

# In Studio with Alberto Bustos

Alberto's delicate, experimental objects are bounded by robust forms. Within this frame, however, movement, dance, swaying and growth burst forth. It is as if each new piece were a further homage to nature. We are looking forward to learning how Alberto conveys this sense of dynamism from clay.

Evelyne Schoenmann

*Alberto, I would like to begin with your career. How did it come about that you decided on a creative line of work?*

My family told me that I was always a restless, creative child. Even today, creativity comes naturally to me. It is a part of me. Originally, I consciously started to paint on any surface and in any format. But I soon wanted to explore all three dimensions.

I really came to ceramics by chance, through a course. Even this brief experience was enough for me to sense all the magic of ceramics. From then on, for

*ideas is unavoidable. With every one of your new works I think: Alberto is a born narrator. Your principle source of inspiration is nature, isn't it?*

Perhaps because I was born in a region with a rugged landscape, wild and untamed natural settings have always captured my imagination and inspired me.

I well remember from my time at college that I became friends with the biology lecturer, who with a group of students went on excursions into the neighbouring countryside every weekend.

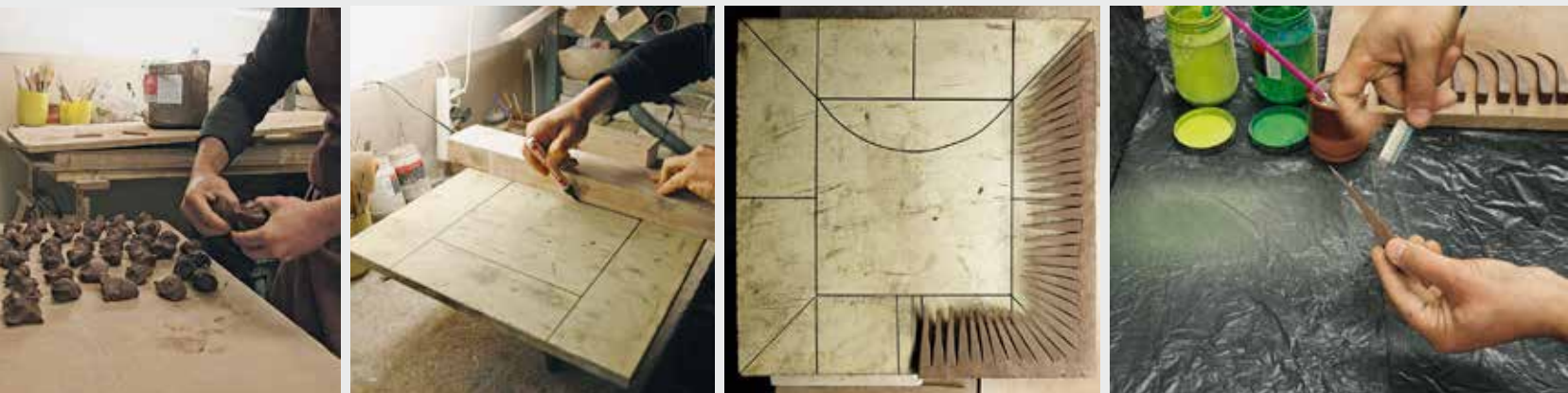
I was particularly fascinated by the minerals, the animal and vegetable king-

doms, I feel that the disaster could still be stopped or even reversed.

*In a Spanish ceramics magazine, I read that you seek to find "impossible forms" in ceramics. What is meant by this? And have you been successful?*

This quote is from an article by Antonio Vivas, the director of the Spanish ceramics magazine. To be precise, he wrote, "In many of his works, he has gone to the limit of what ceramics can tolerate."

In order to translate the essence of these plants into my works, I work with very delicate individual parts. I have had



several years, I divided my time between working in a printing company and ceramics. I experimentally tested all the possibilities in ceramics. Then, five years ago, thanks to the unconditional support of those around me, I decided to take the leap and go freelance, spending my entire time on ceramics. Even today, eighteen years after my first encounter with ceramics, my passion for it is undiminished.

*Speaking about your vibrant wealth of*

*doms and the stars.*

Over the years, all this has made me a lover of mountains and nature in all its beauty. This is why the rapid destruction of the environment that we humans are unfortunately causing is the essence of my work. I try to put myself in the place of the plants and in my ceramics to show their concerns, their fears and their dismay. Inescapably, I always do this with a ray of hope.

