity, for the revegetation of walls, allowing the plants' life. **And it works!**

To mention some of the main requested qualities of the ceramic material used in this research:

- Light and strong, with a so called opened or interconnected porosity.
- Ground properties: air and water can go across.
- It allows the plantation, it allows the roots to grow. The theory says "where water can go through, the roots too".
- The surface is dry in opposition with other projects in this field, like the one of Patrick Blanc, at Quai Branly in Paris.
- To select plants by the size of the opened porosity (nobody wants big trees on the wall!).

Conclusion, Dia 98

Transdisciplinary: a fertile relationship to others in the act of creation.

Definition: transdisciplinary connotes a research strategy that crosses many disciplinary boundaries, in order to create a holistic approach.

We live in a world where the porosity, interconnection, contamination, communication are central concepts. They offer the potential to open spaces, from the imaginary to reality.

They require not losing identities and roots, where opening and roots represent two opposite qualities at once, needing each other.

The project analysis allows to say that it demanded to combine skills from personalities working in areas that individually could not imagine to develop such a proposal. It also requested from each protagonist an equal level of commitment and responsibility. It finally allowed to check one of the definitions of life: being itself, while opening up to others.

This approach is opposite to hierarchical practices, which usually see a "creative" or client under-treating his imaginary, at the time of its realisation.

In other words, the project Green Walls questions the famous opposition between the head and the hands, (see Richard Sennett again), which affects globally our societies.

From this, we can extrapolate. And we can imagine the activities that could potentially cross ours, overflowing if necessary the strict world of art and design. These potential collaborations are to be

caused, and developed: of course, with artists and designers, architects, but with all the professionals, the researchers in all fields, with whom we could establish an interface.

With the completed changes in the processes of production of material goods, where the industry meets – on the strictly functional level – the human needs for the daily life, instead, the function of the ceramist, whatever he does, evolved. What is his place, what kind of space and where is the space for those who have ceramic material, as an essential medium to develop their identity? As a paradox, the transdisciplinary response appears to be one of the possible routes between oneself and the world.

At individual level: it is about promoting opportunities, to construct the chance by establishing creative situations with others, to nourish its imaginary in order to be able to offer it to others.

At collective level: it is about to exchange, to share, to participate, in an ecology of collaboration and contribution.

Henri Christian Verreet

CONTEMPORARY CERAMIC SCULPTURE IN 20TH CENTURY

Whilst the subject of contemporary sculpture in ceramic materials is an extensive one, not least because of the recent rise of a new generation of highly creative artists which show an astounding diversity of approaches, it is also true that in a globalising world it is not possible any more to talk about dominant styles. In other words, it is difficult to talk about national traditions when it comes to the younger generations.

My presentation here will concentrate on contemporary approaches to ceramic sculpture that have specific origins in early – to mid – XX Century artistic developments, both in Europe and in the United States, out of which came a way of viewing and using clay as a sculptural material that marks a break from earlier traditions and uses of the material.

It is well known that in Europe developments were very much marked by the use that Avantgarde artists such as **Picasso**, **Miró**, **Chagall** and others made of the material, liberating it from traditional approaches to sculpting and decorating clay.

This was not so much the case in the United States. In the '50 young artists in California started very much from a Tabula Rasa, struggling with local conservative tastes but coming to the task with an unencumbered mind and lots of creative energy. The impulse to ceramic sculpture that west coast artist such as **Volkos**, **Mason** and **Soldner** gave are also still felt today. Their highly idiosyncratic and informal treatment of the material was subsequently subsumed under the term of *Abstract Expressionist Ceramics*.

In order to describe recent trends in contemporary ceramic sculpture, the question arises as to from which point of view to judge the pieces: do we talk about processes, materials and surfaces, about technical terms, formal aspects or about how the sculpture interacts with space and society? In other words, what are the critical framework and the vocabulary applicable here? Should we talk about ceramic sculpture or rather about sculpture that is employing ceramic processes and materials? It is here that we place these artworks in a context that determines their reception. Although categories seem increasingly out-dated and irrelevant, it is still notoriously difficult to introduce ceramic works into the sphere of the 'high arts'. Therefore I think it is important to link our subject to broader themes and currents present in contemporary culture and society.

Having traditionally been tied to the specifics of the material employed, it is only since the advent of conceptual art that materials have taken a back seat. Concept is important, which means that there is a freedom when it comes to choosing materials that convey ideas.

However, sculptors in particular retain a refined sensibility for the qualities of matter; form is often a direct result of processes and materials employed.

I don't attempt to be inclusive here and will present a personal selection, open to discussion and disagreement about my criteria.

I am also leaving to one side all those who work in a more figurative style. This subject would certainly merit a closer analysis but here I will just mention in passing that there is a resurgence of the subject among younger artists, reworking the human figure and the discourse surrounding the body.

