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**‘If one doesn’t go
to extremes
there is no point in
going at all...’**

These words were uttered by Denmark’s most important 20th century artist, Asger Jorn (1914–1973), who, with a wide-ranging international perspective, allowed experimentation to govern his art. A powerful statement that extremely aptly applies to Jorn’s entire oeuvre, but also describes the tendency of the present international scene in ceramics. Today it is the ceramists who exploit the utmost potential of their material and challenge the idea of the autonomous work in an expanded field.

Ceramic Momentum – Staging the Object is the title of this book and of a major international exhibition at CLAY Museum of Ceramic Art. With the presentation of 23 trend-setting ceramists, it is the museum’s intention to put its finger on the present pulse. How is contemporary ceramics positioning itself at the moment? What trends and tendencies can be discerned? And what impulses fuel it? With regard to Asger Jorn’s aphorism, present-day ceramics is experimenting more freely than ever and expressing itself in a great variety of ways! With works that comment in art form on the world and investigate the almost endless potential of the material.

This reveals a paradigm shift and general change regarding the idea of what constitutes a ceramic work. A movement that since the 1990s has liberated studio ceramics from the function-bound archetypes – the vessel, the jar and the bowl – and the idea of the autonomous work on a raised pedestal in the white cube of the gallery.

The works chosen for the exhibition and the book show in various ways how contemporary ceramics is positioning itself in a virtual world. A world of new standards, particularly in the relation between the prevailing image culture and ceramics, as material-based objects. On the one hand, ceramists operate with their roots firmly planted in the proud tradition of crafts. On the other hand, they create their ceramics with a strong awareness of the virtual reality in which the work is disseminated and experienced – a world where ceramics, as never before, is projected as images via the social media: Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook etc.

Typical of many present-day ceramists, therefore, is a discerning eye for a subtle dialogue with both the physical and virtual pictorial space in which the ceramic work is experienced. Which explains the choice of title: *Staging the Object*. With a reference to the growing tendency of ceramists nowadays to ‘incorporate’ the work into a larger compositional virtual context. With the aid of seductive effects that link up with the digital media but also refer back in time to the baroque and to staged photography – and to a great degree make the works more photogenic.

For that reason, the scenographic dimension is unfolded to its maximum at the present exhibition. In an age when the world to a great extent is conceived as an image via the digital interface, and where the ceramic work is incorporated into

and staged as an expression of a larger visual context. In a virtual reality which on the one hand acts as a window onto the world, and on the other hand – with the structural, aesthetic characteristics of digitalisation – perhaps influences even the techniques and expressions of contemporary ceramics. In a flow of images where we at present also note how the physical experiencing of the materiality and ‘down-to-earthness’ of ceramics acts as an important counterweight to precisely this virtual transitoriness.

Thanks

On behalf of CLAY Museum of Ceramic Art, I would first and foremost like to thank the 23 artists participating in the exhibition, and also Danish Arts Foundation, galleries and private owners for lending works. The museum would also like to express particular thanks to Bente Skjøttgaard, Steen Ipsen and Martin Bodilsen Kaldahl, who in 2011 started the artist-operated exhibition platform Copenhagen Ceramics. They have curated the exhibition with great insight into the international scene of contemporary ceramics. A large thank you to them for exemplary and highly dedicated cooperation.

Next, grateful thanks to the authors of the articles in the book. Thanks to curator and author Glenn Adamson for a fascinating analysis of the international positioning of contemporary ceramics in his article ‘The Rise of the Hyper Pot’. Thanks also to Stine Høholt, Head of the Art Department at ARKEN Museum of Modern Art, for shedding light in her article ‘The clay speaks to us’ on the present-day attraction ceramics exerts in a wider artistic and philosophical perspective. Thanks also to the curators for providing an account of the concept and content of the exhibition in the introductory article of the book.

A special word of thanks too, to architect Johan Carlsson from JAC Studios, for developing the exhibition's formidable scenography. And for great sympathetic understanding of the concept as well as his professional ability, despite the spectacular scenography, to communicate the works with both respect and resonance. The result speaks for itself.

Thanks also to graphic designer Henrik Kubel for supplying a striking graphical masterpiece with this book and in the exhibition. In the same breath, thanks also to the photographer Jeppe Gudmundsen-Holmgreen, who with a discerning eye for the artists' works has captured the staging concept of the exhibition and produced the lovely illustrations for the book. And in this context, thanks also to John Irons for translating the text and to all those at Narayana Press for printing and layout.

Next, a very special word of thanks to museum curator Susanne Bruhn, who, with a solid overview has coordinated the practical exhibition issues with the many challenges the organisation of an international ceramics exhibition of this nature involves. Thanks also to curator Anette Lindbørg Karlsen, for a dedicated contribution made during the introductory phase of the project.

Lastly, on behalf of CLAY Museum of Ceramic Art, the project partners and the artists participating in the exhibition, a very special word of thanks to OJD Foundations for the financial support that has made it possible to realise this ambitious project. To be able to present an array of trend-setting artists from all over the world is a significant event for the entire field of ceramics. From CLAY Museum of Ceramic Art, our grateful thanks to the OJD Foundations for its trust and support.

Let the curtain rise – Staging the Object!

Upwards of 100 ceramic works from Scandinavia, USA, Canada and Japan: A snapshot of the present-day ceramic scene with all its various agendas and intentions. Exhibited against the backdrop of CLAY Museum of Ceramic Art, a modern museum which sees the communication about and interpretation of new trends and tendencies within the field of ceramics as one of its very important tasks.

But why is it relevant to organise a major exhibition right now that involves the participation of a considerable number of artists whose works at first sight seem to point in every conceivable direction? Why take all the trouble to place Matt Wedel's Flower Tree sculptures in juxtaposition with the ceramic reflections on food-tray-canteen by Danish Anne Tophøj? Why invite the reliefs, Dual Survival by Norwegian Nils Martin to encounter the work Sketch for Wet Dream Architecture by Linda Sormin? And what is Marianne Nielsen's grammatical scrutinising of the form of flowers doing alongside Marit Tingleff's ornamentally quivering landscapes? Turi Heisselberg's geometrical vases – soft and angular? – or Mia Göransson's work, New Nature, tentative juxtapositions of elements from unknown lands?

What are all these works speaking of? From which perspective is it meaningful to bring them all together? How far is it between the 'inner workshops' where the ceramic works are being created? If they find themselves on a hill-top in Ohio or behind backyard windows in Copenhagen? If there is a view to the waterfall at Hønefoss or if the works have come into being at the very spot where they are to be exhibited? On the spot or not on the spot? When do we find ourselves where? In Japan, in Copenhagen, on Facebook or on Instagram? In Stockholm, in Chicago or all over the place? Clay is heavy, ceramics is heavy, but it flies well over long distances.

Is that the way it is? In the course of history, pre-Columbian ceramics, Korean and Japanese stoneware, Chinese porcelain, Italian majolica, Persian faience, Spanish-Moorish lustre pottery, and earthenware from countries all over the world have been transported over long and short

distances. Been traded, collected and taken care of. By obsessive collectors and just as obsessive ceramists, potters or whatever they happened to call themselves. Again, again and yet again. New works are transported, shown to others, cause wonder and admiration.

This is Ceramic Momentum: ceramic works that point in many directions, all created – at various points of the globe – by artists with both legs firmly planted in their own sphere, yet at the same time with an awareness of the global, virtual reality in which they are creating.

As curators, Copenhagen Ceramics wish with this exhibition both to emphasise and pay tribute to the universality of ceramics and to look at its present-day powers of fascination by confronting a series of ceramic expressions in a juxtaposition that invites us to take a closer look at both new connections and differences between the works, and at the rôle the works assume in both the local and the globalised world. We focus on contemporary ceramics with a particular look – the eye of the maker. The very character of the work is central to our selective process – the finished ceramic work, which is the result of long-term focused work on the concept, materials and techniques.

With regard to content and artistic statement, we have selected significant works that help shift the field of ceramics in new directions, made by artists who, in widely different ways, consciously incorporate their own age into the expression of the work. In sculptures, jars, objects, tableaux, etc. In works that speak a clear language of deep engagement in and understanding of the material and its potential.

Certain present-day forms of ceramic expression have not been included in the exhibition. For example, the raw, unfired clay used as performance, or works in which ceramics is included as a theme in video works. This in no way indicates any kind of rejection of these forms of expression – our choice aims solely at creating a consistency between the works by focusing on the position and significance of the fired, permanent ceramic work as a player in a current globalised material culture.

The place

The Ceramic Momentum exhibition is international and it must have an angle of approach. A place from which one views things. Scandinavia, the only place from which we can ultimately view things, is therefore most fully represented. This is where most of the artists at the exhibition come from and live – the locus from which they view the world. And from where they catch sight of the works of other artists – also of other ceramists. Some of the works are retained in one's awareness, call insistently for attention, and make one want to meet them physically as well.

What does place mean nowadays? The place where we live and work? Does a kind of affiliation still exist to a locally anchored tradition? What does the local aspect signify? Is it visible in our works? In our identity and self-understanding? In the artistic approach or use of particular techniques in relation to the ceramic aspect? In the choice of raw materials?

The material itself is place. Clay can be present as used building tiles, pulverised and used as a pure, red surface layer in a dialogue with an underlying concrete form, as in the works of Carl Emil Jacobsen. As in other works where he uses locally extracted types of clay, the value-laden quality of the objects is there as a poetical/political comment on place and environment. Place is also the natural world which we directly encounter in our everyday lives. The landscape of the emotions. Moments seized, throughout the year, described and made permanent in artistic form as ceramic figuration in Marianne Krumbach's evocative, isolated sections of plants. And in the starkest possible contrast to this, we find the works of Niels Martin, where the places of urban life are prominent: Hip-hop culture and YouTube. Topical satire as compressed narrative,

with the aesthetics of the strip cartoon arm in arm with dazzlingly precise ceramic craftsmanship.

Traditions belong to a place, have local origins and are therefore interesting to look closer at from a present-day viewpoint. In most countries there are strong traditions when it comes to creating things – not least within the field of ceramics.

The Scandinavian design tradition, for example, with its strong focus on simple (functional) form. Can traces of this be found in present-day works? Is it found in the expression of Danish, Norwegian or Swedish artists? Is it the essence of Turi Heiselberg's works, in her special flair for creating strength in simplicity? Can it be recognised by others? Is it used by other, non-Scandinavian artists?

And what about Japan and the Japanese ceramic tradition, which, seen from an international ceramic perspective, became a world brand a long time ago? How is this tradition made use of and transformed in Takuro Kuwata's hands? Where can his inspiration be seen to have come from? He represents a contemporary view of the tradition – as something one is free to play with and the wall against which one can bounce the ball. There is not much humble 'unknown craftsman' about him. How do we in the West experience his pop-cultural works, with their present-day interpretation of and close relation to the Japanese tea-bowl tradition? – and why has Instagram made these works globally loved in recent years? To what extent is the authenticity in his works based in precisely his culture and local anchorage? The fact that he was born in Japan and works there? Or has his local culture actually long since been accessible to all of us – and on the same footing? Is it both the traditional aesthetics and the pop elements with which we are immediately able to connect?

How as artists do we create our identity? What is the nature of the connection between our various specialist training and our local affiliations when it finds expression in the acquisition of skills and knowledge of materials? For many years now, the use of international guest teachers has been common practice at our schools and colleges. We travel out into the world for our education and bring back new impulses, trends and attitudes. International specialist journals have long since become easily accessible and to a certain extent have now been supplanted by the image stream of the Internet, where exact knowledge and direct teaching are easy to find. We now see students who learn to throw pottery with the aid of instruction videos – with the laptop on a chair next to the wheel. And, as qualified professionals, we exhibit globally and sell our works in galleries and at international fairs everywhere. We have Facebook and Instagram and the whole world is our oyster. The whole time.

