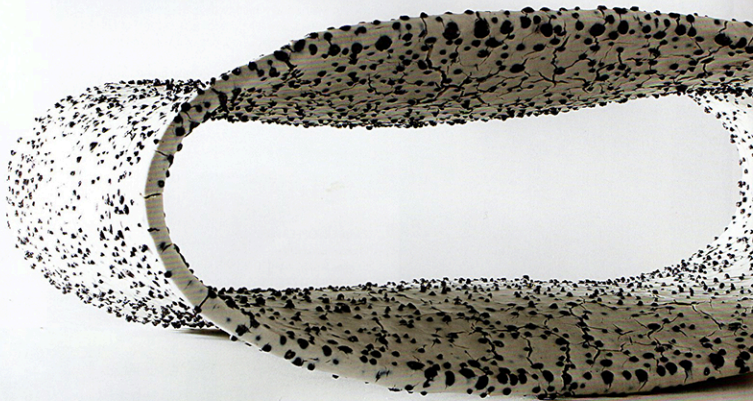


CHRISTA ZEITLHOFFER

What was
What is
What's coming

HELENE KIRCHMAIR



For the thirtieth anniversary of her work in ceramics, I met Frau Zeitlhofer in her studio in Vienna. She talked about her career to date, described where she is at the moment and cast a glance into the future.

Christa Zeitlhofer was born in Scheibbs, Austria, in 1962. As a child she spent many hours in the claypit opposite her parents' house, playfully kneading and inventing forms. In 1981 she graduated from the technical school for ceramics and stove building in Stoob, Austria. Over the following ten years, she immersed herself in ceramic practice with various ceramists in Austria, took an M.A. in social management at Vienna University of Economics and Business and is a graduate culture manager trained at the University of Vienna. She ran ceramics workshops for people with special needs and worked as a manager for nonprofit organisations. In 1992, she set up her studio, *keramik_art* in Vienna and has subsequently devoted herself to art. Her ceramic works have been shown in leading national and international exhibitions; in 1998, she was awarded a Judges' Prize at the 4th International Ceramics Biennial in Cairo. She has participated in ceramics symposia in Innsbruck, Austria and Kecskemét, Hungary. Christa Zeitlhofer was the founder and

opposite page -
vista IV, 2013
porcelain, mixed media
50.5 x 23.0 x 26.5 cm
photo - Brigitte Voglhofer



president of the society for the promotion of international ceramic art in Austria (ICCA-International Contemporary Ceramic Art, 2004 – 2012) and vice-president of the artists' house association, Gesellschaft bildender Künstlerinnen und Künstler Österreichs (2014 – June 2022). In addition, she has organised and curated exhibitions in her studio. Since 2021, she has been a member of the International Academy of Ceramics (IAC). Zeitlhofer lives and works in Vienna and Amstetten.

Among her works are individual free-standing abstract ceramic sculptures as well as serially produced and multi-part groups of work. They are all exclusively constructed in a geometric vocabulary of forms. Ellipses, squares or rectangles, which in the third dimension become ellipsoids or elliptoids

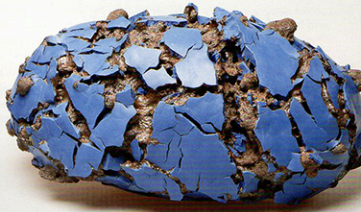


above right -
rosarotquader
("pink rectangular
form"), 2021
porcelain, engobe
mixed media
49.0 x 45.0 x 8.0 cm
photo - Joe Malina

(a word invented by the artist), columns, rectangular blocks or cubes, and which may mutate to form combinations. Initially, she made flawlessly crafted geometric forms that demand perfection to work. They always have an exterior and interior through notches or perforations, and she has a mastery of the ability to combine form and surface to create a unity. The surface is not decorative, not like a coating, it enhances the form. She often works with contrasts. Then followed a series of works demonstrating her enjoyment of experimentation, where she initially made use of mixed media such as rivets, enamel paint, iron or gold leaf, finally integrating mixed media in her geometric formal repertoire.

In contrast to her first works, the ones made in a mix of materials are unique through this approach and the making process and are thus unrepeatable as such. However, she is able to unite these two per se contrary poles to form a harmonious whole and has thus created an intrinsically coherent oeuvre.

"Dear Christa, I have very much enjoyed exploring your journey and your ceramic practice. In the



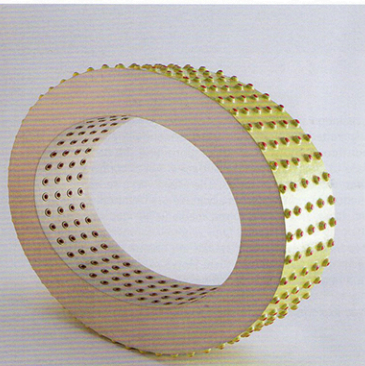
blaueier des lebens/ellipsoide, ("blue eggs of life/ellipsoids") 2019, blue porcelain, mixed media, l. to r. 20.7 x 13.2 x 11.0 cm. 23.2 x 14.7 x 11.3 cm
photo - Foto Schuster

works created over the past thirty years, changes have been observable as well as continuity...?"