Whilst the field of sculpture in general used to be almost exclusively dominated by men until recently, it is now very noticeable that there are many women artists working in the medium, producing highly original work and bringing with them different sensibilities.

It is perhaps no accident that Spanish artists contributed much to the development of ceramic sculpture during the 20th century, building on the rich and varied pottery traditions present in the Iberian Peninsula. A specific cultural trait that expresses itself in a strong feeling of connectedness to rural origins and traditions and a sensual appreciation for the specific textures and colours of the soil out of which the clay and with it local traditions arise has surely helped artists to bring some unique characteristics to modern clay sculpture in Spain.

This deep and ancient tradition retains an influence on modern artists, many of which, although sometimes principally known in other disciplines such as painting, have made works in ceramics. On the other hand, there are sculptors that come from a craft background and crisscross the

increasingly blurred boundaries between art and craft, and vindicate the vessel as a container for artistic expression in a wider sense.

First, I will look at the work of **Eduardo Chillida**, Basque sculptor of international prominence. He employed a variety of materials, ceramic clay among them. Whilst his work in ceramics is subsumed within the themes and concepts he employed, he nevertheless brought a sensitivity to his work with clay, bringing out its specific nature as a sculptural material. His ceramic sculptures, although often small in size, can have a monumental character; they are clean and compact containers of space that hardly ever show traces of his touch. Often, geometric lines and fields of black or red oxides interact with the built volumes, which might be indented or perforated in different places.

As seen in his early drawings, he takes his fundamental inspiration from the human hand, the forms it assumes when grasping or holding an object, the space the hand articulates. Literally grasping and understanding space in relation to human scale is his concern here, reflecting his interest in analysing the psychological and haptic relationship we have to space.

As a friend of Chillida and largely due to his insistence, Catalan painter **Antonio Tapiès** became interested in ceramics in 1980. He introduced ceramic sculpture into his mature work and made a number of ceramic sculptures that were however eclipsed by his activities as a painter. His sculptures are often roughly modelled and have scarred and dented surfaces that carry expressive, bold brush marks and letter-like symbols, numbers or crosses. His pieces can be large and have a primordial and archaic feel. The viewer is confronted with their presence and might feel reminded of archaeological finds, of cult objects from ancient civilisations. Yet they also contain multiple references to common objects of everyday life, in various states of deformation. As in his paintings, the execution of his sculpture is always characterised by a free and idiosyncratic treatment of forms and surfaces.

I would certainly be able to enumerate other artists from the same generation that have exerted considerable influence upon ceramic sculpture in post-war Spain, such as **Arcadi Blasco**, **Jorge Orteiza**, **Antoni Cumella** and others, but time does not permit.

Instead, I will now look at artists that are still working and teaching today and whose influence can be traced in today's younger sculptors, often having been their students.

With a strong minimalist slant, the sculptures of **Enric Mestre** develop his interest in monumental space. Often fairly modest in size they nevertheless seem to contain vast spaces that can however only be walked through in the imagination. His sculptures might take their inspiration from mundane structures such as the agricultural hangars and other purely functional buildings that

surround his studio in Valencia. On the other hand they can be described in terms of the spaces that a Romanic church might contain in its sombre and dimly lit interior, hidden behind heavy walls.

With references to the work of Chillida, Mestre raises questions of scale and our relationship to it; his pieces dwell on the psychological and existential experience of architectural space. He explores a great variety of clays and surface treatments, which serve to counterbalance the pieces' geometrical rigour, yet always at the service of a rather sober and disciplined aesthetic, using a vocabulary that continues to define his works to this day.

Taking some clues from the work of Mestre but basing his forms on variations of the cylinder, the sculptures of **Juan Ortí** transcribe the shapes of grain silos, tanks and towers he finds in the landscape of industrial agriculture into a vocabulary that is austere and devoid of the anecdotal.

Using wheel-thrown sections assembled into larger forms with accentuated verticality, his sculptures often contrast the white glaze he always employs with matte and soft-coloured surfaces. The small openings he cuts are like windows and doors. These simple devices create a relationship to human experience, placing the assemblies of cylinders and rectangles into a context of scale relative to the body and make the sculptures accessible to the viewer as he transits between interior and exterior spaces in the imagination.

Maria Bofill is also working themes relative to architecture, but she does so from a more sensual and feminine point of view. Her small-scale buildings and furniture make references to archaeological finds that represent model houses and interior spaces, which can be found in many ancient cultures, from Mesoamerica, via Egypt and the Middle East to China. Her spaces are soft and giving, diffusing hard lines and linear structures into a more organic whole. Made usually of porcelain covered with transparent or slightly tinted glazes, her small pieces formulate a space that is intimate and lyrical and seem on the point of melting under our gaze.

