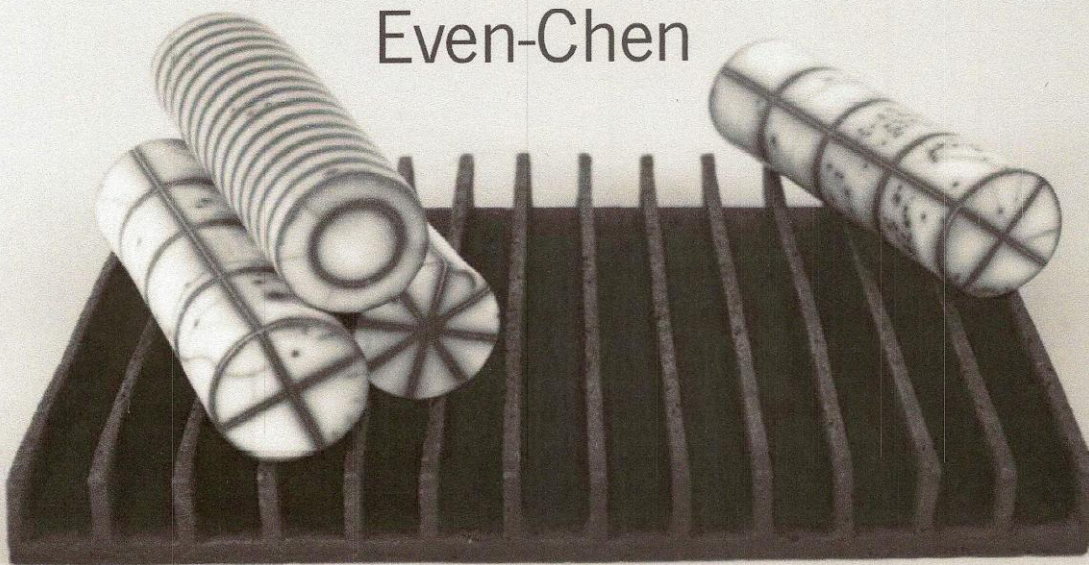
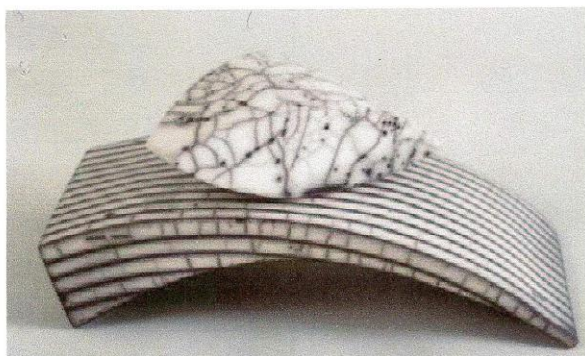


Simcha  
Even-Chen







Previous page top: *Rhythmus*. 2011. 32 x 32 x 27 cm.  
 Previous page below: *A moment before...* 2009. 11.5 x 30 x 24 cm.  
 First Prize in the Competition of Design and New Forms in Ceramic,  
 LXXIX Exhibition of Pottery and Ceramic of La Rambla, Cordoba,  
 Spain, 2009.  
 Above: *Balance*. 2010. 21 x 43 x 23 cm.  
 Right: *Double Sequence*. 2008. 13.5 x 60 x 40 cm.  
 Below: *Illusion*. 2008. 17 x 80 x 40 cm. Winner of  
 the 26th Gold Coast International Ceramic Art award,  
 Gold Coast City art Gallery, Australia, 2008.



ISRAELI ARTIST SIMCHA EVEN-CHEN ENJOYS A BUSY LIFE AS both a scientist and ceramist. She has been considerably successful in each of these disciplines which can be seen to come together in her unique clay sculptures. She was awarded her Bachelor of Science in 1981 and her Master of Science in 1985, in the field of Human Biology at Tel Aviv University.