Materiality

The ceramic materials and processes offer us an inexhaustible treasure trove of various textures and colours. We are dealing with the earth and the mountains' minerals. With volcanic processes at microcosm level. With basic elements of ancient cultures that repeatedly find new forms of sensual expression.

It can be demonstrating to us what is so unique about clay – its plasticity, as when investigated by Anton Alvarez, for example, in his extruded works. How far does one have to go to get the basic characteristics of the material to assume the appearance of an independent artistic expression? In what way is a form to be shaped and, in particular, finished for one to sense the malleability as being something essential and important to notice? And how is one to attain a new freshness of this

material statement today – half a century or more after Jackson Pollock as the avant-garde – made the physical nature of the materials obvious to us in his drip-paintings?

Running in parallel to Alvarez's manifestation of the will of the clay, Christina Schou Christensen works on displaying the innermost character of the glaze. Naturally, this has to do with gravity – most things in this world of ours want to move downwards – but that is precisely what constitutes the artist's challenge. How can one retain any magic in this banal phenomenon? What is to be emphasised? What is to be underplayed? What elements have to be in contrast with each other in the composition of the work for its immortalised, fully-fired appearance to grab hold of us now – and perhaps in a 100 years' time?

In the course of the history of ceramics, there have at regular intervals been periods with a similar focus on material. From the late 19th century, one could name a group of artists who, with their roots in French Symbolism, were profoundly interested in the highly textural potential of stoneware glazes to bring out sculptural qualities – under a certain influence from Japanese art which had recently become known in Europe, particularly the nature-bound aesthetics of its ceramic works. In works by artists as, among others, Jean Carriès and Auguste Delaherche, and – in their wake – particularly in ceramic works by the Danish sculptor Niels Hansen Jakobsen, the glazes run and drip merrily down over modelled masks, sculptures and art nouveau vase shapes. In Italy in the 1930s, the artist Lucio Fontana strongly experimented – even early on in his career – with the particularly expressive potential of colours in glazes. Later on too, the ceramists of the expressive art movement in USA in the 1950s and early 1960s – with Peter Voulkos as the best-known example – placed the main emphasis on the

primary capacity of the pliable clay to retain the traces of their very interaction with it.

But why do we precisely now feel this strong urge to explore the material itself in completely new ways? Does the virtual dominance of our age give rise to a generally widespread need to come into real contact with the physical world – to leave an imprint? To notice one's surroundings in a concrete form? Materiality is being investigated almost from scratch as a goal in itself. But this new focusing on materials is complex and combines the quite basic urge to comprehend the innermost nature of the material with an awareness of the resonance of this language in the present, its potential for modern narratives that strike home in a latent longing to be connected to a physical expression per se.

This is what can clearly be seen in Takuro Kuwata's works: he assigns his materials a fresh role as super-materials that almost appear to be images of themselves. Elements from aesthetics in the ancient traditions are magnified using pop-art effects to almost grotesque dimensions with great clarity in the constructed phenomenological reference. And is it possible to see somewhere in Matt Wedel's works a line stretching back to, for example, the above-mentioned deceased artists and their way of working with ceramics? In his free yet precise modelling of the clay, in the complexity of the compositions and the generous, lavish use of the glazes and their magic that give the works their feeling of being all of one piece?

Glaze poetry and expressiveness. For many contemporary ceramists, the glazes and an understanding of the latent expressive potential of their use as the hub of their visual language are a key issue. At times during firing and the cooling process the glazes even act as the main shaping factor,

resulting in poetic expressions through the fixation of the drama of the firing – the decisive moment in the kiln.

Already in her early works from the late 1990s, Bente Skjøttgaard set up a new stage for the glazes to perform on, with her vessel shapes designed especially to allow the glazes plenty of latitude during the firing. And with great consistency she has continued this work until now, where the boundaries for the capacity of the glazes in her works are tested to the very limit. To the point where the glaze constitutes the form itself, and where via innumerable experiments she gradually gains control over the liberated material, which is ultimately crucial if the work is to obtain its conscious nature and become a statement that can convey more than precisely itself.

A similar search for expressiveness in the texture of the material is found with Morten Løbner Espersen and Gitte Jungersen. In Espersen's universe this takes place in a close interaction between body and glazes, in works of strong texture and in a playing with this as the truly ornamental. In Gitte Jungersen's works, on the other hand, the materials have completely merged to form one single mass, the gases of which during the melting process cause it almost like lava to swell up and become its own strong shaping in a host of different shades and bubbling structures.

Form up for negotiation

At the opposite end of the spectrum, far removed from the material-expressive approach, other ceramists work on exploiting the harder and firmer stages of the clay, where it is possible to work with great precision on expressing the form via meticulous working up at various stages of the evolutionary process. With considerable craft skills, acquired through persistent practice over a long period of time, patience and scrupulous planning, they create works with a precise, serene sculptural appearance.

This can clearly be seen with Steen Ipsen, in whose works all traces of the human hand have been completely removed, to make way for the experiencing of a cleansed sculptural form. The reflecting gloss and lustre of the glaze help emphasise this form, which makes up the basis for an ornamental playing with lines and form in black and white, as takes place in his almost Op-Art inspired Organic series. And in Turi Heisselberg's vase shapes, sculptural stringency is balanced with inspiration from both the formation of crystals in nature and present-day architectural forms with soft, subdued colours that have an almost velvety mat texture which challenges our ideas about the innate narrative about functionality in the jar.

But the ceramic form is constantly up for negotiation, and the artists of the exhibition have very different objectives. The clay can be painstakingly modelled by Marianne Nielsen to give us a hyper-precise mapping of the shapes of plants, where she indicates the signs and ornamental systems that underlie our cultural attitude to them.

In works by Karen Bennicke, Martin Bodilsen Kaldahl and Mia E Göransson, the form is of an abstract nature and conveys

the artistic statements based on familiar phenomena.

Expressed, as can be seen, in Karen Bennicke's geometrical form-poetry, which is sharp or soft, absurd and logical at one and the same time, or in Kaldahl's cultivation of self-constituted coincidences, rhythmically formed as complex tubular structures. Or expressed as what we experience in Mia E Göransson's mysterious tableaux of unknown symbolic objects juxtaposed with objects that describe the very states of the clay itself. Or, yet again, in completely different form universes with a fusioning of figuration and abstraction where the form and 'cracky' material-aesthetics are taken to the point of no return and where beautiful and ugly are inseparable, as in the sculptures of Pernille Pontoppidan Pedersen.

The functional poetry of the object

To most people, the concept of ceramics is closely linked to objects of everyday use – the functional aspect. It is in this connection that ceramics play a major role in granting admittance to distant times and it is via all the preserved objects of this type as well as the many shards of pottery that ceramics possesses its enormous cultural weight.

Marit Tingleff is highly aware of this. In her huge dishes this is clearly stated. Despite their size, they still represent to her dishes that can be placed on a shelf or on a plate rack. And behind the freely painted and processed coloured surfaces and signs she links up with the strong decorative traditions of old dishes: the landscape painting, the blue & white decorations, etc. She gains inspiration from the stylistic history of the forms of dish rims and freely adapts them as rhythmical elements in the actual surface or as shadow-forming openings in the double-walled sculptural works.

Primal Pottery, Ole Jensen's earthenware series, also speaks out loudly and clearly into this space of functional form by pointing out the close collection between the form of the jar and the human body. The primeval connection used as a theme in a seriously meant, humorous playing with handles and legs, neck, belly, feet and spout. Executed with plenty of sculptural reserves of energy. And then there are the approved norms for functionality at the table which Anne Tophøj's project makes the subject of her inquiry. What would you eat off a plate like this one? Clearly functional form-typologies feature in the large, theatre-like eating surfaces, but they are nevertheless mysterious – like large question marks concerning your everyday habits and perhaps also as an aid to rethinking how we use things.

Non-function. Utility objects as super-objects: familiar functional forms placed in non-functional contexts. The concept of Superobjects arose in the years just after the turn of the millennium as a possible way of explaining an artistic standpoint or approach – for some people a new basic condition when involving oneself artistically in utility culture in a world already crammed full of things. That the works refer to utility things without wishing to be functional. Michael Geertsen's ceramic project in itself is the expression of such an attempt to assign a new role to the familiar functional items and in his early collages he gives them a sculptural function in a series of objects made up of thrown abstractions on the cup, plate and bowl. In recent years, he has been on a tour de force trip through the history of ceramics with works that refer and reinterpret quite specific works, e.g. the Alhambra vase from 15th century Andalusia, or the Skarpskalling vessel, which is one of the absolute and hard-wearing icons of the Danish history of ceramics.

All objects naturally exist in space. Indoors or outdoors. But in certain works the experience of both elements suddenly becomes more distinct. The assignment of roles between ‘that which contains’ and ‘that which is contained’ is dislocated, and the works start to question the very nature of the objects, and especially your understanding of the space around them – including yourself in the space in which you are standing.

This is the issue Anders Ruhwald’s works address. Through installations of well-known objects in unaccustomed contexts, or in objects that make a poetical comment on people’s use of certain spaces he questions the apparent matter-of-courseness with which we surround spaces and things. In other instances his works take over positions in the spaces of the museum. In this sacrosanct experiential and cognitive space of our age he releases his sculptures, which appear to be half formless matter and yet half monumental strength.

Linda Sormin works just as radically with the experience of space and the role of the works within it. In her site-specific installations she annuls the hierarchies of the space between observer and what is observed. The ceramic material, with its built-in connotations of familiarity and an invitation to sensual absorption, is mixed with all sorts of other materials, and transforms the space into a growth medium for all-devouring structures in an infinite growth principle that starts in some place and, with utter naturalness, can be continued some place else.

The major basic movements and paradigm-shifts in the world of art occur indisputably at a global level in our high-frequency communications age. The development which – superficially at least – has changed the conditions for dividing the objects into clearly distinct categories such as design, craft or fine art has violently accelerated and the scales of values have changed.

What is it then that connects us? What values and conditions are shared across continents? Have we in actual fact long since become part of a common culture? The whole world is our stage – even if it is no longer necessary to move around in it physically. The works – not least the ceramic ones – can still only be experienced in physical form one place at a time, but Instagram can manage the rest. Images of them can be everywhere, where they can work for you at many different levels, as Glenn Adamson excellently describes it in his article *The Rise of the Hyper Pot* elsewhere in this catalogue.

As *Ceramic Momentum* clearly shows, most of the works at the exhibition do not unambiguously belong to any one of the above-listed categories. New concepts have arisen as a sign of this overlapping between the former divisions: *The Contemporary Object* – with specialised galleries to cater for them – have emerged over the past 25 years as a fairly spacious category which, with self-awareness, status and intellectual back-up from the academic world, also now features in major international fairs such as Art Basel in Switzerland and Miami, and is attempting to rub shoulders with the customary prestige of fine art. At the same time, these galleries are also aware of the importance of preserving clarity regarding the craft aspect as being precisely what at present has such a strong appeal and makes the works something special.

As curators at this exhibition, we were unable from the outset to be completely aware of the extent to which our identity as ceramic artists has changed over the past 25 years – as a result of the increase in virtual communication. Interestingly enough, there does not necessarily seem to be any great difference between how various generations make use of the social media. Many of the ceramists featured in the exhibition worked for many years prior to the arrival of the Internet, but have quickly adapted to the new realities and now have a lively exchange of works – both new and old – whereby they are also helping to create a new form of historical awareness via the new media.

The exhibition Ceramic Momentum – Staging the Object offers museum visitors an occasion to react personally to our observations and reflections. Many will probably feel that it is completely uncomplicated to become involved in works that one only knows as images but has never actually seen in reality, and yet at the same time, here at CLAY, to be able with one’s own body and senses to be completely absorbed in the physical experiencing of the material presence of the work. Once again, as in so many other areas today, we slide smoothly between our virtual and physical existence.

