



Origins

Jordi Marcet and Rosa Vila-Abadal

Overview.

Article by Eva Rodriguez

THE CATALAN CERAMISTS JORDI MARCET (1949) AND Rosa Vila-Abadal (1950) started their ceramics studies at the Massana School and their design studies at Eina School, both of which are situated in Barcelona, Spain. In 1967 they worked in the workshop of the ceramists Jordi Aguadé and Jordi Ancil. Later, they founded several workshops together with other ceramists, the first being *Am Terrissaires* (1969), where they worked on the contemporaneity of the shapes and the techniques of popular Catalan ceramics. After that, they founded *L'au Cal·ligràfica* (1973), where they started working with clay and the design of pieces for everyday use. In 1977, the two artists decided to found their own workshop, *Quart Creixent*, and they have since then continued the work with clay and the design of pieces for practical use.

In 1989, Marcet and Vila-Abadal initiated their artistic career as ceramists exhibiting their pieces in galleries and museums throughout Europe and in countries such as Brazil and Japan. From then on, the artists work their pieces with high-temperature white clay and with colours of their own production.

Without abandoning the distinctive traits that characterize their pieces and make them unique as artists, Marcet and Vila-Abadal are currently developing a new and more abstract contemporary reflexion in which the pieces flirt with more sculptural design, retaining their characteristic shapes and line for which they are known.

What surprises the spectator in the work of Marcet

and Vila-Abadal is the force of the drawing and the colours of the pieces which carry a strong initial impact. It is not very common to find ceramists who embellish ceramics as profusely as they do, even though traditional ceramics in Catalonia are very colourful. In most of their work, the two artists have confessed that they dress the pieces with a second skin (a singular feat in ceramics that otherwise tends to be very sculptural) and that far from looking like something added to the form or a simple support, this skin wraps the piece and blends with the form to create a new whole. This communion form-pattern has been a distinctive trait in their work. As time passes, it is inevitable that there will be changes in their artistic outlook as a consequence of their constant development as creators. One, however, always recognizes the work of Marcet and Vila-Abadal.

If we follow their work through the years, the pieces still maintain a certain ambiguity that is contrary to our usual perception of the form. Their pieces have always subtly drawn a fine and invisible dividing line (a border they have already passed) between sculpture and the useful meaning of the piece. A dish, a bowl, a bottle, a box, an urn... when the spectators contemplate each piece, they cannot help asking themselves on which side of the line the piece is situated. The ambiguity arises from that: sometimes we only want to take pleasure in the mere contemplation of the ceramics that we see as a sculpture. At other times we have the impulsive wish to



Overview: *Seedbeds (Foreground)*. Stoneware fired at 1260°C. 43 x 83 cm/lea. seedbed.



Above: *Overview*.
Below: *Eyes*. Stoneware fired at 1260°C. 2 m/dia.

touch it and use it, because in it we see reflected the everyday use of a beautiful container.

This sensation can only be awakened by one of the premises of the two artists: "A piece has to be beautiful but at the same time possible". And in the thorough and exhaustive work that is done in the design of each piece, every piece is thought, studied and debated before being materialized. Teamwork, complicity and mutual understanding have never left space for errors or surprises.

The two artists have always worked with clay at high temperatures and without the potter's wheel. They elaborate their pieces with moulds, which give them more freedom in the design and creation. For these reasons, all of their artistic work transmits subtlety, elegance and purity in the forms and sobriety in the lines, removing each piece from brute handling of the material and conferring an apparent or virtual fragility. Like true alchemists, the artists elaborate their own craft colours with natural pigments and minerals.

Indeed, the colour is an essential part of their work. Often difficult to truly identify, the colour wraps the piece with unique iconography. Geometrical forms, animals, man and a narrative tone are present in many of their pieces, all becoming symbols transformed from the artists' interior world, symbols inviting to ponder, sometimes to denounce when stirring critical sense, to humour, to irony, to complicity or to tenderness.

Throughout their work, the *leitmotiv* has always been modernity, the century in which we live now. They use a contemporary language to reinterpret other cultures and other times or to show us the everyday things or the uncertainty of the future. With *Origens – Origins* – Marcet and Vila-Abadal initiate a new stage in their artistic career. The pieces are more abstract, more conceptually complex and with a marked sculptural appearance, at the same time playing with the pictorial world and with a modern and committed artistic discourse.