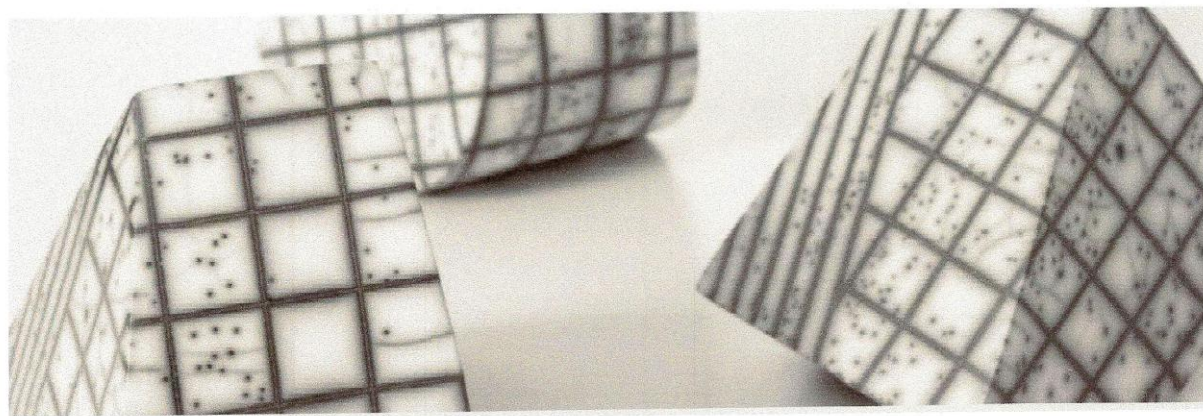
She spent the next two years working in a Biotechnology Company as a Project Manager but, in 1993, was forced to give this up as she was experiencing an illness that necessitated surgery. Following this, she needed several months of recuperation and it was during this time that she developed an interest in pottery, spending two years doing courses in ceramics at the Rehovot Culture Foundation. Also, following the period of recuperation, she began her Post Doctoral studies at the Biochemistry Department of the Hebrew University Medical School in Jerusalem and for a time was both studying for her PhD as well as developing her skills in pottery and establishing the studio from which she still works. During this same period, she gained a position with the Medical School which she has held ever

### Article by Gordon Foulds

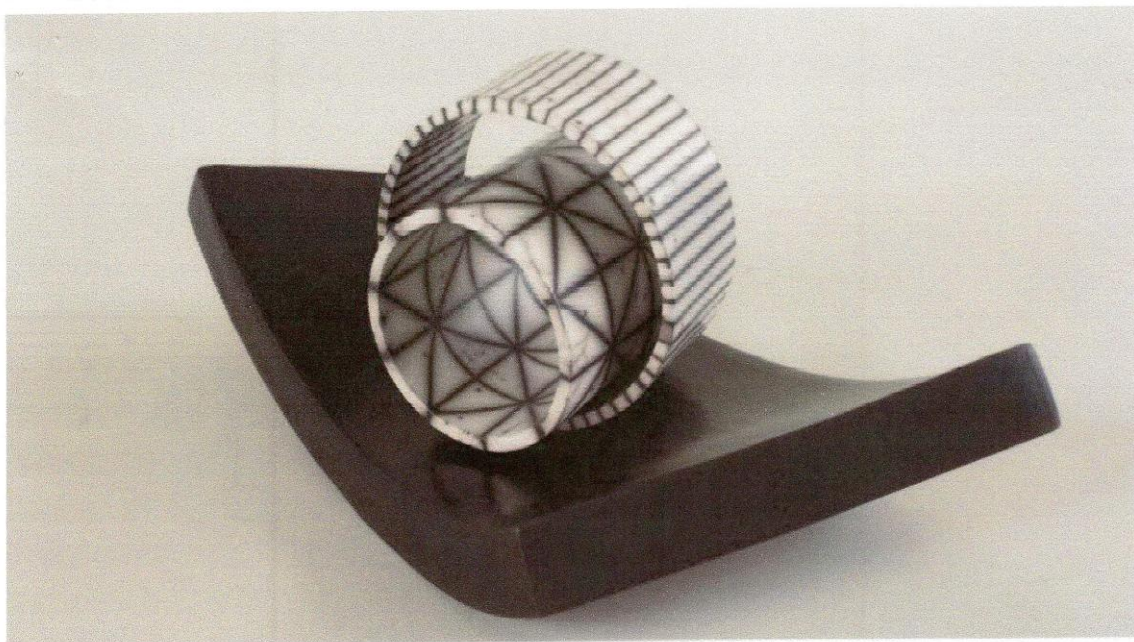
since, now holding the position of Senior Scientist.