The Rise of the Hyper Pot

Glenn Adamson

The most popular pot I’ve ever posted on Instagram (600 likes, but who’s counting?) was by Takuro Kuwata. This young Japanese ceramic artist has taken the world, both virtual and actual, by storm. He is a potter skilled in the idiom of the Japanese tea ceremony, and continues to make teabowls within that hallowed tradition. Alongside these, Kuwata also makes radical reinterpretations of these forms – based on a 17th century teabowl rather than the latest Marvel movie is based on a 1960s comic book. The references are all there, but they have been exaggerated almost past the point of recognition. In his more futuristic works, Kuwata amplifies the cracks of older teawares to earthquake proportions; glaze peels off the irregular sides in thick, buttery layers. The delicate tracery of traditional Japanese kintsugi (gold and lacquer repair) is transmogrified into gleaming metallic ornament, about as understated as a Trump hotel.

The particular piece I posted featured a liquid landslide of bubblegum pink and sky blue, dripping down over a crunchy shell of egg-yolk yellow. I knew it would get a good response. It has all the earmarks of Instagram bait: eye-popping color, a strong graphic silhouette, just the right balance of weirdness and familiarity. The photo was expertly lit, too. Kuwata presumably thinks about that kind of thing, for his own Instagram feed has an impressive following (over 11,000, last I checked). And none of this is incidental to the work. Kuwata’s ability to move back and forth between styles gives his oeuvre the quality of a time lapse, or visual distortion field – an effect accomplished with a mere press of the button in a CAD program, but hard to achieve in ceramic. His pots seem to signify two ways of being in the present: on the one hand, a resistant connection to the earth; on the other, the basking, acid glow of a computer screen.

Kuwata is superlative, but he is not alone. Many potters today are finding ways to navigate between the established pleasures of the ceramic medium and more unconventional, aggressively artificial aesthetics. This marks a decisive change in approach for the field. A few years ago, as fine artists began to drift into the ceramic medium, at first diffidently and then with increasing enthusiasm, the overriding rule seemed to be come-as-you-are. A casual, manifestly unskilled style was briefly in vogue. I called it “sloppy craft,” a term that itself circulated online,



where complicated phenomena are so often encapsulated short slogans.¹ Professional potters were, understandably, annoyed by this trend. It undercut their sense of craft pride, obscuring the history and sophistication of the medium.

I half agreed with that reaction, but also felt certain that the phase would not last. And behold: now, the fashion is not for what could generously be called “approximate craftsmanship,” but its opposite, an excess of prowess. Kuwata is one of many potters at work today, quite a few of whom are in *Ceramic Momentum*, who create objects of incredible intensity and technical sophistication, couched in a vocabulary of un-placeable abstraction. In common to this group is an interest in deep surfaces, which may be gradually built up over the course of many firings, or else gorgeously and subtly shaded, as in the work of Mia E Göransson. Her “near to nature” objects, which are pitched right at the midpoint between geometry and still life, providing the satisfactions of both while also skating free of their generic limitations, and permitting a free exploration of color and form. Something similar could be said for the work of Anders Ruhwald, whose complex and ever-evolving body of work combines the suggestiveness of Surrealism, the slapstick of Dada, and the formal intelligence of De Stijl. Ruhwald often constructs highly controlled environments for his pots, lending them the air of props for an unseen, fantastical film. Or consider Steen Ipsen, whose works are extraordinarily complex in structure, so much so that they bring to mind molecular models in an advanced chemistry classroom. Further intricacy is introduced through PVC ligaments, which wrap around the base of each globular component and then connect to the next, in a continuous interlaced network. Despite these convolutions, the overall force of design makes the works snap to your attention.

The sheer proficiency of figures like Kuwata, Göransson, Ruhwald, and Steen Ipsen does seem a reaction against sloppy ceramics: the grownups are back in charge. But there is no getting around the fact that this work is also incredibly photogenic. It used to be said of certain actors that the camera loved them, and that is true of these ceramics, too. These new works announce a new visual rhetoric for the medium: one based on saturated color, density of texture, and lack of finicky detail. They are at least as good in reproduction as they are in person. Call them Hyper Pots. Though literally saturated in materiality, they are also primed to perform on the digital stage.

Should this bother us? It was a long time ago that Jean Baudrillard predicted the “precession of simulacra,” by which he meant that simulations would begin to overtake reality, and set the

conditions for its unfolding. In so many ways, the 21st century has borne out his insight: more and more, actual life contorts itself into the shape of its already-existing representations. Cause and effect seem to have switched places. This is true in our politics; it is true in our economics, as attention itself gradually displaces other forms of value; it is true in our film, our fashion. Why not our pottery?

Well, I can think of a few reasons. Previous tendencies in ceramic, though oppositional to one another, have all had in common an insistence on immediacy. The traditionalist approach, associated with Bernard Leach in England and the *mingei* movement in Japan, laid great emphasis on tactile experience both in the making and appreciation of a pot. Though Leach did rely on photographs to get his message across, most famously in *A Potter's Book* (1940), he was a prophet of the holistic, of the “heart, head and hand in balance.”

The subsequent generation of modernists, like Peter Voulkos, broke sharply with Leach's conservatism but still laid great emphasis on physicality as a primary value. The postmodernists of the 1970s and '80s followed the lead of other disciplines like architecture, in emphasizing the façade or surface pattern of a pot - here I am thinking particularly of the British artists like Liz Fritsch. But even they were wary of divorcing themselves too radically from direct presence. The whole point of Fritsch's mesmerizing “optical” pots was the way they slid and danced in person – photos couldn't do them justice. The discipline has always maintained a sense of its own ancientness, the idea of a pot as an axis mundi anchoring us in space and time, giving us not a fleeting impression but a sense of depth.

And here we come to the crux of the issue, for I think the best of the Hyper Pots do more than just perform, skidding across the surface of our screens. They also do what pots have always done, exert friction in the flow of life, like a rudder in a swift current. It's simply that they do this in the digital realm rather than the analogue. As I have argued elsewhere, modern craft has many social and aesthetic roles, but its primary purpose is symbolic.² This was true in the nineteenth century, when Arts and Crafts reformers summoned up a largely imaginary medieval past in order to stage a contrast with an unideal present. One doubts that even William Morris himself expected wallpaper and tapestry to bring about the socialist transformation that he so urgently desired; yet he also believed that handmade artefacts could act as a spur to the conscience, encouraging wider understanding of the importance of “joy in labor.”

Craft's symbolic role was updated to a more compatible relationship with capitalism in the middle of the twentieth century, when designers sought to humanize their mass-produced wares by infusing them with artisanal qualities. This phenomenon was geographically widespread, with variants in Italy, Japan, and America; but it was in Scandinavia that the model had its greatest triumphs. That success was not a straightforward proposition for producers in the Nordic countries at that time. As demand for their hand-shaped furniture, glass, and pottery increased, it was a constant struggle to balance quality and efficiency. For at least twenty years, though, Scandinavia managed to project an image of exquisite craftsmanship intertwined with progressive design. It was both a look and an ethic, calculated to soften the hard realities of postwar economic expansion.

If the Arts and Crafts movement reflected an incipient stage of modernity, and the midcentury “designer-craftsman” ideal its apex, then we might see contemporary object production as a response to our own postmodern, late capitalist condition. Search on the tag #ceramics on Instagram, and you will immediately be presented with an infinite array of reference points. Many of these posts are as artfully composed as Kuwata's, landing in the small dimensions of a smartphone with an almost audible pop thanks to a defined silhouette, strong color, and deftly written caption. (For a masterclass in this secondary artform, see Ayumi Horie's feed @potsin-action, which currently has nearly 120,000 followers.) As the images unfurl on your screen, you may well be struck by a sense of equivalence, tantamount to interchangeability. Past and present, traditional and futuristic, local and cosmopolitan, functional and sculptural, conventionally beautiful and purposefully ugly: all of these qualities are pounded flat into a single frictionless plane.

That compression is not unique to this discipline, of course. The same is true of any other medium with a long history. Hence exhibitions like *The Forever Now*, staged at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2014–15, which sought to explore atemporality in contemporary painting.³ This feeling – that our present is compounded of a brimming, unstable accumulation of past moments – was foundational to postmodernist thinking in the 1980s. At that time, this sense of pervasive simultaneity was not widely shared; it was discussed within the tight circles of theorists like Baudrillard and David Harvey (who described the phenomenon as “time space compression”), as well as in avant-garde practice, as in the paintings of David Salle and Jean-Michel Basquiat, or the sculpture of Jessica Stockholder.⁴ Now, their predictions have come true. Anyone who can enter a search term into Google Images can have the vertiginous,

tumbling experience of endless association: a clothes dryer for your brain, with the setting permanently stuck on spin.

Ceramics is inherently resistant to this sort of mediation. Its tactility is one reason; pots are made to be touched, and turned in the hands, in the round. Then too, there is the discipline's extremely strong relationship to place. These days, ceramic supplies are shipped all over the world, but until very recently, for reasons of cost and convenience, pots tended to be made primarily from materials that were available nearby. Certainly there were exceptions. A global trade in cobalt emerged during the height of blue-and-white porcelain production in China and elsewhere; already in the eighteenth-century clay and glaze ingredients were transported in vast quantities to Staffordshire (the potteries prospered there because of available fuel and transport links, not raw material). But for the most part, pots have served as anchor points for national identity. They speak loudly and proudly of location – indeed, of the earth itself.

We should understand the Hyper Pot not simply as anti-technological, though, a rear-guard gesture. Rather, it is a knowing manipulation of such tropes, a way of juxtaposing material authenticity and pure appearance. These objects give the people what they want, and then some. The overstatement is an invitation to consider the conditions in which objects, in general, exist today. Tactility, you say? Here you are: running rivulets and slag-slides of glaze, as in the work of Matt Wedel. A sense of place? How about several all at once, a veritable whirlwind tour of world ceramics, as in the work of Michael Geertsen, whose newest work combines gilding (an allusion, perhaps, to kintsugi), drips of Chinese oxblood, and celadon glazes, and European formal vocabulary in a single pot. Or else an extreme exaggeration of a single tradition, as in Morten Løbner Espersen's integral vases, some of which could be seen as maximalist takes on the Korean Moon Jar. If the traditional Choson Dynasty version of the form is like the full moon on a clear night, then Espersen's pots are like the actual lunar surface, filled with craters, pockmarks, and gleaming reflections.

Then there is the work of Bente Skjøttgaard, which has always been distinguished by its vitality, as if a fluid movement had been caught in mid-air. A particularly distinctive form seems to lurch forward on multiple uprights. In some of her more recent works, the glaze seems to take on an independent life of its own, as if straining to achieve autonomy from the clay substrate. Erik Steffensen of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Copenhagen, has commented memorably that Skjøttgaard addresses her material “in much the same manner as a runner or an existential

philosopher,” perfectly expressing the admixture of muscularity and intelligence in her creations.⁵ In their extreme fluidity, they outperform the slip-and-slide operations of computer design. Yet they are made using the ancient technology of the potter, and nothing more.

Notable in all this work, and of the Hyper Pot in general, is a cult of the accidental. Not to be confused with sloppy craft (which involves actual lack of control), this is a tactical deployment of chance operations in the execution of the work. It is another way of reflecting on contemporary conditions – the seeming randomness of digital connections, which is actually governed by algorithms nested within other algorithms, a cascade of profit-based logic to which the everyday citizen has no access. Against this, the Hyper Pot stages a spectacle of individualistic control. Far from indicating a lack of skill, the arbitrariness is carefully cultivated.

Some potters put obstacles deliberately in their own way, knowing that in transcending them, their work will attain new heights. Martin Bodilsen Kaldahl, for example, adopts the methodology of an obstacle course in planning his intricate, tubular compositions. His goal is always to avoid the obvious, and in this he entirely succeeds. Though the results may appear modernist and abstract, the history of baroque ornament is encoded in them, much as the long trajectory of Japanese tea ceremony wares is reconfigured in Takuro Kawata's pots. As in certain buildings and objets d'art from the seventeenth century, it is impossible to say where architectonic form and eccentric decoration give way to one another.