*If my appeal helps to shake up people's*

*the opportunity to hear many different opinions of my work and to swap ideas, which I found very satisfying. This alone is a success; it conveys both positive and negative feelings and stimulates the viewer's conscience.*

*As we have already said, your sculptures are made from lots of individual pieces. I could imagine that you have to plan your work painstakingly from A to Z. Could you give us a brief outline of*

*this planning phase?*

I usually begin with a sketch, a basic idea, that I transfer to paper. This serves as a map, a basic idea that I can then develop in white earthenware or porcelain clay. In our example, Geometric Dream, the object looks like a large letter "E". I begin by drawing the main lines of the piece under construction straight on the kiln shelf as a guide. Even in the construction phase, my works are very fragile. As a consequence, I work right on the kiln shelf because I don't want to touch or move the individual pieces any more than necessary. I form each segment individually and then assemble the individual pieces as quickly as possible so that the components do not dry too fast. For each one of my works, I make its own wooden box. I only fix the ceramic object in the packaging with wedges, the greatest support is then the air. I always say jokingly that building the packaging is more time consuming than making the sculpture.

*Let me ask you a follow-up question about your technique. You start by letting the pieces of clay dry a little before you then ...*

.... mould them by hand to form taper-

already been started. In our piece here, there are six layers. You can see the undulations or the upwardly curving ends. I have to ensure this has happened as I add each piece and pay attention that I don't alter any of the pieces that have already been added by mistake. I repeat this step with each individual piece from which the overall work is built up. I use my hands, or wooden or wire modelling tools. This technique is very tricky, by the way. You have to be very careful but still work swiftly, otherwise the piece of clay dries and you cannot use it. To stick the pieces together, I use a mixture of slip and a transparent matt glaze. This makes the joints stronger.

If I plan to use colour in the piece, I spray them individually before I assemble them. For this I use colour pigments and a brush or a toothbrush. When the object is finished, I smooth the outer surface with sandpaper. My studio is very small and the work surface is limited. That is why I put the finished object straight in the unheated kiln to dry. This way it is safe from any unwelcome accidents. For a piece such as the one you can see here, I need about 10 – 15 days from the first sketch to the firing.

Professionally, I am very content. Ceramics has opened doors to me. This has led to prizes in competitions and biennials, solo and group exhibitions, articles in magazines as well as master classes and workshops, including with my Spanish colleague Juan Ortis.

In Spain, ceramics is unfortunately still seen as an inferior art form, which I find disgraceful in view of the large number of ceramists in Spain. That is why it is my aim to gain access to more and more countries in Europe, but also America and Asia, which esteem ceramics more highly. The IAC conference in Barcelona next year is very important for me. At the same time, I will be taking part in an international symposium, also in Barcelona, and displaying my works in a solo exhibition in Gerona.

On a private level, I dream of moving to Sotres (Asturias, Spain). It lies in the heart of the Picos National Park, where the natural environment is the main thing. Who knows how my work would develop there!

Perhaps I simply speak of nature when I am in the city and of humanity when I am in natural surroundings. But is there really a difference?



ing, conical shapes. I then "throw" them to the appropriate length and thickness. So I use a throwing technique, on a wooden board that is curved slightly upwards. So I shape these cones and throw the long side several times onto the board. With each throw, the now pyramid-shaped strip of clay becomes longer. I repeat the process until I have achieved the desired length for this piece, and then I place it immediately in the spot intended for it on the kiln shelf or in the piece that has

The dimensions are 42 x 44 x 8 cm. I fire in an electric kiln with the following firing curve: 4 hours up to 450°C, then straight up to 1190°C or 1220°C. I do give my works names to create an identity for them, but I prefer it if the observers feel free to name the pieces themselves.

*What are your plans for the New Year? Until now, you have mainly worked in your own country. Has the time come to take the leap into the big, wide world?*

**Alberto Bustos**  
Valladolid / Spain  
[www.bustosescultura.es](http://www.bustosescultura.es)  
[www.facebook.com/Alberto.Bustos.Ceramica](https://www.facebook.com/Alberto.Bustos.Ceramica)  
[bustosescultura@yahoo.es](mailto:bustosescultura@yahoo.es)

Evelyne Schoenmann's next interview is with **Ester Beck, Israel**

**Evelyne Schoenmann** is a ceramist. She lives and works in Basel, Switzerland and Liguria, Italy.  
[www.schoenmann-ceramics.ch](http://www.schoenmann-ceramics.ch)