Her first studies in pottery included both wheel throwing and the preparation of glazes. She says "My knowledge as a scientist contributed considerably to the study of glazes." She says that art and science provide her with a continuous stimulus and have broadened her creative thinking. "It has taught me that patience and perseverance lead to improved results."

Following two careers simultaneously has meant "hard work", science in the daytime and ceramics both "nights and weekends"; she is not prepared to give up either. "My analytical mind is well attuned to the intuitive and creative possibilities; they successfully combine and complement each other."







Above: *Triple Balance*. 2010. 17 x 44 x 27 cm.

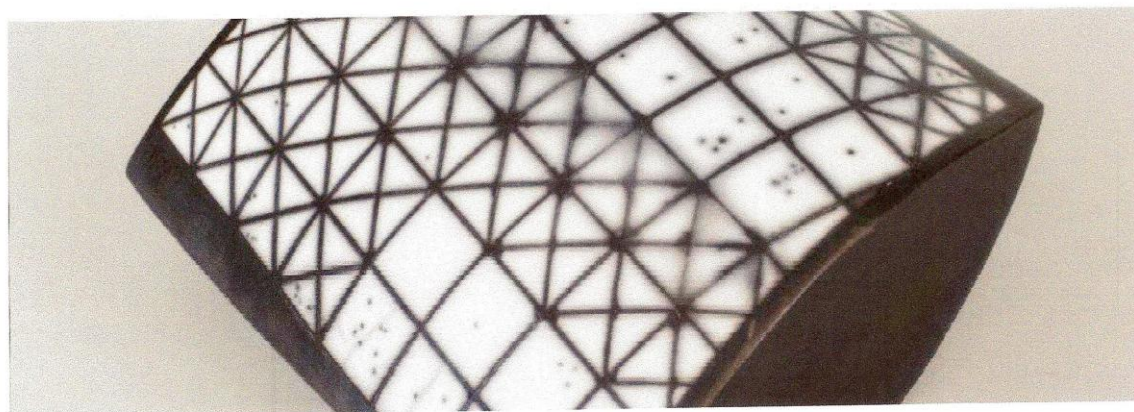
Below: *Vacancy*. 2008. 13.5 x 30 x 30 cm.

From the time that she established her studio she worked in a number of techniques before eventually finding her hallmark technique and unique look. Initially she focused on wheel thrown works and developed her own range of glazes, all being fired in an electric kiln. She reached a stage, however, where the work no longer pleased her. She felt that she had nowhere further to go with it and decided that she was no longer interested in the glazed surface. She then discovered firing using sawdust and felt an immediate affinity for it. "Here was a way to achieve a tactile surface of depth and great richness, without glaze," she says. "I loved the soft quality created by low-firing and knew that I had at last found my path." Over the last four years, the majority of her work has been sawdust fired. This is a most interesting technique and is closely akin to smoke firing but is known as nude firing. In its most basic form, it produces totally random surface patterns. In a more advanced form it can be made to develop controlled patterns in combination with the random markings.