Origins was born with the wish to lead us towards the discovery of ourselves. With ceramics as a means of artistic expression, the reflection on our origins takes us back to the biblical Book of Genesis. Through

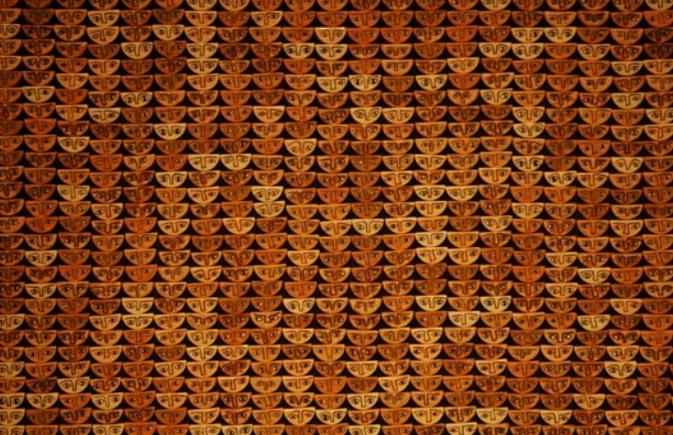


a totally contemporary view, the artists arouse the answer to all of our existential questions with a staging fundamentally marked by sobriety, serenity, *chiaroscuros* and a contemporary language. All of the staging is formed by large ceramic platforms that outline a material and conceptual route for the spectators, taking them through different stages of existence in a kind of initiating journey towards the discovery of the origins of Earth, man and art.

Where is the origin? We spectators initiate the journey in the dark and in the silence. A silence marked by the rhythm of the beautiful melody that Eleni Karaindrou composed for the soundtrack to *Ulysses' Look* by Theo Angelopoulos. The sound of silence marks the beginning and guides the rhythm of the steps in our physical and spiritual route in tireless search of answers that give sense to our existence. A feeble light, almost imperceptible initially, yet seemingly growing gradually more intense, directs and centres our look solely in what is the essence. The rest is merely shadows.

We set off. Four large vertical platforms, a first stage symbolizing absolute darkness, nothingness, void materialized in minute ceramic pieces, matt black and velvety feel. They are small, nervous strokes dying an enormous cloth, an impressionist painting sprinkled with only five marks of colour scattered randomly: Light is born.

We continue. Even though blackness and darkness



Top: **Globalized.** Stoneware fired at 1260°C. 1.05 x 1.4 m.
Above: **Bark.** Stoneware fired at 1260°. 80 x 80 cm (ea. panel).

Top: **Emerging.** Stoneware fired at 1260°C. 1.10 x 1.10 m.
Above: **Fingers.** Stoneware fired at 1260°C. 1.10 x 1.10 m.

prevails, from the humidity of the stagnated waters in small ceramic trays, the spectator senses the first signs of vegetal life: primitive forms, shapes, the first colours, the first elemental points of white, green, red and yellow. A still very feeble light softly wraps the shapes of the pieces. The incipient appearance gives way to the eruption of colour. The darkness seems to be shyly retracting to give way to light and to show the splendour of nature, represented in a third stage by the multiplicity of small pieces drowning in space: the exuberance of organic forms, crowned with vibrant colours, green and red, makes us participants in a new moment. The change can be sensed. A fourth stage indicates it and is represented by a sea of fingers; fingers with feminine shapes that seem to wave with the wind, a white tapestry of silenced voices that shake our spirit: they show us the way and they invite us to action.

Is the end is getting nearer? Will it be the exact answer to our doubts? We continue our journey. Our steps merge with the black felt. All of the pieces seem to flow before us; a large panel hanging lightly culminates our journey. The intensity of the light and the soft colours blurs the shapes and a subconscious urge impels us to leave the penumbra and to get nearer to see clearer. Only by looking closely do we discover an enormous *reredos* covered with small faces, a puzzle of triangular shapes fitted perfectly that ascend towards

the surface of the deep dark place that we have left behind. Many faces, deceptively cloned, puppets with undefined traits although they manifest themselves with their eyes closed and a serene pose. All of the faces are actually a sole face and they announce a not very distant future: the birth of a new Man.