Pernille Pontoppidan Pedersen also intentionally interferes with her own work by incorporating stones such as marble and granite in her clay. She also gravitates to stacked forms, which seem to contradict themselves. Some are as chaotic as the Mad Hatter's tea party, others so orderly that they seem like careful archives of their own making. One example of the latter idiom, from 2014, bears a title that could be the slogan for Hyper Pots in general: “Casual Mineral Materialities.” Of course, there is nothing actually casual about it; the work serves as a compendium of Pedersen's alternately found and created, dead and delicious surfaces. It is a little quarry from which whole bodies of work could be mined.

Though many of the artists included in the exhibition Ceramic Momentum do hail from the Nordic countries, including most I have discussed so far, it is an international show. This is important, and appropriate. One of the most striking features of the Hyper Pot is its cosmopolitanism. During the latter half of the twentieth century, progressive currents in ceramics (as in

other media) tended to be geographically centered. Idioms like Abstract Expressionism and Funk emanated from California. Avant-garde explorations in Italy (Lucio Fontana, Leoncillo Leonardi), Japan (Yagi Kazuo and the Sodeisha group), and Britain (Carol McNicoll, Gillian Lowndes, and Alison Britton) all had their own distinctive tenor. There is no such point of origin for the Hyper Pot. Like the broad referential content that is compressed into its compact forms, it seems to come from nowhere and everywhere all at once.

In 1957, the theorist Roland Barthes observed that plastic combined the qualities of utter banality and complete omnipotence. At one end of an injection molding machine, he wrote, there was nothing but “raw telluric matter.” At the other emerged “the finished, human object. And between these two extremes, nothing; nothing but a transit.”⁶ What plastic did for materiality, in the postwar period, digital technology is now doing to experience. The very texture of our lives arises instantaneously and mysteriously. The forces to which we are all subject combine in obscure ways, and to confusing effect.

It might seem crazy to suggest that ceramics can stand against all this. Yet look at Anton Alvarez’s series *Alphabet Aerobics*. Every bit as camera-ready as the other Hyper Pots in this exhibition, they are quite different in that they have little of the skill, and none of the temporal overlay that most of the other objects possess. (And it is worth noting that Alvarez comes from a design background, rather than that of a trained ceramist.) What they do have is extraordinary immediacy. Each is the trace of a unique extrusion, which he treats as a form generator. With each of these objects, he seems to create another syllable within a still-emergent language, one that can tell only a single story: the story of clay’s own shaping.

Here, and in every object in *Ceramic Momentum*, we see how valuable this medium can be as a way to negotiate the present. The “transit” that went missing in the age of plastic, and then came to define the contours of our perception, is now being fixed in the work of clay. An ancient medium grounded in functional necessity, it has been recast in recent years. Symbolic these pots may be. But they are still necessary equipment for our uncertain future.

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- 1 Elaine C. Patterson and Susan Surette, eds, *Sloppy Craft: Postdisciplinarity and the Crafts* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015)
- 2 Glenn Adamson, *Invention of Craft* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013)
- 3 Laura Hoptman, *The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2014)
- 4 David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 1989)
- 5 Erik Steffensen, “Elements in White,” <http://www.skjoettgaard.dk/text-1.htm>
- 6 Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012; orig. pub. 1957), p. 25



The clay speaks to us

We love ceramics. Suddenly say ‘Oh, yes’ to the rustic, brownish vase from the summer cottage and vacuum the country’s flea markets for good ceramic re-use finds. The fashion photo we see in shops, in magazines and on Instagram shows us great quantities of ceramics and stoneware. The enthusiasm for ceramics displayed by the broad lifestyle culture is appreciable and conspicuous. Much would seem to indicate that, in an everyday life dominated by algorithms and ‘likes’, we are turning with renewed interest towards the natural tranquillity and materiality of ceramics. This is a trend that some people may regard as superficial, but that can also be regarded both as a result of the development of culture and nature, where the human and non-human are nowadays intertwined in new ways, and as an expression of a present-day human need to anchor ourselves in a digitalised world. We are apparently attracted by the earthiness of clay.

If we take a look at the world of fine arts, we also discover an enthusiasm for ceramics there. We see how international contemporary artists such as Grayson Perry and Rosemarie Trockel use ceramics as part of their artistic practice. This tendency can also be seen in Denmark in such contemporary artists as Rose Eken, Anna Sørensen, Klara Lilja, Mie Mørkeberg, John Kørner, Alexander Tovborg and Cathrine Raben Davidsen, who in various ways have created a number of important works with clay as their artistic mode of expression. Visual artists plunge into ceramics with the image, the conceptual or a more broadly orientated art practice as their diving

board. It is not clay as a material nor the technical mastery of it which is the centre of interest when a visual artist such as Anna Sørensen shapes her painted pots – and she herself underlines that her work first and foremost is an image-creating process as an extension of many years as an active painter. Once she has defined the form of her pots, Anna Sørensen scratches and scrapes the moist surface of the clay, after which she paints them with layered, geometrical patterns.

Institution-wise, ceramics is also in focus: In 2017, the National Museum in Oslo acquired the large installation *You in Between* by the ceramist Anders Ruhwald; the art museum in Horsens last year acquired an immense installation by Rose Eken made up of 1,967 ceramic components, and, finally, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art staged that same year a comprehensive exhibition of Picasso's ceramics.

The interest in ceramics coincide with the emergence of a material-oriented, interdisciplinary mode of thought, with such international theorists as Jane Bennett, Donna Haraway and Karen Barad. In her book *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010), Jane Bennett has advocated a reorientation of our approach to the world, from an investigation of the human experiencing of things to one of the things in themselves. In other words, neo-materialistic thinking investigates the innate potential of the materials, material energy – or, as Bennett herself formulates it in her introduction to *Vibrant Matter*: 'The vital materialities that flow through and around us.' (Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Duke University Press 2017: p. x).

With the exhibition *Ceramic Momentum*, focus is placed on a selection of Danish and international ceramists who have had their hands well-buried in clay for many years. Their enthusiasm

for ceramics has not been engendered by some sudden momentum or whim of fashion. What the ceramists all share is that they work continually and inquiringly with the clay, exploring the innate properties of the material. They have lost their hearts to an analog material that in a way is hopelessly old-fashioned, yet now seems hotter than ever before.

The material energy of ceramics

The material energy is visible in the works at the exhibition. They have been created from clay, a natural material taken directly from nature and - as far as some are concerned, recreated into organic, natural forms. But also in the purely geometrical expressions or stylistically precise, figurative expression the material can be strongly sensed. The exhibition provides insight into how the strength of contemporary Danish and international ceramics lies in the technical mastery of a number of studio ceramists who allow new vibrant forms to emerge in their work with the clay – forms that in many cases can be experienced as living organisms that have their own life and embody a force that comes from within.

An important feature among the works at the exhibition is the soft, round and at times rampant forms, where the texture and presence of the clay and the glaze are salient. We can see this in Morten Løbner Espersen's *Moon Jars*, where the glaze streams down the sides and forms piled-up lunar landscapes, adding an intensified textural surface to a traditional form. We can see it with Anders Ruhwald, whose sculptures balance between the figurative and the abstract. The sculptures are half-human, half shapeless matter. They grow up from their bases like biomorphic posts in space – or like vital organisms suggesting that the clay possesses an innate force which is here given sculptural expression. Steen Ipsen's universe has been dominated over the years by a sculptural project in which organic forms occupy space with a clear, almost graphic expression that is kept in black and white. His works are certainly smooth and exquisite, but not without contrasts. They are static and frictionless, but always in motion. Organic, yet at the same time almost industrial with their smooth, perfect look. The interaction between the organic and the industrial has also characterised Ole Jensen's production over the years in his many poetically personified everyday objects. At this exhibition he is showing objects of red earthenware clay from the series *Primal Pottery*, which introduce the human body directly into the object in a humorous way. The jar has acquired small breasts, the bowl has sprouted legs and the flower-

pot has been given large ears. Jensen's playful, anthropomorphised objects are round and soft like the body, yet also usable and everyday in appearance.

Turi Heisselberg Pedersen gets her inspiration not from the body but from geological, crystalline forms which are then modelled into firm, angular forms without any useful function. Her stoic ceramics is rich in texture and tactile, velvety presence, natural colours and soft pastel shades. Its forms mime forms of vegetation or other parts of nature – they remind one of buds on the point of bursting open or cloven pieces of wood. The Canadian ceramist Linda Sormin creates vibrant and far more uncontrolled sculptures. Here, clay is combined with other materials in a powerful but also raw, porous and fragile expression that allows chance to reign both during the firing and as a signature of the finished work. Material energy is also given room in Martin Bodilsen Kaldahl's works, where the clay is shaped like coarse, mechanical intestines – tube-based structures that twine together and round each other, forming robust, rhythmic sculptures.

One of the characteristics shared by many of those exhibiting is the investigation of materiality 'almost from scratch and as a goal in itself', as the curators of the exhibition say in the introduction to the catalogue. This present focus on the material is varied and multi-faceted, as is clearly demonstrated by the wide range of works on show. And even though the exhibition is called 'Ceramic Momentum', it would be misleading to say that the varied collection of objects brings ceramics 'out into the light', for it is already fully spot-lit and sparkling with its insistent materiality. The exhibition shows us the foundation behind the present trends in the mainstream culture and on the art scene. By its attempt to display the good examples – centred on artists who have the material energy of the clay as their focal point – the exhibition manages to provide tradition and weight to our dialogue about clay. At the same time, the exhibition is a call of inspiration to everyone to be present in our spontaneous sensing of the world – and that is a point in itself, particularly at a time when we are constantly refining our ability to function in the communicative reality of the social media. For what can better reteach us the ability to be in the world than these objects, which with precision and mastery of material have been shaped into individual items that one wants to pick up and feel.

Stine Høholt, PhD., Chief Curator at ARKEN Museum of Modern Art
and board member of the New Carlsberg Foundation





Anders Ruhwald

In Anders Ruhwald's work the weight and malleability of the clay enters into a direct dialogue with the observer's own body, whereas the figuration in the works is harder to define. His works are most often created as large site-specific installations, either in a dialogue with the white space of the gallery or as comments in interiors with a particular story, as for example his exhibition in 2018 at Asger Jorn's house in Albisola, Italy.

In the sculptures, a fertile curiosity towards form, in the tension between the abstract and the figurative, is combined with an intellectually controlled investigation of the innate expressive potential of the material and the very idea of the ceramic as an autonomous culture. Ruhwald's visions arise in working with the material and its special qualities, the texture, weight, scale, surface and colour – perhaps even its smell. The physical qualities of the material are crucial to a reading of the works.

Anders Ruhwald is deeply concerned with the meaning of the object itself in the surrounding space, how it affects and how it can transform and introduce disturbance into this space. He plays with the conceptions of the agreed positions and roles of things, e.g. their relation to inside and outside, and he puts their hierarchies under the magnifying glass. Everyday design is fused with the status of the sculpture in a transformation of context which raises questions regarding the values and qualities we assign to things. In the project an attempt is made to integrate the works in the world, to cause them to appear on an equal footing with some of the other everyday objects with which we surround ourselves.



MATERIALITET OG VERK

MATERIALITY AND WORK

The sculpture 'Materiality and Work' is a tall, abstract, textured sculpture made of glazed earthenware. It features a complex, organic form with a rough, porous surface. The sculpture is composed of several interconnected, rounded shapes that create a sense of depth and volume. The color palette is primarily dark blue and black, with some lighter, speckled areas. The sculpture is displayed on a dark, rectangular pedestal. The background wall is white and features text panels with the heading 'MATERIALITY AND WORK'.

