

NEW CERAMICS

The International Ceramics Magazine



02 >

ISSN 1860-1049
US-\$ 12,00 | € 11,00

Charcoal Kiln Firing

(see article on p. 28ff)



Dear Readers of NEW CERAMICS

With her method of firing ceramics in a charcoal kiln, Karin Flurer-Brünger shows us a somewhat unusual way to fire her pots. You can find some of her work on p. 28ff, and on the opposite page you see a few snapshots of the firing and charcoal making process. This is an interesting and ancient technique where the moisture is extracted from wood as it smoulders under the exclusion of fresh air. The gaseous reactive products formed in this process burn, leaving only the carbon structure of the wood. Any other constituents have been driven off but some of them are deposited in the surface of the ceramics in the kiln. The carbon content of charcoal is around 80-90% and has a calorific value many times higher than that of wood as a fuel. For commercial purposes, this process is normally only conducted in other countries. More than 90% of the charcoal on the market in Germany is imported. Several interesting films on the subject can be found online but if you want to find out more about charcoal burning, stacking the kiln, packing in the ceramics and later, the opening of the kiln, you can find the info about the next firing with Karin Flurer-Brünger, the venue and the dates at the end of the mentioned article, on p. 31.

But you can find a lot more unusual pieces and artists in this issue. Starting with the fantastic figures by Janina Myronova with their psychological, narrative background, or Waleed R. Qaisi's abstract images and constructions from the Arabic world, the spectrum extends to include classics of our genre with Mechthild Poschlod's serene, delicately proportioned, well-balanced vessels or Alfred Schliessler's pots orientated towards the lucid spirit of the Bauhaus, presented in a history of a family business.

Our articles from Italy this year represent a special feature too in a way. Thanks to the support of Giuseppe Olmeti from the Associazione Italiana Città della Ceramica (AiCC), the association of Italian ceramics cities, we receive information about recognised Italian ceramists. We started in the first issue of 2020 with a profile of Silvia Celeste Calcagno and continue the series this time with a profile of Pol Polloniato. And we introduce Giorgio di Palma in the next issue, 3/2020.

Symbolically speaking, one might say that the Alps were not simply a mountain range but also a kind of barrier to the flow of information from the Italian ceramics scene to the north of Europe. Thanks to Giuseppe Olmeti, in 2020 it has become easier to overcome this hurdle.

In addition to this, the current issue also includes the latest coverage of exhibitions, events and travel, not forgetting our FORUM article from Gustav Weiß, who was born in 1922, and who not only analyses ceramic artistic events in contemporary fashion but who is also ceramically still active and is working towards an exhibition for his hundredth birthday.

I would like to make particular mention of announcements of competitions and prizes: on the NEWS pages, and also in the supplement on p. 68, you can find dates and contact details. As it is not yet mentioned in detail in this issue or on those pages, I would here like to draw your attention to the general assembly of the AIC/IAC in Rovaniemi, Finland, from 27 – 31 July. Around 300 – 400 participants are expected at the Arctic Ceramic Center (ACC) in the far north of Lapland. As usual on such occasions, there is an interesting programme of talks as well as the opportunity to get into contact with the local ceramics culture and of course to meet and exchange ideas among the international participants. I am sure you know that non-members of the AIC/IAC can take part. Only one meeting is exclusively for AIC members, when internal matters are discussed.

The coming months are full of events, exhibitions and markets. I wish you a sunny start into spring and many interesting visits to some of these events in Germany, Europe and the world.

We'll be back in May.
Until then, very best wishes,

Yours,



Bernd Pfannkuche

*With ceramist and
ceramics collector
Hannelore Seiffert
in Heidelberg
last autumn*



Karin Flurer-Brünger

on black firing and the love of clay

MONIKA GASS

Talent, curiosity, creative energy and unmistakable joy in everything she does and plans: this was what Karin was like when I got to know her more than thirty-five years ago. And that is exactly what she is like today. Someone who as a ceramist is full of energy and vigour. No surprise then when again and again new themes demand new zest, and interior as well as exterior adaptations in her everyday work routines. In the balancing act between her own studio and the university, travelling abroad to far distant countries, between her demanding work as a therapist, giving to people who are currently not well and organising and participating in symposia where batteries can be recharged – to Karin Flurer-Brünger all these aspects are interesting, but above all they are of equal value. For all this you need a good foundation that, while you are learning, reflects various aspects of what you will later be doing. From 1973 –

