

In the passage of time - Au fil du temps: Cathy Fleckstein at the Keramikmuseum Kellinghusen

Hans-Georg Bluhm



photos - Bernd Perlbach

in Strasbourg and Kiel. In 1975, she enrolled to study ceramics under Johannes Gebhardt, head of ceramics at the Muthesius School, what was then the School of Arts and Crafts in Kiel. She had met a teacher who was to leave a lasting impression on her individuality as an artist.

Impressions and casts

In 1980, Cathy Fleckstein graduated from the Muthesius School. The subject of her final examination was Space and Plane. She found the source material for this in her spacious living and studio quarters situated in a neglected nineteenth century building, the *Milchküche* in Dahlmannstraße, Kiel.

By applying clay, she took relief impressions of the individual corners and planes, documenting the status of the textures of the walls, including the split plaster and cracked paintwork. In this way she managed to capture an excerpt of space in three-dimensions. The rendering of ageing and the results of a process of decay was enhanced on the surface by oxides and engobes in a range of red and brown shades.

Cathy Fleckstein had thus entered new territory in ceramic surface treatment. From her graduation pieces, an autonomous group of works developed: in the following years, she created an entire encyclopaedia of cracks, fractures, crevices and fissures

Torn and split surfaces can also be found on smaller objects, such as the cubes from 1982, which in that year earned the young artist the Modern Ceramics Prize at the International Biennial of Ceramic Art in Vallauris – recognition and motivation at once.

Ceramic Murals and Wall Pieces

From 1984, Cathy Fleckstein has made mural pieces, a group of works that she has maintained up to the present.

To do this, she uses a coarsely grogged stoneware as the base for a layer of a body she developed herself, on which coloured clays and materials as diverse

In Cathy Fleckstein, we meet one of the most distinctive ceramists in Germany. This summer, she turns 60, which is reason enough to take a closer look at the life and work of this major artist.

Background and training

Cathy Fleckstein was born in Molsheim, a small town in Alsace, in 1955. After graduating from secondary school, she studied German and Romance philology

opposite page-
Wall Impression I - 1984, h 67 cm, stoneware

right -
Hut - 2007, h 19 cm, Ø 29,5 cm
stoneware

below left -
Aufbruch ("Breaking up") - 1982, h 14 cm
stoneware

below right -
Dreamy - 2013, h 20 cm, stoneware

as wood, paper, glass, ash, cinders, metal, earth from the garden and leftover pieces of plaster from the walls are combined to create an image.

Looking at the wall pieces chronologically, changes in technique and composition become apparent: whereas the early works from the 1980s tend to have massive individual elements that appear raw and fissured, the newer works have become more delicate, more sensitive and thus more variegated.

Today, Cathy Fleckstein also works with small – or even tiny – individual, variously shaped pieces of clay, sometimes as a counterpoint to large areas, and she assembles them on the prepared background to keep producing new variations..

The technical implementation is based on knowledge acquired through experimentation that provides her with a large stock of creative possibilities, which, as building blocks, as individual letters can be used for her words, sentences and stories.

Stelae and Cones

Parallel to the pictorial panels, since 1986/87 Fleckstein has been making sculptural pieces, including cones up to six feet tall, stelae and vessel forms. Here too, layered strips of clay predominate today, either cracked like bark or burnished



smooth. Surface treatment remains the central theme. In her own words:

"I usually take my inspiration from nature. To me it is a mirror of the spiritual forces that I listen to. I start out from the point that touches me, for instance growth processes, especially germination, which have defined the cone cycle. At the base, this form is broad, rooted in the earth, it strives upwards and the lines come together to continue their path invisibly in the immaterial world."

Critical Appraisal

Although since the early 1980s, Cathy Fleckstein has been recognised in numerous exhibitions and awards, and although she has been a member of both the renowned Académie Internationale de la Céramique since 1986 and of the German Gruppe 83, she does not see herself as part of the hurly-burly of the arts scene.

Independently of fashionable trends,

she uncompromisingly pursues her ideas, on her own. She studies natural phenomena sensitively and meditatively, interpreting them in fascinating, large-scale narrative objects. She works systematically and with discipline, and has the ability to formulate her work poetically and with craftsmanlike precision in equal measure.

We can look forward keenly to what she will be making in her studio in Preetz in the future!

Hans-Georg Bluhm M.A. is the director of the Keramikmuseum Kellinghusen

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until 6 September 2015