Anders Ruhwald, DK: Group of works, 2017, Glazed earthenware. Courtesy of Morán Morán Gallery, Los Angeles

Anton Alvarez

Anton Alvarez's work with clay is a technically ambitious and artistically liberating project. Over a considerable period of time he has intensively explored the potential of extruding in a series of works where the soft consistency of the clay and its inner structure are brought out in a form of expression that retains intact the fresh and fragile nature of the clay itself. He often works on a large scale, which is technically demanding, and with the use of a colour intensity that can be both insistent and delicate. But his works are always executed with a playful sense of the spontaneously attractive nature of clay – the soft, malleable material. The language of the objects speaks directly to us through the retention and visualisation of a basically haptic feeling. They fascinate – even via the images he frequently posts on social media of both his process and the fired finished works.

Anton Alvarez's artistic project is highly diverse and is realised in many different materials and types of object. In ceramic expression, where widespread conventions to do with handling and technique as well as aesthetics and traditional form categories are challenged. In his works the direct influence of the tool – or the machine – on the aesthetic presentation is always present in an immediate and spectacular way. As an integral part of the process he develops and constructs his own tools, because he wishes to thoroughly understand a technology and thereby become inspired to enhance the potential for new form and expression even further.



Anton Alvarez, SE/CL: Extruded works, 2018. Detail



Gitte Jungersen



Gitte Jungersen, DK: Everything Changes and Nothing Stands Still, 2019. Three different glazes in several layers. Detail (Work made at The Danish Art Workshops)

Glaze comes into being when various raw materials coalesce and become something new, but in the firing destructive and disintegrating forces also occur. Gitte Jungersen sets about things in radical fashion in her attempts to bring out and explore the materiality of the clay and the glazes. For many years she has continually experimented with the actual understanding of the ceramic process. She challenges and breaks down common conceptions of the role of the clay and glaze as being what bears and what is borne. By doing so, she has developed a raw but sophisticated and controlled artistic expression that has the appearance of pure physical force and bodily present substance. The transformation during the firing is retained as a dynamic dimension that is felt and attracts like a quivering undertone in the finished work – with a poetry that at one and the same time is strict form and volcanic eruption.

The project is an experiment in pushing the visual and tactile potential of the ceramic glaze to its extreme limit. To a point where the raw materials and the process are as clearly discernible as possible and give one a feeling

of something being created and yet on its way towards dissolution.

In concrete terms, Gitte Jungersen works with a series of large glaze surfaces consisting of glazes in thick layers. The various glazes coalesce, creating a violent textural effect. During the firing, the glazes are impelled to move as violently and chaotically as possible when they coalesce, so that the cooling-down process leaves a result behind that makes one feel one is observing a snapshot from the melting process. The glaze surfaces arouse simultaneously associations with natural force and synthetic materials. The intention is for the objects to appear ambiguous: is it natural force and primeval mass, or artificial and synthetic?



Gille Jungeresen, DK: Everything Changes and Nothing Stands Still #10, 2019. 151 x 94 x 5 and Everything Changes and Nothing Stands Still #, 2019. 151 x 89 x 5 cm. Three different glazes in several layers.
Works made at The Danish Art Workshops

Matt Wedel

Large ceramic sculptures with modelled flowers of unknown species. Mineral-like formations or strangely proportioned people and animals with dramatic texture and colour that embrace the forms in thick, oozing glass-like layers or have a completely monochrome or gilt appearance. Matt Wedel's works are violent reminders of the greatness and fragility of nature that is at stake in the relation between culture and nature. He makes use of the format of statue that usually expresses the elevated, whereas here it bears witness to a possible collapse. To a power struggle that always contains the possibility of annihilation.

The sculptures have a familiar feel, but even so come from a completely alien place. They contain a powerful atmosphere of sadness, yet also express a form of acceptance of an (inevitable) development and cycle. They signal a proud celebration of something almost paradise-like, but with a strong undertone of a loss of innocence – a kind of requiem, as Matt Wedel himself puts it. With inspiration in the descriptions in art history and religious myths of collapse and new breakthroughs, he portrays visions of our future. In that sense his works become a powerful statement about

the struggle for existence to a greater extent than an actual picture of nature.

The sheer scale of the works and Wedel's handling of the materials in themselves add to the fusion of frailty and the enthusiastic celebration of our connectedness to nature. Everything is staked on one throw. Irrespective of Matt Wedel's masterly technical skill, everything can happen in the ceramic process during the creation of these gigantic works. The artist acknowledges this and lives with the challenge and the ever-present risk of failure which is inherent in his working method.

Matt Wedel, US: Flower Tree, 2014. 107 × 93 × 122 cm. Fired clay and glaze. Courtesy of L. A. Louver, Venice, California





Matt Wedel, US: Flower Tree, 2014. Detail. Fired clay and glaze. Courtesy of L. A. Louver, Venice, California



Mia E Göransson

Mia Göransson's works have been described as modern mysteries. They often have the character of a kind of still life, a nature morte, that she creates under her own – by now long-established working title, *New Nature*, even though her works only partially deal with nature. They are reified landscapes, tableaux placed on meticulously dimensioned shelves or podiums that create new meanings via the juxtapositions of the various visual identities of the individual elements which may derive from something recognisable but which nevertheless remain inscrutable. They convey ideas about man-made technology, geometrical forms and science in a not more closely defined sense, but also express organic life and structure.

The juxtapositions cause a transformation of the individual constituents to take place, giving rise to a new meaning or feeling. Culturally determined concepts such as the functionality of objects (a handle, a spout, a screen...) create meaning along with purely physical modes of expression, such as the way in which clay snaps when it has a quite particular consistency. Or it takes place in combinations of other materials or media, e.g. printed newspaper texts

contrasted with the almost unprocessed materiality of the clay, perhaps painted with a glaring orange glaze.

Göransson works intuitively and to a certain extent impulsively by building up her works based on her strong sense for the necessary form- or colour-related measures as the common denominator that holds together the various elements of the work. An inseparable interaction between the potential instability of the stackings, the calmness of the overall colour scheme and the precisely detailed design of the individual elements creates a fascinating magic. The tableaux have a rhythmical clarity and are apparently utterly simple in their expression. They possess a special, laconic humour that does not answer any questions but slowly release a complexity of possible meanings and inner tensions that open up for new interpretations.



Mia E Göransson, *SE: Travers*, 2018. Porcelain and earthenware. Detail

Mia E Göransson, SE: Travers, 2018. 71 × 60 × 29 cm. Sugar Landscape, 2018. 54 × 100 × 32 cm. Porcelain and earthenware. Shelf in wood and metal

Mia E Göransson, SE: Sugar Landscape, 2018. Porcelain. Detail



Nils Erichsen Martin

Pranks and poetry. That is one of the ways in which Nils Erichsen Martin characterises his own work. Pranks should be interpreted fairly broadly, one could add. In the elegant and perfectly executed ceramic sculptures, reliefs and completely two-dimensional drawings on sheets, his striking ceramic skills and technical high-browedness are important co-narrators. The pop-art attitude and the stylistic consistency are eye-catching and give one the immediate impression of an easily decoded narrative. In actual fact, the converse is true.

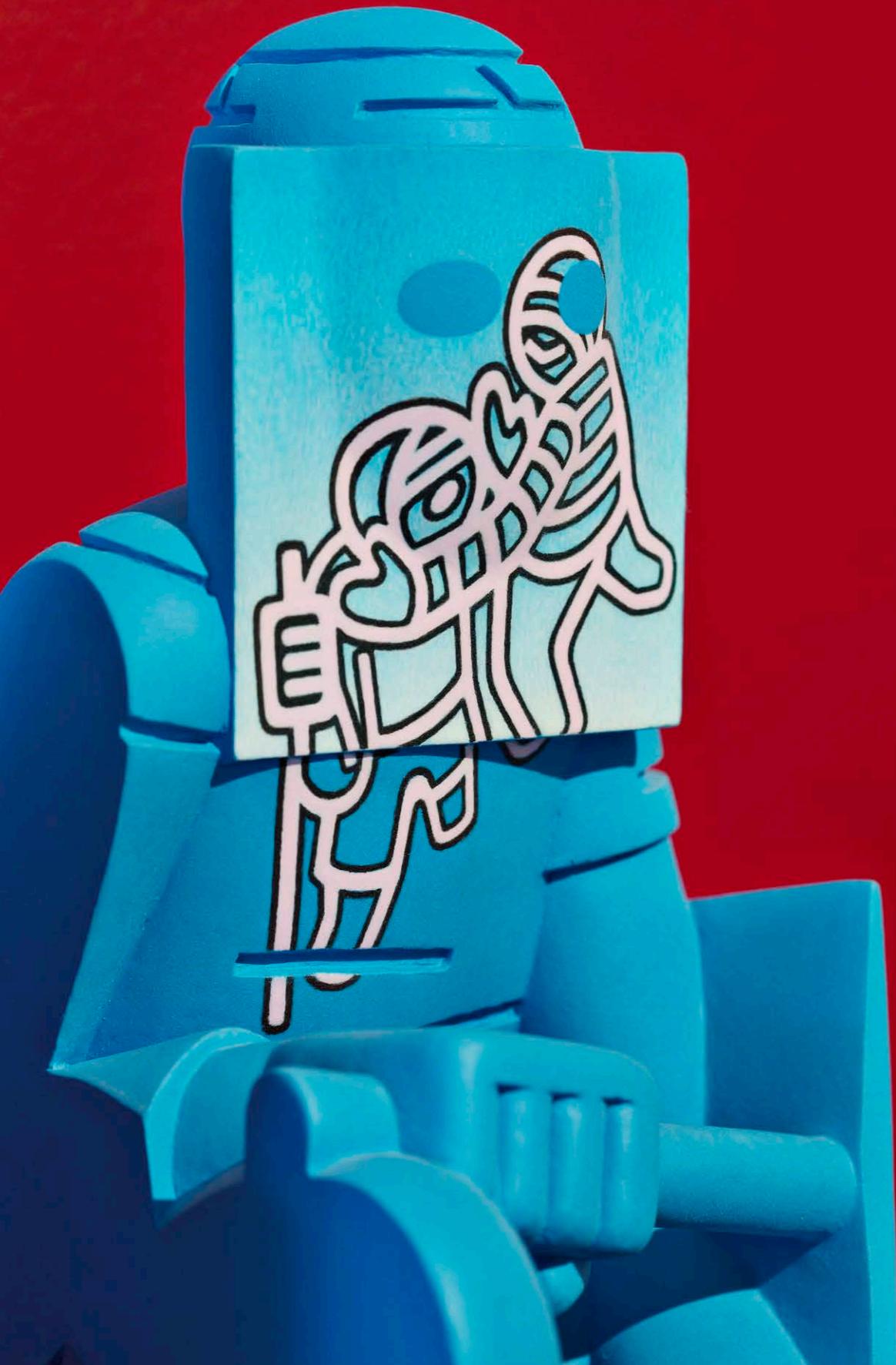
Nils Martin's visual universe, expressed via almost classical, perfectionistic drawing work and a hyper-precise modelling, has over the years been based on stories, experiences and observations from his own cultural background. Both as a younger man – with his participation in kick-boxing, hip-hop and skateboard environments, and from the artistic world of which, later on, he has professionally become a part. With a keen sense of the involuntarily comical in the various environments and situations, and with a good portion of self-irony, he describes completely concrete situations in a compressed form in which he emphasises laughter-provoking and self-

important elements in common, everyday events.

In the series about Cody Lundin and Dave Canterbury, he takes hold of Discovery Channel's reality series, *Dual Survival*. In three interconnected reliefs two of the main characters, Cody and Dave, are described in characteristic episodes from the action of the series. We see situations that indicate the general foolishness of the two characters, but in actual fact kicks are aimed in all directions (including the banality of the constructed conflicts of the concept as well as the viewers who watch fascinated – you and me). In the two sculptures, *Dave Canterbury's Apology* and *Cody Lundin in Norway*, the humour in the low-key irony reaches an almost grotesque level in the encounter between the story – the frayed nakedness of the two characters at all levels in the series – and the super-slick, almost ad-like aesthetics in the actual ceramic execution of the figures.