We continue the journey, our journey, in search of the future, of the uncovering of consciousness, now guided by the light of a white felt path. The puzzle of infinite faces ascending from darkness with their eyes still closed is set against its own reflected image on the opposite side of the wall. There, in its reflex, we discover the kaleidoscope of small triangular faces multiplying infinitely with their eyes wide open watching for the end of the path. A big wall rises defiantly; a completely white wall obliging us to stop our steps before the entrance to the discovery of something new.

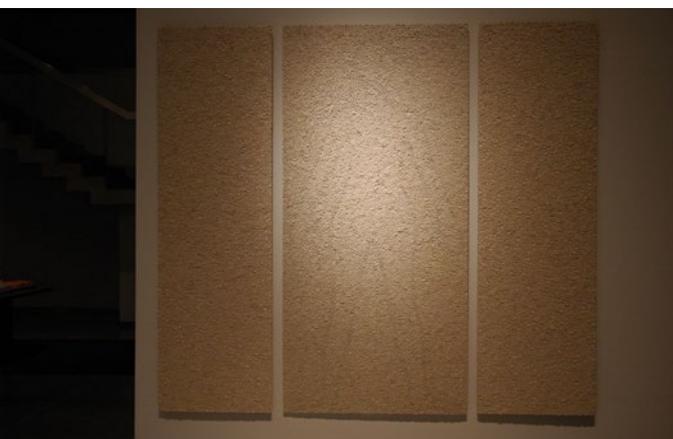
Behind the wall there is light. Our eyes, accustomed to the darkness, contemplate a wall of infinite faces, small semi-circumferences with well-defined traits, different features individualized multiplicity. Each piece is an 'I', is a 'that', is 'the other', is a 'we', is 'society', and all have their eyes fixed on our final destination.

We continue. On a path of white light, our steps – accompanied by the eternal melancholic melody – are guided towards the wakening of consciousness.



Top: *Balls*. Stoneware 1260°. 23 cm/dia. ea.

Above: *Tryptych of the New Human Being*. Stoneware fired at 1260°C.



Six spheres flank one side of the lit path. One by one, the six spheres – with purple colour and satiny touch, crowned with a delicate and meticulous clay work – erect themselves in rejoice to show our symbols. Now that we have gained conscience through our journey, we recognize the concepts understood by ourselves. We see our feelings reflected when we contemplate an overflow of hearts and delicate small innocent mouths whispering. We identify ourselves with a group, a tribe, a border, a flag among all of those crowning the second sphere; our look caresses the word, the desire to communicate, symbolized by a colophon of letters; and with our hands we go over science, gracefully sculpted in a dance of numbers; the sixth and last small symbolic universe culminates with a hyper realistic image of elements that symbolize progress and technology.

On the other side of the lit path, the concepts symbolized in spheres become a materialized offering: feelings, emotions, love; religions, faith and beliefs; tribe, peoples, cultures; words, letters, communication; science and knowledge; technology, modernity and progress... all placed on trays of a firmament of stars: a micro-universe drawn with a delicate line.

We continue. The light path leads our tireless way towards the end of the journey. A large, imposing *redos* rises before us. White on white, the small clay cells form an asexual human shape that only defines

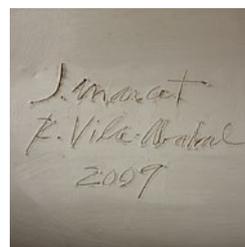


Humid (Foreground). Stoneware fired at 1260°C. 1.10 x 1.10 m.

its outline by the means of the light. Astonished, we can not do anything but focus our eyes on the halo and feel a certain uneasiness. As our consciousness awakens, we discover the arrival of the New Man. We discover ourselves.

During our journey, some eyes were watching. In the middle of the installation, a large circle packed with eyes. The penetrating look of the numerous and incredibly identical pieces collide with ours, now wiser, and the perfect circle infuse a state of peace in our soul, a feeling of infinity. Finally.

Right: *Signatures*.



Eva Rodriguez studied Catalan philology at the Universitat Autònoma of Barcelona and made a postgraduate course of cultural communication. She is currently working at the Linguistics Policy Department of the Government of Andorra and writes critical