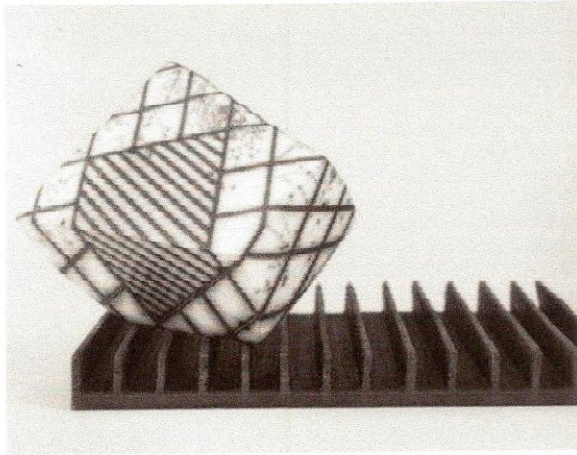
By treating each piece with metal salts, a wonderful range of colours can be achieved, including

oranges, reds, pinks, soft pastel colours, greys, blues, creams and blacks. In using this firing technique, each work develops its own unique and abstract surface colour making it a 'one-off' piece. After she had mastered this process sufficiently, she decided to stop her current throwing methods and began to make slab-built pieces using the naked Raku technique. Each piece is carefully planned and its execution meticulously carried out; the location of the grid and the planned defined pattern is calculated with a devised end in mind.

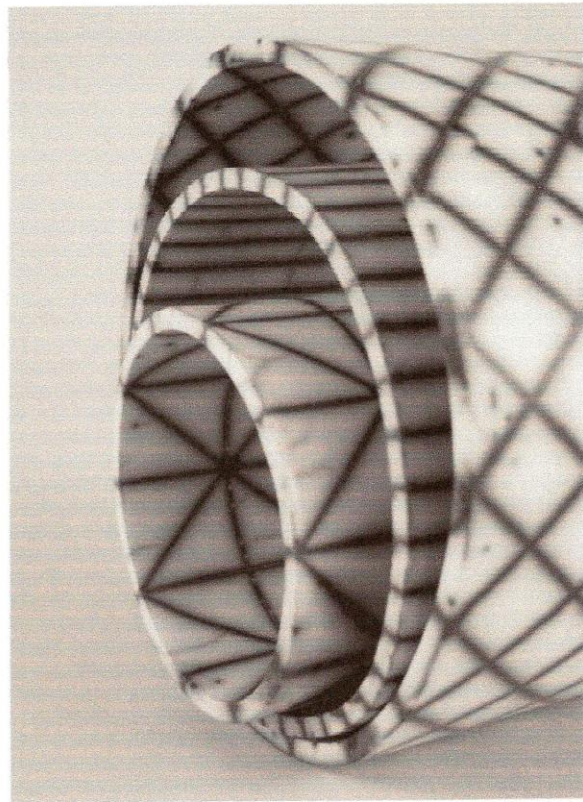
Each piece is slab built using a mixture of porcelain and stoneware, then burnished and, when bone-dry, a thin layer of terra sigillata is applied. The piece is then bisque fired to 980°C, after which, the designed sketches are drawn on to the bisque-fired objects and taped on to the sketched parts of the surfaces. At this point, the Naked Raku begins. A layer of resist slip is applied, followed by an additional layer of Raku glaze. The resist slip creates a fine space between the clay and the glaze and







Above: *Just before...* 2009. 21 x 20 x 24 cm.  
 Right: *Inside Outside*. 2010. 21 x 21 x 15 cm.  
 Below: *Split*. 2008. 12 x 80 x 60 cm.