A friend and colleague of Maria Bofill, **Madola's**, (Maria Angeles Domingo Laplana) also works and teaches in Barcelona.

Her sculptures show the kind of muscular expressiveness more often associated with men. Looking for a certain archaic quality and an almost primitive directness of expression, her sculptures are reminiscent of primitive shelters, altars and urns, of sarcophagi and baptismal fonts. Surfaces are often covered with bold, gestural marks, symbolic of letters or pictographic marks scratched onto walls. In an attempt to bridge the time that separates our modern culture from its ancient roots in early Middle Eastern and Mediterranean cultures, her pieces make reference to religious sites and cult objects, in a search for relevance of the sacred in a secular culture.

Miró and Tapiès are strongly resonant in her work, as well as influences of medieval Romanesque art, prominent in the Catalan region.

Angel Garraza lives and works in Bilbao, where he remains an influential teacher, as well as developing a body of work that is characterised by a very defined set of forms and processes. Whilst he takes on the challenges of producing large-scale work for public spaces, also in other materials, his ceramic sculptures within the gallery context have a formal rigour, based on a personal vocabulary of repeating shapes. Always shown as installations, his work take up a dialogue with the surrounding space, spreading out across the gallery walls and floors. Usually within a narrow chromatic range consisting of blacks, greys and whites, the elements of his installations are taken from outlines of everyday objects, bringing them down to their formal essence, where they then become symbolic. Recurring elements such as house shapes, head shapes, hourglasses, phalluses, leaves, crosses and more are converted into flattened out shapes and dishes; this process of reduction converts these elements into a vocabulary that is reassembled into larger 'sentences' and which in the hands of Garraza is able to speak of human life and the passing of time, where events and objects leave their traces in memory, forming a story that is constantly recombined and rewritten in the mind.

Within the trends that show the influence of science and technology on our culture, with an emphasis on research and investigations into the properties of matter, the following artists all work in a more process-oriented fashion.

Claudi Casanovas has consistently developed a line of investigation into the material possibilities of clay, subjecting it to forces that deform and alter its qualities. He often combines incompatible clays, freezes big slabs or throws them down from great heights; it is these process as well as the heat of the kiln that determines the emerging forms, bearing resemblance to fractured rocks formed by tectonic forces, erosion or volcanism. Other forms such as spirals might make reference to symbols and marks on rocks and in the landscape, left by ancient peoples. Having been prominent in the field for some decades, he has executed impressive public works where he was able to translate his methods into pieces of monumental size, such as his *Memorial to the Defeated*, in Olot, Catalonia.

However, as an artist that feels free to go in different directions, his more recent work having a distinctly formalist element and is based on the human form, more specifically the head, which he represents as a large, dark, spherical and featureless mass, based on strict geometry.

Joan Serra is also an investigator when it comes to making his artworks; they bear no traces touch and intervention, in fact it is his stated intention not to interfere in the process of gestation that happens in the kiln. Only the heat of the fire realizes the possibilities inherent in the materials he combines. A studied use of clays that expand and liquefy result in solidified foam, cracks and

pressure fractures that he controls only via the knowledge acquired during years of trial and error. The resulting objects remain nevertheless based on cubic forms, sometimes barely distinguishable. This formal tension is narrating the struggle between the artist's intention and the chemical processes that occur during the firing.

Gregorio Peño is also working with clays that foam and distort during firing. His sculptures are often consisting of multiple elements, contrasting forms and surfaces. Large cylindrical bottle shapes seem to be melting and on the verge of collapse. Here, the amorphous, disintegrating surface maintains a fragile balance with the clean geometry of the upper part of the piece. In other pieces, he combines different materials such as slabs of glass, turned vessels and amorphous, rock like pieces into assemblages that remain in tension, setting formal elements against contrasting materials and textures.

Rafa Perez also uses processes and materials that introduce a chance element into his work. Combining different clays that might have certain incompatibilities, he achieves a delamination of his layered structures, like a piece of millefeuille patisserie on the point of disintegration. Often his forms are deconstructed vessels, sometimes more closed and compact containers, less often more whimsical constructions. His process involves cutting and assembly, rebuilding a whole out of fragments. Also here, the firing process intervenes and dictates the final fate of the pieces. Colour can play an important part and gives a more painterly quality, akin to Pop art sculptures.

In very recent works by young makers, colour is becoming much more prominent, with the effect of dematerializing the earth-bound qualities of clay and moving the reception of the pieces into a new realm, and although not strictly speaking decorated, colour becomes integrated, encrusted into the surface.