Nils Erichsen Martin, NO: Dave Canterbury's Apology, 2018. 31 × 28 × 21 cm. Earthenware







Turi Heisselberg Pedersen

Turi Heisselberg Pedersen's many vases and vessels have emerged as one long gliding movement over time, borne by a remarkable constancy of expression. They radiate an inner tranquillity – a particular striking presence in space that is experienced irrespective of the object being strongly dynamic in its formal lines or completely and stoically simple in its volume.

The works have developed in series with particular themes, where a formal problem area is thoroughly examined, and with the same searching gaze inspiration is fetched from both an organic and a more geometrically and culturally borne formal world. This can be crystalline formations and the swollen roots of plants, for example. Or balusters and the spaces in-between them – architectural facade elements that she experiences on her cycle trips through the town.

In an attention-demanding age, where the spectacular fix most often grabs people's attention, Turi Heisselberg Pedersen's works demonstrate a strong insistence on the ability of the actual form to evoke emotions and mood via precise work on proportioning and meticulously adjusted colour gamuts and textures. Her objects retain an essence which in some instances is directly readable in the formal distillation and simplification, but in other instances is also discernible in her more complex and ambitious mode of expression. They are pots that challenge the restlessness and insist on our time and attention.



A striking methodological consistency spanning more than half a century is what characterises Karen Bennicke's work. She often works thematically, but never repetitively with the visual expression in her works. An inspiration, a field of interest is examined thoroughly as a rigorously controlled concept in which the visions freely unfold in her continuous fascination with the relation between two- and three-dimensionality. With a special flair for spatial formation in the sculptural structure, she systematically builds up her works, intuitively and subjectively, and with full control over her clearly defined 'game rules'.

Karen Bennicke's works have ranged incredibly widely in terms of themes over the years. At regular intervals, her development takes her quite naturally to subject- and form-related issues that she has also dealt with earlier. For example, her repeated reinterpretations of geometrically based expressions runs like a strong thread through her entire artistic career. This has given rise to whole series of highly striking sculptural works, one of which, based on city plans of the Parisian arrondissements and carried out over the past five years, should especially be singled out.

A look at the monograph of Karen Bennicke's comprehensive oeuvre, *Spatial Destabilisation* from 2016, bears out this assertion. The works can have widely differing sources of inspiration, but the poetic striving behind the expression – complex or simple in form – is always there as a consistent visual statement that defies simple interpretations. And they always acknowledge the material-based point of departure in the clay and its special potential for texture and colour.





Carl Emil Jacobsen



In a series of sculptural objects with titles such as Powder Variations and Half Pieces Carl Emil Jacobsen examines certain basic constituents of our experiencing and physical sensing of form, texture and colour. The works are not ceramic in the usual sense of the word, but are set in concrete that is meticulously covered with surfaces of ceramic material, e.g. finely powdered brick tile.

Jacobsen starts from scratch in the process: Where does our sculptural pictorial language actually come from? Our conceptions of texture and colour? How does our relation to the materials of nature – or lack of same – influence our capacity for spontaneous sensation and experience, bypassing intellect and interpretation? Via his use of locally collected raw materials, e.g. clay, stone, volcanic ash or brick tile, which he crushes and grinds into pigments with strong texture and a high light-proofness, he sheds light on the integrity of these materials and challenges the observer with an insistent sculptural presence. The objects have an unmistakable archaic feel to them, as if they were some kind of condensed signs from thousands of years of experience. Clear in formal idiom and yet completely

inexplicable. Bearing and borne at one and the same time, massive and hollow, meditatively absorbing and yet with a feeling of function and implement – referential cultural objects at a profound level. Basically essential, perhaps even bordering on the banal.

From this formal position, Carl Emil Jacobsen, with his strong focus on detail, transforms the sculptures so that they comment on extremely topical subject such as the environment, the earth's materials and our capacity to be present in the sensing of our immediate environments.



Carl Emil Jacobsen, DK: Group of Powder Variations. Red Powder #9, 2017, 60 x 85 x 85 cm
Pink Powder #4, 2017, 54 x 100 x 50 cm. Dark Red Powder Variation #2, 2017, 85 x 60 x 60 cm
Acrylic, fiber concrete, pigments from crushed bricks, polystyrene, steel

Pernille Pontoppidan Pedersen

Pernille Pontoppidan Pedersen's particular approach to the material clay and its further processing are fundamentally experimental and unpredictable, borne by a strong will to seek out the unintentional and surprising. She is looking for a showdown with fixed ideas about ceramics and is prepared to let herself be inspired from right and left, sometimes with figurative references to objects we all know, sometimes in purely abstract compositions where 'the story' is the expression of the actual material (e.g. in the work Nickel Dripping from Heights Unknown from 2013). Or she mixes everything together and revels in an almost anarchistic, deliberate ignorance concerning the expression of the end result.

Pontoppidan inquisitively sinks completely down into the mud and lets the body's interaction with the material lead the way forward. But it is not an expressive exercise that in itself puts emphasis on the qualities of the clay in a dynamic now. It is rather a searching for new formal possibilities and poetical expressions that are based on a spontaneous sensual experience of the characteristics of the material just as much as on a visual reading and

understanding of the shared recognisable figures that can possibly be found in the works.

Pernille Pontoppidan Pedersen works assiduously at ensuring all the observer's senses are stimulated in the encounter with the works. She wants the works to meet you with equal amounts of anti-aesthetics and engaging beauty and thereby challenge you in your experience of them. She embraces the errors that arise, creating works that feel both well-known and inexplicable at one and the same time.

Pernille Pontoppidan Pedersen, DK: Monolith 90, 2015/2018, 90 x 65 x 30 cm, Glazed ceramic





Pernille Pontoppidan Pedersen, DK: Nickel dipping from heights unknown, 2013. 36 × 28 × 25 cm
Monolith 90, 2015/2018. 90 × 65 × 30 cm. Honey Pie, 2016. 42 × 100 × 100 cm. Glazed Ceramic



Pernille Pontoppidan Pedersen, DK: Monolith 90, 2015/2018. Glazed ceramic. Detail.

Ole Jensen



Ole Jensen's project is to investigate the everyday – to turn the mundane into something special, as he himself has put it. To make things with their point of departure in the simple functions of daily life and using quite common materials, perhaps looking back at what has been seen before, perhaps now forgotten or overlooked, and thinking it again from the beginning. His process and conceptual development is characterised by the wish to produce poetry and sensuality in the objects, both when it comes to the developing of a design for serial products and when he is working on one-off items for a given exhibition.

The functionality of common things, most often fine-tuned through cultural processing and use over a long period of time, is a strong springboard. When the close connection between form and function is expressed in a utility object it can acquire a genuinely iconic character. Visual form, materiality and practical use are balanced against each other and merge into a poetically indivisible expression.

The strength of Ole Jensen's works lies in his obvious involvement in this. He knows inside out the direct link to the body of the functional objects – and how this is part of our daily language.

In the project Primal Pottery, he plays on this connection and magnifies such elements as foot, body, handle, spout, etc. in a direct, humorous language in a series of different vessels that have the appearance of cultural archetypes – almost humanoid creatures. Here the actual functionality is no longer the message – the works are rather images of their cultural origins.



Ole Jensen, DK: Primal Pottery Project, 2016. Glazed earthenware. Detail

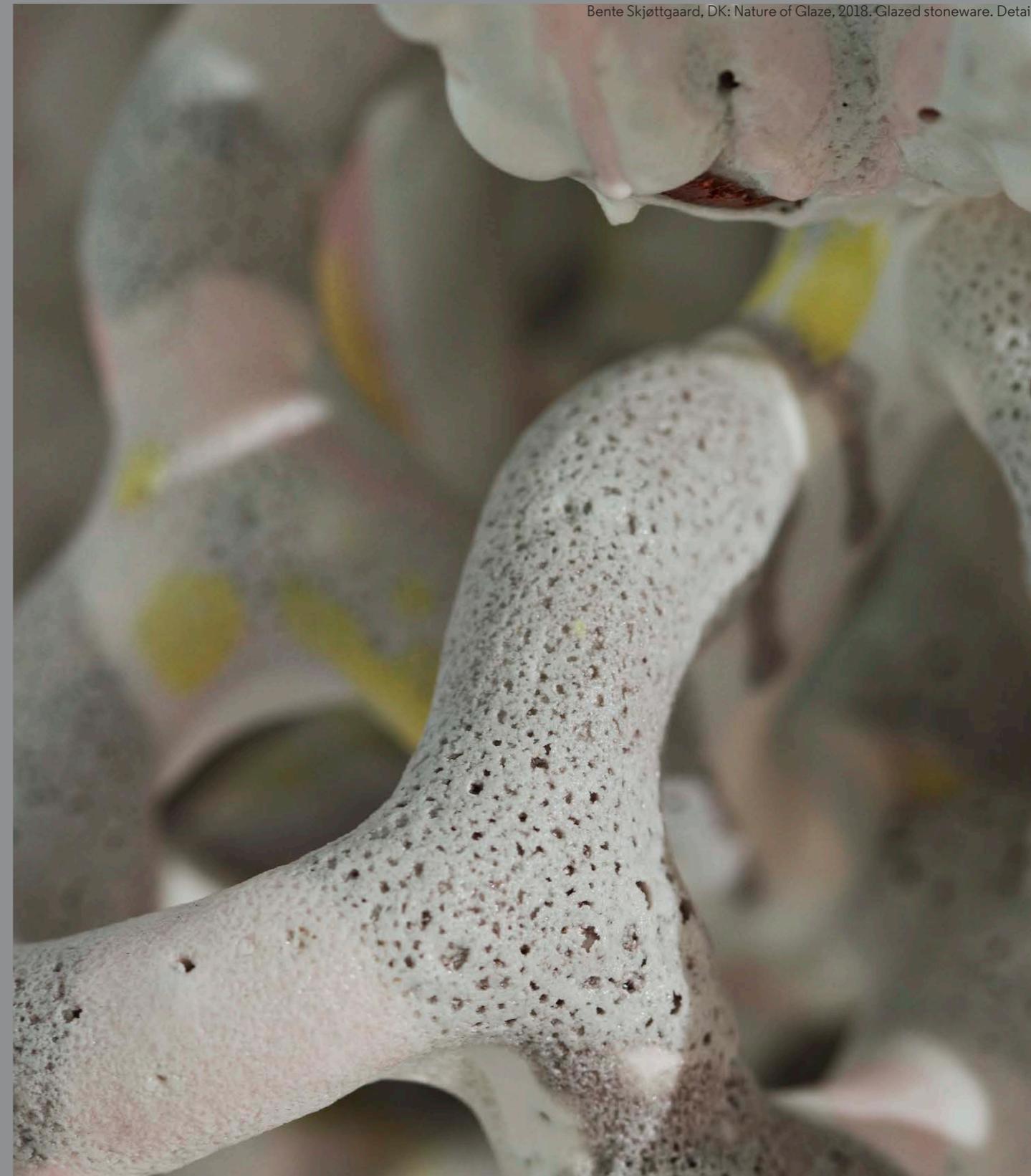
Bente Skjøttgaard

The special thing about Bente Skjøttgaard is the way in which she uncompromisingly and fearlessly challenges her materials. No matter what inspiration underlies the works, it is never a question of a direct narrative description or figuration. Rather the opposite. The intangibility of clouds – the lightness, transience and colour intensity – are used both as positive and negative image to underline the dramatic transformational potential of the clay and glaze through the firing towards an absolutely physical presence and irrefutable permanence.

The order or disorder of nature is present when Bente Skjøttgaard's works balance on the edge of the possible. Beneath the seductive glazes lies the risk of chaos and collapse. She puts the ceramic process to the ultimate test, walks the plank and follows the material to the finish. Allows the experiments to pose questions about all the material-bound, cultural conventions of beauty and ugliness, technical mastery or ideas about the finish of the final expression.