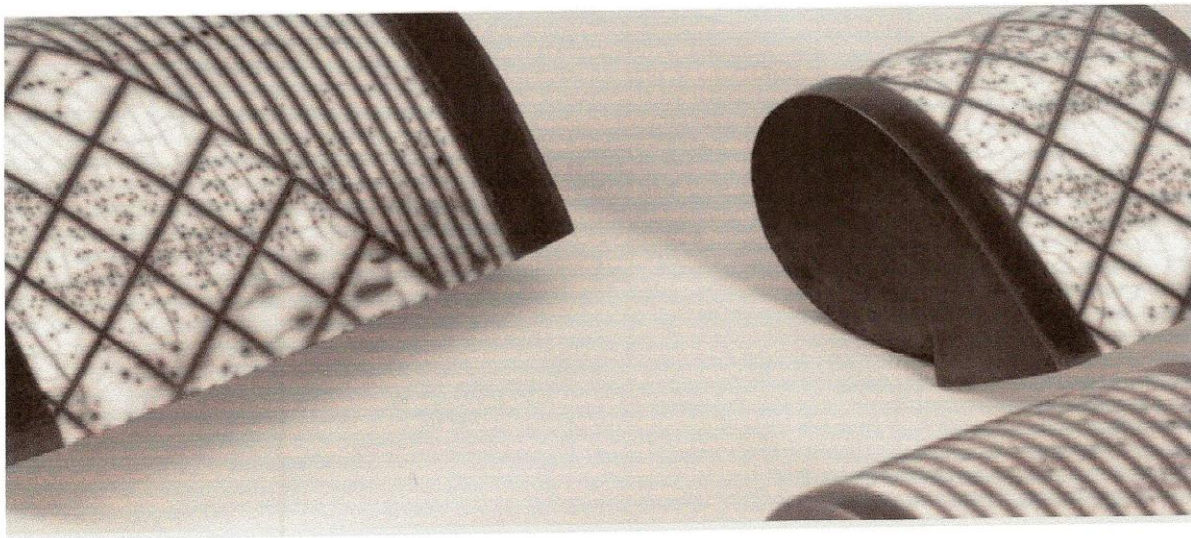


prevents the glaze from melting on to the clay surface. Before firing, the applied tapes are removed and the works are then fired in a Raku gas kiln to 1000°C before being removed to a smoke chamber. Here, the smoke penetrates the cracks of the outer glaze and continues through the slip glaze and into the clay; this leaves irregular crack-like patterns and spots on the work's surface. The exposed areas not covered with slip and glaze are carbonised during the process and they turn black. When cold, the glaze peels off, hence the term 'naked', followed with slip washing; when dry, a layer of wax is applied.

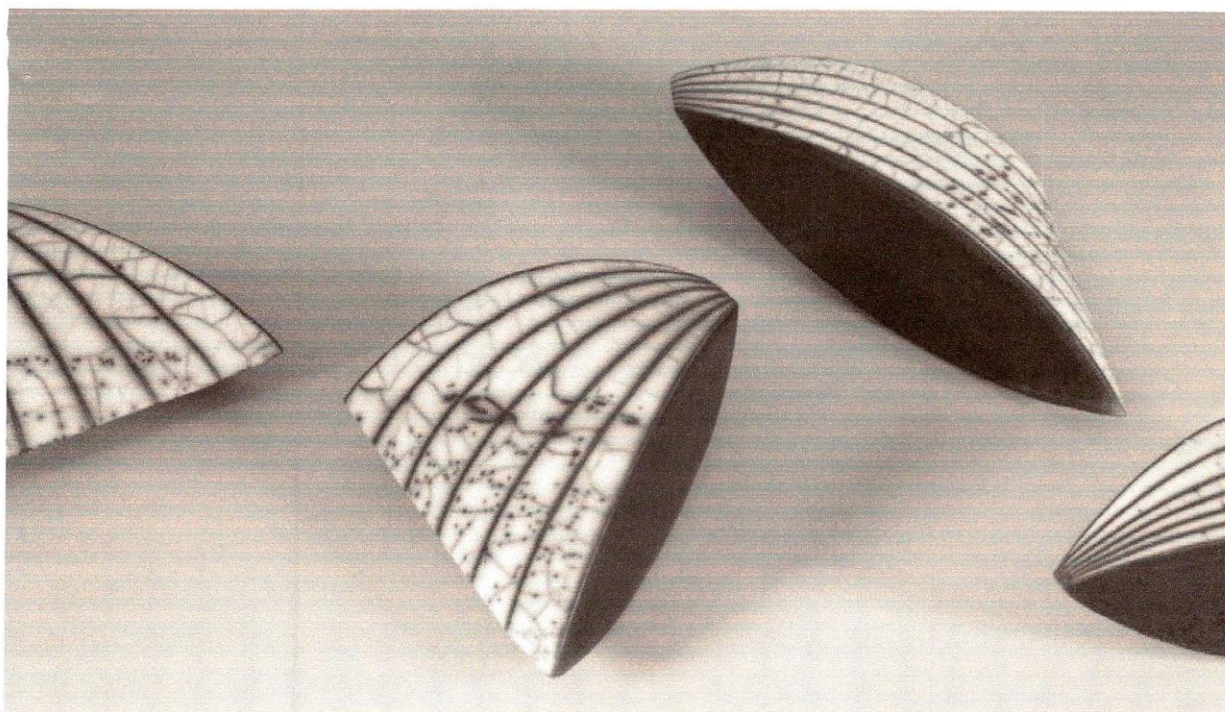
All works included here have been made using this process. *A Moment Before* is a lovely example of the whimsy that we find in much of Even-Chen's work. Four cylinders sit rather precariously on a black carbon base; the single cylinder on the right of the image appears to be seen at the moment before it actually falls off the base. The three cylinders on the left side of the image also appear to be balanced rather precariously as the top one will force the two beneath to separate and roll away.