As example might serve the work of **Roger Coll**. He uses the material to construct his curvilinear sculptures out of tubular elements prefabricated in moulds. He hides the typical surface colours and textures of the clay under a uniformly coloured glaze, which helps to remove the pieces somewhat from their ceramic context and brings them closer to the look and feel of industrial materials.

International ceramic artists showing at a recent collective exhibition at Barcelona's *Side Gallery* also treat colour and surface in a fashion that is less 'true' to the material.

Korean Sculptor **Sangwoo Kim** fashions his works using sculptural processes more often associated with other materials. The surfaces of his fairly large biomorphic forms made of layered porcelain have intriguing, colourful patterns. He brings out layers of colour hidden under the fired surface by grinding and polishing, resulting in the painterly aspect of his pieces.

Polish artist **Aneta Regal** makes animistic and anthropomorphic shapes with a slightly uncanny edge. Usually incrustated with strong, matte colours, they might be reminiscent of organs and limbs, or of dismembered toy animals.

British ceramicist **Gareth Mason** deconstructs and reassembles vessel forms in refreshingly informal ways, using pieces of different colour and texture. With a disregard for proper methods of making, the large vessels pay testimony to his freewheeling creativity.

In the work of Danish potter **Morten Løbner Espensen** we find a fusion of colour with form in such a way that the large, cylindrical containers she makes have the look and feel of paint, of having been made entirely of paint, thus dissolving the form into colour.

I am mentioning this exhibition here because it demonstrates a renewed interest in ceramic sculpture and the variety of fresh approaches that younger makers bring to the subject. It highlights the fact that tendencies today cannot be understood any more on a regional or national level. There is now a fertile international dialogue going on between artists and ceramicists on all levels, making this a very interesting field to consider and write about.

Form and Surface, Concept and Process. Those have been the central axes of my narrative here, which attempts to show the on-going development of the expressive and constructive possibilities of clay. It is clear that it requires artistic vision and integrity as well as perseverance when it comes down to working with this material, explaining the decade-long dedication to experimentation, both formal and technical that ceramic artists are often engaged in.

Also, it could be said that artistic developments are not linear, neither in personal nor in art historical terms. It is evident that themes and preoccupations dominant at certain moments in history will disappear and later resurface in the work of artists from another generation.

I hope my talk contributes in some way to the definition of contemporary ceramic sculpture. Naturally, my talk only represents one of many possible narratives that one could present about this subject, as vast as human creativity itself.

Claudia Casali

CERAMICA OGGI!

Siamo arrivati alle conclusioni della seconda giornata faentina dell'*ICMEA in Italy 2018*, quinta sessione del tour. In questi giorni abbiamo ricevuto input positivi dalle conferenze e soprattutto da *Ceramics Now!*, una mostra che ci ha impegnati per tre anni in un lavoro corale di selezioni e individuazione di un *concept* da proporre in occasione dell'anniversario degli ottant'anni (60 edizioni) del Premio Faenza e dei centodieci anni della fondazione del MIC.

Parlare di ceramica e arte contemporanea è un argomento che mette in campo molteplici specifiche che *in primis* coinvolgono la società ed è il risultato dell'interazione tra situazioni differenti, emozioni e sentimenti inclusi, come abbiamo intuito dagli interventi di oggi.

Vorrei porre alla vostra attenzione una riflessione suggerita da un artista in mostra che afferma: "Innovare significa recuperare per evolvere". È un concetto valido sempre e ovunque ma che, a mio avviso, per l'arte contemporanea ha un significato in più. Siamo in un luogo magico dove il passato è molto incombente, ma questo passato, la nostra storia, ha fornito gli spunti per riflessioni importanti su lavori fondamentali del XX secolo e dell'attualità. Dobbiamo quindi considerare il nostro passato, non demonizzarlo, per vivere il nostro presente ponendo le basi per il nostro futuro. Ritengo che *Ceramics Now!* e gli interventi di questa giornata abbiano sottolineato quanto oggi sia necessario il rispetto della nostra tradizione storico-artistica, per poter proporre un linguaggio nuovo e più attuale. Ciò che vorrei lasciare invece al pubblico di addetti ai lavori, di scrittori e critici, molti presenti in sala, è un concetto molto chiaro, operativo, di analisi linguistica, ma che si sviluppa come approccio mentale. Quando si parla di *ceramica*, bisogna sempre aggiungere *arte ceramica* oppure si scrive *arte ceramica contemporanea*. Dobbiamo imparare a considerare la ceramica come scultura, come arte contemporanea, senza distinzioni legate alla tecnica o a ideologie gerarchiche. Questo sarà un ulteriore aiuto e supporto per sdoganare la ceramica che è un linguaggio assolutamente contemporaneo, oggi più che mai. Quando la ceramica è contemporanea ed è arte, non ha bisogno di altri aggettivi per definirla. È Arte.