Everything is up for expressive negotiation in Bente Skjøttgaard's work, while she puts the works at stake based on a deep understanding of the transformative force which the firing in the kiln constitutes. The interaction with the kiln takes place in an equality based on her great knowledge and systematic registration of results and experiences acquired over many years. She allows the kiln to decide to a great extent, and the magic found in Bente Skjøttgaard's works derives precisely from the fact that she so obviously loves risking everything in this interaction. Powerful – without caution or reservation. Everything or nothing.

Bente Skjøttgaard, DK: Nature of Glaze, 2018. Glazed stoneware. Detail





Christina Schou Christensen

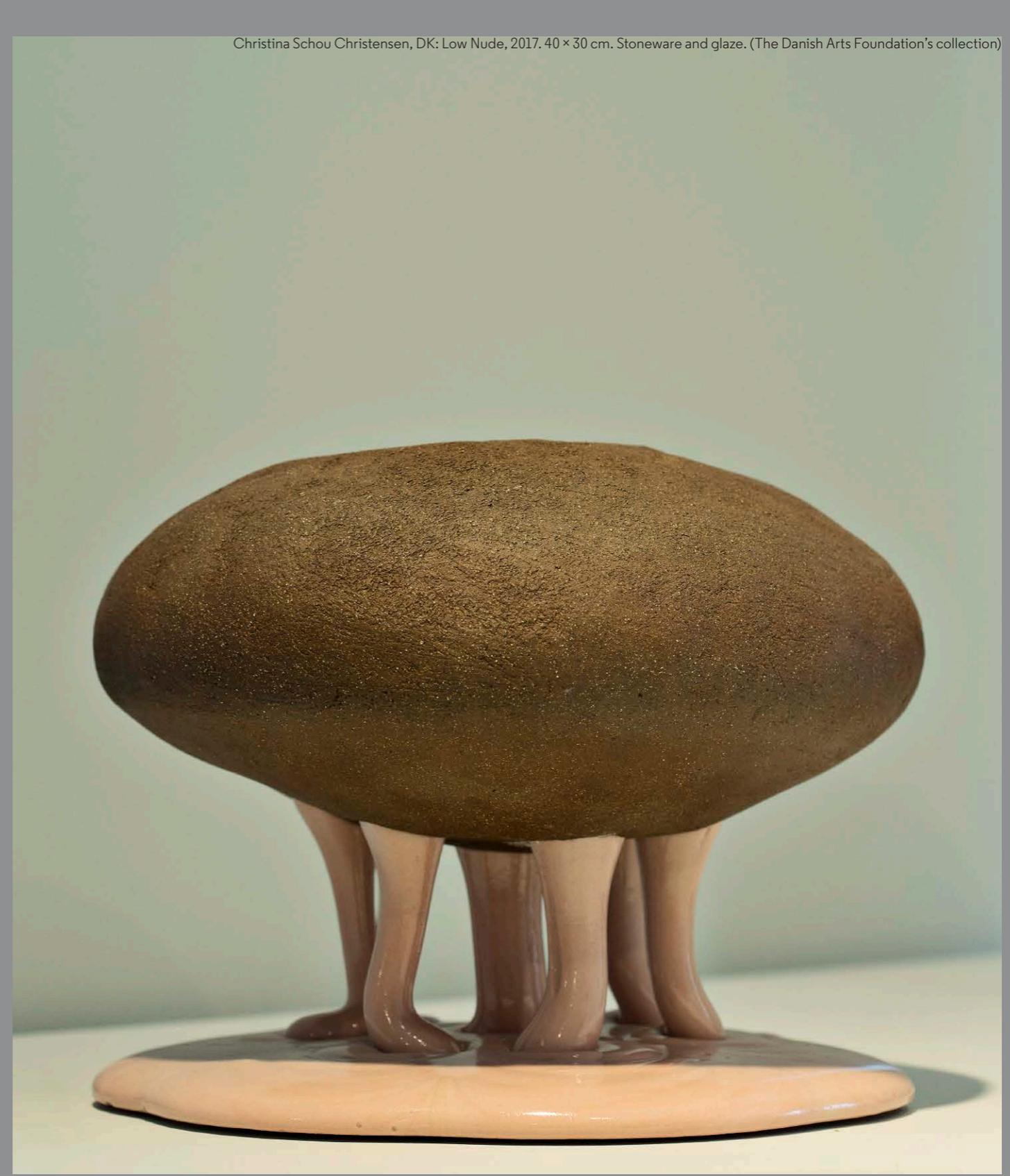


In Christina Schou Christensen's ceramic works the formative qualities of the glaze are in focus. Over a number of years, she has built up a vocabulary of expressions which, at the beginning of her career, basically consisted of a container of coarse clay – full of glaze, from which its viscosity and fluidity were explored by intervening in the melting process in the kiln.

Over the years, her works have attained a striking simplicity. They are easy to read with their congealed movements that retain an essence of the actual fusibility and its fluid nature – like a image of gravity isolated in itself. They are phenomena of nature and yet visually separated from it. As pure materiality, in various meanings, in an age that cultivates precisely the expressive potential of materiality, her works seem to be strictly controlled and paradoxical.

For Schou Christensen, the experiments constantly develop in new directions, with the formal language continually being hazarded in other constellations. As a starting point they are pots on feet, but she regularly explores areas where this association is not relevant.

The objects break free of their culture-boundedness and are able to attain their own playful and poetic nature, e.g. simply by virtue of the distribution of material – clay and glaze – in the individual works. Or they can suddenly assume humorously absurd formal expressions resulting from the unpredictable process. In such instances, they defy interpretation and remain mysterious drawings and reproductions from 'nowhere', while the expressiveness and texture of the glaze most of all signal sweets and cream – lusciously tongue-tempting.





Linda Sormin

Linda Sormin is especially known for her installations, where she builds up large, complex sculptural structures that take over and interact with the specific interior space, its history and content. She adopts a poetic, inquiring attitude to the space, and with clay as the recurring constituent, she rolls, presses and squeezes out works in a fluid process in which everything around her can in principle be included – even bits and pieces of other people’s works. If the installation is in a museum context, selected parts of the collection are often included in this in a total dialogic expression.

She subordinates the technical challenges to her objective and often turns usual methodological techniques upside-down in the process. The clay is fired, for example, after which she continues to build on it with fresh clay in a flow forward towards some non-defined boundary or other. Just how much can the material take? How is the risk built in as an experience, as part of the DNA of the work? What dialogue arises between the sense perception of the observer and the massive piling up of material? When does the work mature as a live field of energy that grabs you in a total

yet exceedingly frail embrace? And that can be smashed to smithereens at the next moment, at the slightest touch?

On display at Ceramic Momentum is the work *Sketch for Wet Dream Architecture*, which is of a more classical, sculptural nature. Here the many facets of the frailty are present in concentrated form, such as timorousness, aggression and threat to survival. One is captured and confronted by a transient frailness and a violent weight. The composition is rigorous and lax at one and the same time. With a visual complexity that cannot be decoded narratively, but must be understood via investing physical/sensual presence.





Marianne Krumbach

Marianne Krumbach operates in the landscape of the emotions. In her delicately modelled interpretations of the close objects of our everyday lives, whether created by nature or conditioned by culture, she has a flair for creating a particularly insistent lyrical mood through the ceramic materials that is immediately eye-catching. She is interested in the innate emotionally suggestive potential of things. The works naturally tell a story, or show well-known elements of one, but it is the observer's own version that is brought alive. We look at an emotional trigger in an utterly constructed description that nevertheless manages to produce recognition in us – feelings that precisely good poetry is able to evoke.

In Krumbach's works there is actually a paradoxical distance between the motif and the final ceramic object we stand looking at – the coloured, hard, shiny, permanent expression – a thing. Where does beauty come into the picture? Is it in the particular depth of colour and texture of the glazes? Is it in the simple composition – its focus on isolating and magnifying what has been experienced? Is it in her understanding of the very character of the

clay, as a means to emphasise the transience in all forms of life? That the repetitively passing has now been made permanent? The weight of the colour? The capacity of the glaze to ornamentally accentuate? Its covering thickness or its semi-transparent underlining of the form in a rhythmical movement?

The works express a honed sense of the extra, almost indefinable dimension which is added through a solidly constructed mastery of the artistic effects – also purely technically. Marianne Krumbach's choices in the use of clay and glaze manage to make the image of a naked branch endlessly naked and a sprig of withering leaves to appear to be quivering full of life.



Marianne Krumbach, DK: State, 2018. Glazed stoneware. Detail

Marianne Krumbach, DK: State #3, 2019. 24 × 32 × 33 cm. Glazed stoneware



Takuro Kuwata

Takuro Kuwata is a clear example of a present-day artist's will and ability to seize all sorts of traditions in a single grasp – provided the framework is rigorous enough, of course. Educated as he is in a traditional Japanese ceramic workshop tradition and aesthetics, and with an equally strong tie to his culture's present, more strident visual expression in a fusion with strong Western influence, it has seemed natural to him to update tradition by magnifying the effects of it all. All the time, he clearly acknowledges – and also refers to in his works, great and small – traditionally well-known techniques, such as ishi-haze (incorporating natural stones into the clay and glaze when firing), kairagi (the ability of the glazes to separate and shrink), and kin-shugi (the repairing of cracks in things).

Takuro Kuwata is particularly well-known for his expressive works that bombard the senses. Pure, strong colours on the coarse clay. Metallic-shiny surfaces of gold and platinum. Thick layers of glaze tumbling down over the clay body in a liberated, scarcely fixed movement – like a wild gesture from the firing, in a controlled playing with the unpredictable. These are effects which seem to be right on

target in relation to the present-day urge to have a quite exaggerated and strident surface, as the enthusiastic response to his works in the social media testifies to, but make no mistake. He also wants to move us in a very low-key, intimate language, as with the tea bowls on display at this exhibition. The radical element of Kuwata's work lies in this vast range, and in the fact that he unceasingly allows himself to be led by a profound curiosity regarding the materials and their infinite potential for expression.



Takuro Kuwata, JP: Group of tea bowls, 2012 – 2016. Porcelain, glaze, pigment, gold, platinum. Courtesy of Kosaku Kanechika





Michael Geertsen, DK: Wall object, 2008. Glazed earthenware. Detail. (Private collection)

Michael Geertsen

‘Dialogue with my historical origins’ could be the ultra-short description of Michael Geertsen’s ceramic work over the past 25 years or so. Early on in his career – in the mid 1990s – he developed, in terms of material aesthetics, a clear, visual language with simple, thrown forms and pure, colour-intense and high-gloss glazes. At the same time, the basis for his particular vocabulary and narration was laid, namely the actual utility culture of ceramics. A personal interpretation of the relatively new artistic movement of the time, deconstructivism, has since been a key issue for him and has proved itself constantly conducive. From the earliest tableaux, which establish themselves somewhere between pictorial still life and sculptural form, there is a clear striving to create a completely new expressive fixed point for the utilitarian archetypes in clay: the cup, bowl, pitcher, etc. In other words, the well-known objects from both the physical and metaphysical spheres of our life.

During this process, Geertsen has developed from mainly geometrically based abstractions on utility objects towards a strong interest in the actual objects themselves, where he re-evaluates the classic form typologies: What is

the essence of a vase? The rounding of the belly and the rim of the finish? What about the position of the handle and its sculptural role?, etc. How is it characterised as an ornamental object? With pop-cultural references and bearing the dictum of deconstructivism in mind – rigour and clear citations from history – he has freestyled in terms of expression, using all the effects available in his box of tools. He has challenged his own perfectionism in doing so, particularly with regard to accepted norms of aesthetic value, but to just as great an extent the counter-images of this: What is kitsch and what is beauty?

Consistent formal anchorage in a sure sense of rhythm, repetition and simplification characterise his entire production, which despite the nature of the individual work – no matter whether the object is large or small or a sculptural assemblage – seems to be one great, restless yet highly cohesive movement.