1976, she spent her apprenticeship and journeyman years at the pottery of Gerhard Seiler, as the last trainee there, in Leutershausen near Ansbach, where at that time tableware in the tradition of the Polish ceramics town of Bolesławiec was being made. In 1985, she qualified as a master potter. Subsequently, she qualified as a therapist and a teacher for pupils with special needs at the University of Koblenz-Landau. Since 1992, she has had her own ceramics studio and has exhibited regularly. In 1997 she was appointed to a teaching post for ceramics in the institute of art history and fine art at the University of Koblenz-Landau. Besides her general teaching commitments, she was also made acting professor working on a project about ceramics in the Jugendstil era in southwest Germany.

I know Karin to be an energetic organiser of symposia on the subject of the educational and therapeutic potential of clay in co-

Vessels, black-fired in a charcoal kiln, h 18, ø 20 cm, and h 28, ø 17 cm, 2012





Vessel sculpture
Aurora Borealis
black-fired in
a charcoal kiln
h 30 cm, ø 17.5 cm
2019



Lüsterhauch ("A Wisp of Lustre") stone plinth, charcoal kiln firing, handbuilt, burnished, h 42 cm, 2019

operation with the ceramics platform Kalkspatz e.V., as an expert on building and on the presentation of her fire sculptures and paper kilns as well as for many educational projects. As an artist she is a member of the German women artists' association GE-DOK, and a writer: in 2017, she published her book *Faszination Ton* ("The Fascination of Clay") published by Modernes Lernen, Dortmund, which today is indispensable in the fields of education and therapy with clay.

In Germany she has initiated, organised and implemented Empty Bowls charity projects, established and conducted regular student exchanges from her university with colleagues from China. A project that deserves special mention is her therapeutic ceramic work with child soldiers in the Republic of the Congo in 2005.

Her own work continues to develop. For instance, Karin won a grant from the 6th international art symposium, Terra Arte, was a participant at the 2016 Contemporary

Ceramics Symposium in Dehua/Quanzhou, Fujian, China, was at Art Academia with other lecturers in Riga, not to mention other symposia and workshops. Seeing new things, trying out something new and different, looking for inspiration and then transforming what she has experienced into something of her own – this fundamental curiosity towards many things refers in Karin's case to continually learning about materials, ceramic techniques, formal, aesthetic, artistic and contemporary stimuli, which she simply absorbs, transforms and with her typical individual style brings to life in her ceramics. She has received recognition for these achievements, for instance, in her nomination for the Rhineland-Palatinate Prize for crafts in 2014 and her invitation from the International Ceramics Magazines Editors' Association to Fuping / Xian, China as an International Ceramics Expert in 2010 and 2013.

So Karin Flurer-Brünger is well known in the world of ceramics – although she is not always on hand in Germany. She is often on her travels, well prepared long-distance journeys to the Congo, Iran, Uzbekistan, Myanmar or South America, always in search of cultural experiences, meeting people, looking for traditional ceramics and crafts, regional architecture and beautiful special pieces that absolutely have to go into her private collection and which make these trips unforgettable.

Karin's work with clay is very intense. Her studio displays pieces from various phases of her creative career and many results of her wide-ranging tests with and for special forms and effects, often those achieved by firing in open flames or with smoke. This is precisely where expertise and experience in ceramics can be pinned down – in the difference between moderate or successful results.

Karin's saggar fired, smoke or raku fired pieces display a wonderfully balanced play of colours, their liveliness enhanced by the calm and rhythm in her forms. Thrown or handbuilt pieces, burnished or faceted surfaces, soft, delicate surfaces or powerful wheel-thrown vessels inviting daily use are all made in her studio. At the exhibition in Trier for the Rhineland-Palatinate State Prize for crafts and in Mainz, glossy black ceramics were on display, at the Landesmuseum Mainz in 2019 for the exhibition *VIELE WEGE EIN ZIEL* ("Many Pathways, One Goal") celebrating 50 years of crafts in the region, there were also exquisite pieces by Karin showing a brilliant red.