"My way of working has changed developed over the years through my curiosity and love of experimentation. It has moved away from a traditional aesthetic, away from perfectly executed ceramics to a freer approach, the 'beauty of the imperfect'."

However, she has remained faithful to her vocabulary of forms, which runs through her work of the past thirty years like a leitmotif. Her works still have titles like "cube", "rectangular form" of "hemisphere". But now they have rounded edges, openings, fissures and bubbles yet losing none of their clarity and precision, which are still indispensable components.

lou II, 2004, stoneware, enamels, mixed media
50.5 x 38.8 x 12.0 cm Photo - Brigitte Voglhofer



Zeitlhofer makes use of various characteristics of the material. During shaping, she adds a mix of various combustible substances to the stoneware or porcelain until a multilayered effect of various materials emerges. Organic materials introduced to the clay body burn out during firing and leave voids that permeate the piece. Others boil up and form bubbles, causing the interior to burst through the rigid shell – the surrounding porcelain skin. A torn, burned out, destroyed texture with openings, eruptions, fissures and roughness. It would be wrong to assume that this all emerges at random, Zeitlhofer skilfully manipulates the cracks. Nevertheless, the artist is finally forced to let go, to surrender some control, and leaves the final "stage of production" to the heat.

Her works are not "perfect", the surfaces of the sculptures awaken associations with organic surfaces, are full of concealed energy and emotions, induce us to touch them, and they guide the viewer again and again to new ways of seeing them, inviting interpretation and exploration, inviting us then to "grasp" them. Images come, images go.

They are like silent witnesses, like static snapshots of a fugitive state.

"You have called a continuing series of objects 'egg of life/ellipsoids':"

Zeitlhofer: "Collected materials enriched layer by layer create fractures and tension of an unimaginable force. I thus consciously give myself up to a process in which the experiment, the incalculable, defeat, failure and creativity all affect me in condensed form and staggered in time. This process is accompanied by subconscious energy. An egg as a symbol of life, birth and death, close together like creativity and failure. "Both are manners of existence only common to humans" (Wirth, 2000).

"The possibilities when working with clay are absolutely infinite. I think the methods and materials chosen have a lot to do with one as a person. After all this time, all the experience and developments you have gone through, what would you say about the way you work?"



würfelelliptoide 3tlg. (cube ellipoids 3 part), 2020, porcelain, engobe, mixed media
l. to r. 13.5 x 13.0 x 12.0 cm. 11.5 x 12.0 x 12.5 cm. 12.2 x 12.0 x 12.3 cm photo - Foto Schuster

"The source of my inspiration is nature and what it offers us humans in mysterious ways. Millions of years ago, the forces of nature laid down rock formations, spat out lava, caused floods and earthquakes, deposited earths, clays and sand, brought forth spherical and other bizarre forms, as well as a complex system of growth. This affects our existence even today, provides the means of our existence and our social life. Since primeval times and into the present, clay has played an essential role in our history and society.

"From the heritage of nature, I draw various collected materials and layer them in plastic porcelain, which has the property of being able to pass energy on to me as soon as I hold it in my hands.

"It enables me to feel hidden, invisible structures deep inside the material and under the surfaces and to store them as haptic memories that can evoke emotions. One may find reliving and feelings in my objects and in their invisible structures, possibly in ourselves, in organisational units, society or the economy while it continues to seethe inside the earth and in my kiln.

"The existence of my ceramic objects begins when they come out of the kiln and are born. From then on they are immediately there and live their existence in my haptic cosmos, in my studio or with people who appreciate my objects."

Many thanks for inviting me to talk to you, I wish you a wonderful anniversary among your family, friends, collectors and other interested persons. Very best wishes to you for the future

Text excerpts from: Über die Verletzlichkeit der Oberfläche ("On the vulnerability of the surface")

Dr Eva Daxl, 2021

HELENE KIRCHMAIR

works as a freelance ceramist in Austria and Italy. Besides her studio work, she takes part in international symposia and exhibitions.



Exhibitions and events for the 30th anniversary

take place from 6 – 8 October 2022, daily from 2 – 8 p.m.

6 October 2022 Exhibition opening 30 years of **keramik_art**
with Performance: Daliah Touré

8 October 2022 Japanese tea ceremony with
Chado Urasenke Tankokai, Austria, 2 to 8 p.m.

Details subject to change owing to Covid prevention measures.

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