What is immediately eye-catching about Morten Løbner Espersen's works is the highly textural, often colourful glaze surfaces which, over the years, he has produced in an endless series of more or less complex expressions. His control over the uncontrollable melting process in the kiln and his taming of a microcosm of volcanic wildness and gravity in the material command respect and awe. The works radiate a physical intensity that makes a direct impact on our world of sensed experiences. The primeval material of the glazes and the simple archetypal forms of the vessel are the main ingredients, which when combined create a strong field of tension and interaction between monumental calm and endless dynamism. A clarity of form is the great strength: a pot is a pot is a pot...

But en route in his artistic career, Morten Løbner Espersen has also questioned the purity of the classic pot form, particularly in the series of works with the title 'Horror Vacui'. Here the own iconic value of the pot is transformed into a backdrop for violent ornamental tracery around the form and the glazes are assigned the role of holding everything together. The horror of the void gains the upper hand

in a dramatic sculptural battle between form and ornament.

Throughout Morten Løbner Espersen's oeuvre, his work on the infinite potential of the glaze has become increasingly challenging and bold. He manages a palette with hundreds of colours and textures in developing a language where the idea of the glaze as being a superficial layer becomes progressively erased. He both paints and models with the glazes, and in more recent years his works have often been associated with images of the moon's surface. A comparison that actually is quite suggestive of the strong fascination exerted by the glazes.







Steen Ipsen

Form and ornament are inseparable in Steen Ipsen's works. In both his large and smaller sculptures form is united as a decorative impulse and the ornament serves as an independent shaping of form. Over the years, he has worked, examined and experimented with innumerable themes. In his series of sculptures Organic the works have been intuitively modelled in almost free-rein playing with the concave and convex curves of organic forms, which are transformed into pure, smooth surfaces. These are often decorated with thin contrasting lines resulting in a clearly graphic expression which helps underline and create movement in the very form of the work.

In Steen Ipsen's perfectionistic execution, with the clear, cleansed surface flow of the forms and the perfectly fired glazes – no ceramic chance happenings allowed here – the works rise up in a present-day cultural sphere. They squeeze their way into the history of style somewhere between pop art, the organic abstractions of modernism and the whole weight of the Scandinavian design legacy. As sculptures with an endlessly visually associative range, they have a broad appeal and create a contemplative mood, a feeling of timelessness

that goes straight home in a restless spirit of the present age.

Through the infinite variations on a theme in the works, the inner contrasts of the expression are exhibited. The almost industrial character, the smooth, perfect look are played off against the deeply ornamental impulse. Sometimes pointing directly out into the large space, at other times with an underplayed humour in the formal language that brings you right down to earth again.



Steen Ipsen, DK: Organic Movement 2, 2015, 65 x 60 cm. White glazed earthenware with black decal decoration
(Work made at The Danish Art Workshops)

Marit Tingleff

The archetypes of ceramic culture, the bowls and dishes in particular, are the basis for Marit Tingleff's monumental works. One could well call them a tribute to this strong tradition. But at the same time, precisely their scale and the motif content distances them from the functional sphere of ceramics, positioning them clearly as both painting and powerful sculptural form in a present-day context. But the link between the utility object and the image is important.

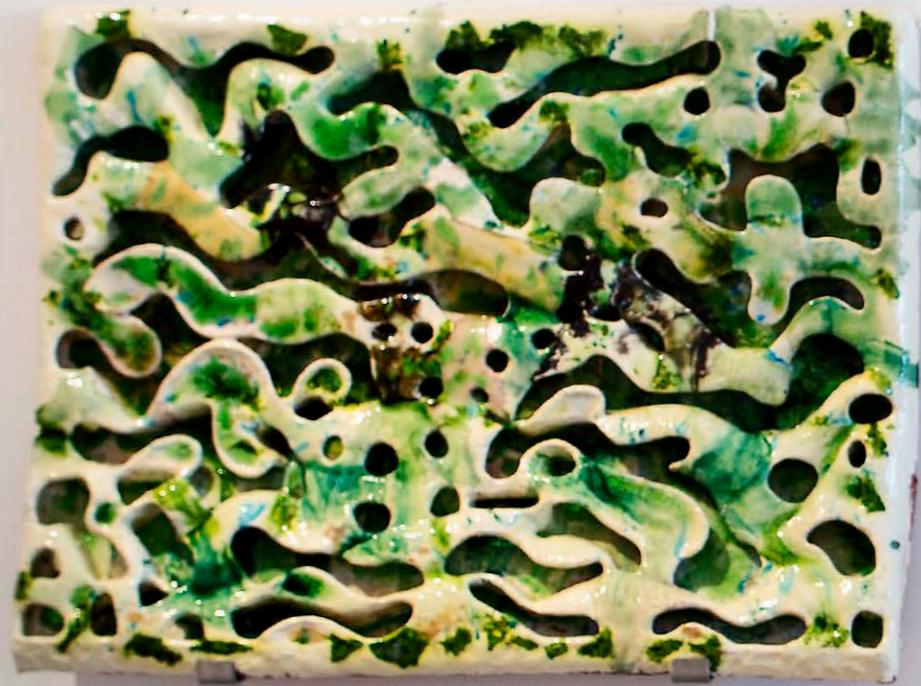
Further, Marit Tingleff's choice of materials is simple and familiar. On the whole, she makes use of classic ceramic materials, earthenware and slips combined to a greater or lesser extent with clear glaze. This obvious cultural deep-rootedness allows her to experiment and expand in all directions.

Using observations made of the landscape in which she moves as inspiration, she forms her works in a fluid movement. According to a plan, of course, but with great spontaneity and direct physical involvement in the handling and understanding of the clay and the slips. With a visually listening attentiveness, she follows a dynamic – a 'give and take' – that is

noticed in the final work as strong presence and a particular energy.

Marit Tingleff's wall sculptures or huge dishes are empathised interpretations of clouds, the movement of water and the weight of the earth in a language where robustness of form and finesse of colour elaboration are united, and where light sections and dark signs arise. Coarse surfaces, ornamental lines in relief break the surface and meet, with deep perforations in the volume of the form. At times with graphic significance and clearly sculptural figuration – at other times with a sophisticated toning of the layers and effect of the colours. In her new works she has incorporated glass, which melts into intense, deep tints and textural patterns in a constant alternation between visual pause and strong dynamism.





Anne Tophøj



Anne Tophøj, DK: Canteen head-setting. Food tray reflection, 2019. Cast porcelain

An unstoppable urge to experiment and investigate new aspects of the functionality of common things in everyday use in relation to their material typifies Anne Tophøj's working method. The dish, plate, table – the meal and even the way the table is laid out with the most mundane of objects – have throughout her career been the central point of departure, out of which she allows new typologies to emerge. She is interested in the values and meanings that can be embedded in things. Either because they contain concrete images or symbols and thereby pass on a history or a message, or because they appeal to a particular use or handling. She selects the plate as a sign of human civilisation and its elevation above the animal world – the plate as a central object in humans' everyday eating rituals.

In a long sequential theme she reinterprets the concept of table-laying and experiments with techniques, surfaces, forms and function at one and the same time. Strict, uncluttered lines and simplicity are combined with lopsided forms and nerdy ceramic textures in new expressions that have often arisen from her desire to turn traditional techniques upside-down and look at them anew. This can,

for example, involve wet-on-wet techniques (where slips of various colours are mixed in a liquid state into lively patterns) or the Japanese *neriake* technique, where forms are built up out of small pieces of variously coloured clay that is pressed tightly together into beautiful textural patterns that clearly relate the nature of the material. In her latest works on table-laying, Anne Tophøj investigates a new context: food in the workplace – the canteen and the food tray. The plate, which like some other tool signals that it is to be used for something specific, has now become a tray, the general form of which enlarges the relation between you and your food consumption. What, why, when, how?

Your place at the table is put in its place; your experience of it put under the magnifying glass. What do you see?



Martin Bodilsen Kaldahl

In Martin Bodilsen Kaldahl's works the fundamental existence in space of objects is brought into focus. He is deeply interested in transforming completely minimal or decidedly insignificant experiences of things into sculptural expressions via a precise, formal fashioning of the material. With a keen eye for the monumental within the insignificant, he allows his works to emerge via a process that creates conditions for an intuitive, spatial form. He bases his work on an overall vision, but incorporates stumbling blocks in the actual construction of the works, so as to let go of the control and avoid a predictable result. As is the case in doodling, where consciousness is only partially present, larger structures are built up out of smaller pieces which, according to the principle of randomness, becomes a dancing sequence that moves up and down – almost reeling out into space.

The sculptural utterances have partially arisen in a mental vacuum; they exist, but could just as well have looked completely different. They express a pure, sculptural movement, the seizing of a now – an image of the moment.

Martin Bodilsen Kaldahl continually experiments and challenges his own ability and understanding of the surrounding world. His approach is non-narrative – he allows the form's own statement and potential to influence and initiate feeling to stand out in a clear and easily decipherable expression which remains open to many different interpretations and experiences. His often spartan use of materials underpins this. The works are often unglazed, but with a worked textural surface that emphasises the rhythmical sequence in the form, or with strong clear colours that add a more insistent dynamism and energy to the works.



Martin Bodilsen Kaldahl, DK: Spatial Drawing #18, 2017, 68 x 49 x 51 cm, Glazed earthenware. Spatial Drawing #20, 2017, 166 x 66 cm, Earthenware with slips (Works made at The Danish Art Workshops)

Martin Bodilsen Kaldahl, DK: Spatial Drawing #20, 2017. Earthenware with slips. Detail
(Work made at The Danish Art Workshops)



Martin Bodilsen Kaldahl, DK: Spatial Drawing #18, 2017. Glazed earthenware. Detail. (Work made at The Danish Art Workshops)





Marianne Nielsen

Marianne Nielsen has an almost scientific approach to her work. She studies phenomena around her, particularly the completely obvious and therefore overlooked, out of an interest in the common-cultural, visual understanding of them. How do we look at hair – experience hairstyles? How and why does a form become iconic in our common language? The profile and nature of a mountain? What do we read into the shape and colour of flowers? In her works it is neither the figuration or narration as such that are in focus; instead it is our perception of the subject or phenomenon that is investigated. She places our stylistic concepts under a magnifying glass – e.g. how they behave in the way in which we refashion the naturalness of nature into culture via designing and use of colour.

Although Marianne Nielsen sometimes consciously verges on the edge of ceramic kitsch, which the flower motif and the porcelain figure are often regarded as in themselves, her aim is basically to examine our assigning of form-related identity to things and occurrences. We become witnesses to a kind of form-grammatical development, as in her close reading of the construction of a given plant. She does not

demonstrate this like some dissection in a botanical table, but as created visual form and rhythm. As a converted ornament. She is deeply involved in the actual basic material of human culture's depictions of the world around us: the echo of the world that strikes our retinas and remains there for ever if the visual interpretation is strong enough.

Marianne Nielsen's absolute mastery of the plasticity of the clay and her profound interest in the ceramic effects themselves are naturally eye-catching and indisputable. Her mastery can be almost magical, but she nearly always underplays the perceptual qualities in themselves and subordinates them to her endeavour to gain greatest possible objectivity and visual clarity in the observation that lies behind the objects.







STAGING
THE

CERAMIC
OBJECT
MOMENTUM

KUNSTNERE / ARTISTS

- Anton Alvarez
- Karen Bennicke
- Christina Schou Christensen
- Morten Løbner Espersen
- Michael Geertsen
- Mia E Göransson
- Steen Ipsen
- Carl Emil Jacobsen
- Ole Jensen
- Gitte Jungersen
- Martin Bodilsen Kaldahl
- Marianne Krumbach
- Takuro Kuwata
- Nils Erichsen Martin
- Marianne Nielsen
- Turi Heisselberg Pedersen
- Pernille Pontoppidan Pedersen
- Anders Ruhwald
- Bente Skjøttgaard
- Linda Sormin
- Marit Tingleff
- Anne Tophøj
- Matt Wedel

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Colophon

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