The total image appears to be a moment frozen in time before all of the cylinders roll away. This work won First Prize at the *Competition of Design and New Forms in Ceramics* at the 79th Exhibition of Pottery and Ceramics of La Rambla at Cordoba on Spain in 2009. Since she first began exhibiting her works internationally, she has been accepted into many major exhibitions and has won many major awards.

In 2008, she won the 26th Gold Coast International Ceramic Art Award with the piece *Illusion* where we see three identical looking pieces. The surface patterns are varied, yet remain similar. These two works







*Dispersion. 2008. 10 x 124 x 60 cm.*

significantly illustrate the results of nude firing with the lines resulting from the application of the resist slip and the taped lines. The other random abstract markings show where the cracks and tiny holes have allowed the smoke to reach the piece before the layer of slip falls, revealing the beautiful and unique finished markings. Another interesting feature of the work is its total lightness. Even-Chen says "I construct simple, precise shapes to enclose and contain space. The works are slab-built, which gives the impression of solid and massive bodies, when they are, in fact, surprisingly light and delicate." *Illusion* exemplifies her personal ceramic philosophy. She adds, "The grid design used in my ceramic work is borrowed from the graphic millimetric sheets that were used in presenting scientific results", so that in a sense, she combines here the results of her studies in these two discrete disciplines.

In *Balance* we see two pieces entirely different from each other in appearance; the bottom piece combines both the planned and the unplanned outcomes, yet the planned lines dominate its total appearance, while the top piece shows an entirely unplanned abstract surface. The pieces balance and support each other making each one necessary to the other. This suggests a possible metaphorical meaning, being that for our existence, we are all dependent upon each other. *Just Before* is another one of those wonderful moments frozen in time. We see the top piece seemingly balancing precariously on its base at the moment before it falls to the floor. This is another example of the whimsical nature of much of the artist's work.

*Split* is another piece in which the surface patterns on the two smaller pieces come together but in a diagonal form in the larger piece. In all of the artist's work, the relationship of the pieces to each other is of considerable significance. In *Rhythmus*, the placement of the pieces is wholly necessary to make it successful. Although this is a fairly obvious one, she says that the placing of each piece is crucial to its meaning; additionally, the physical placement of each piece is frequently reflected in its title.

Simcha Even-Chen has developed an international reputation in the last decade, with works having been exhibited in Spain, Austria, Switzerland, Slovenia, Korea, Croatia, US, The Republic of South Africa, Australia, and of course, in her native Israel. She has won major Awards in Australia, Spain and Korea and has works in major collections in an increasing number of countries. She seems set to continue her career on the world stage.

She sums up her work by saying, "The dynamic of opposites is expressed in a way that juxtaposes the precise and controlled building and graphic design of the ceramic work with the unpredictable firing technique of 'Naked Raku'."

Gordon Foulds is a writer on the arts from Queensland, Australia.

All pieces are a mixture of stoneware and porcelain, slab-built, burnished with terra sigillata and Naked Raku fired, unless noted. All photos by Ilan Amihai.