Karin has achieved many things in her career but not many people know that she has devoted herself for many years to experiments in charcoal firing. In an authentic charcoal kiln, she subjects her carefully formed ceramics to heat and fire, protected by wire cages that resist the pressure of thirty cubic metres of wood, where temperature, smoke and the smouldering gases transform the surfaces into unique pieces with a lustre-like iridescent gleam. Thrown or handbuilt with masterly craftsmanship, with the marks of the hand left intentionally and unfinished edges tolerated, the smouldering fire gives the unfinished pieces their final polish at 400°C, often higher. In a charcoal kiln, wood is transformed into charcoal with air excluded. In this process, known as pyrolysis, the layers of wood covered with grass, moss and clay, gradually carbonise. The kiln must never burn brightly, it slowly heats up to 275°C. From this temperature on the interior temperature of the tightly packed wood slowly climbs to 350 – 400°C and more. The volatile constituents of the wood – usually beech – vaporise and charcoal is formed with a carbon content that may rise to as much as 80 – 90%, depending on quality.

The majority of the charcoal we use is imported. Classic firings of kilns by charcoal burners as they have been done for thousands of years are rarely carried out professionally. They are often done as a historic reenactment or as event firings in a cultural context, however. In Erfweiler, in the Rhineland-Palatinate of Germany, every year the period from Ascension Day to Whit Saturday becomes "Charcoal-Burners' Week", and in the kiln area an imposing mound of 35 cubic metres of beech wood is stacked up in traditional fashion. For ten full days, the craft of the charcoal burner is celebrated, the kiln is watched day and night and gaps continually filled so that an open fire does not break out.

Fire marks, nuances of colour and carbon absorption form a harmonious contrast to the previously serene ceramics. The fire marks that emerge in the charcoal, which can never be fully controlled, leave their own characteristic handwriting depending on the random position and the alignment of the ceramics in the kiln. It is precisely this random element – desired and calculated by experiment although unpredictable, that is exactly what the artist is looking for. She loves these unique pieces more than planned, reproducible works – they are so individual and yet unmistakable, leaving the fire unharmed, inspirational, approved, gifted to the potter by the fire.

Clay, formed by human hand and subjected to fire, purified, now durable and lasting, for future generations: is there a lovelier symbol of human achievement than such a unique piece, the body formed from soft material, having survived trial by fire, now fire-hardened earth! Not only the wisdom of the Far East uses this symbolism.

It is thus no wonder when Karin Flurer-Brünger first holds these vessels that have survived the firing in the charcoal kiln that she calls them her "children".

MONIKA GASS

is a ceramist and art historian. She is in the committee of the AICI/IAC, where she represents Germany.



Vessels, black-fired in a charcoal kiln, thrown, cut

31. Januar until 15 March 2020 in the exhibition "line-up" - Unique pieces by Karin-Flurer-Brünger from the charcoal kiln together with work by other lecturers from the Art Institute of the University of Landau at the "Villa Streccius" in Landau, Rhineland-Palatinate
<http://www.villa-streccius.de>

Next charcoal kiln firing in 66996 Erfweiler bei Dahn, Germany:
Friday 8 May 2020 stacking the charcoal kiln
Saturday 30 May 2020 opening the kiln, removing the ceramics
Presentation from 11 a.m.

Sunday, 31 May 2020 - 11:00 - vernissage: work from the charcoal kiln - til 28 June 2020. Karin Flurer-Brünger, Ann-Kathrin Krächan, Juliane Steca
Organised by the "Werkstatt Gallery", Erfweiler
<http://www.galeriediewerkstatt.de>

Images of stacking the charcoal kiln are on p. 2.
Video clip on charcoal kiln firing from 2015 <https://youtu.be/MFmgFqkhpz0>

KARIN FLURER-BRÜNGER
Schlüsselstraße 6
76889 Klingenstein
Germany
+49 (0)6349-7574
www.kfb-keramik.de
k.flurer-bruenger@t-online.de

