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Guy Van Leemput

Belgium

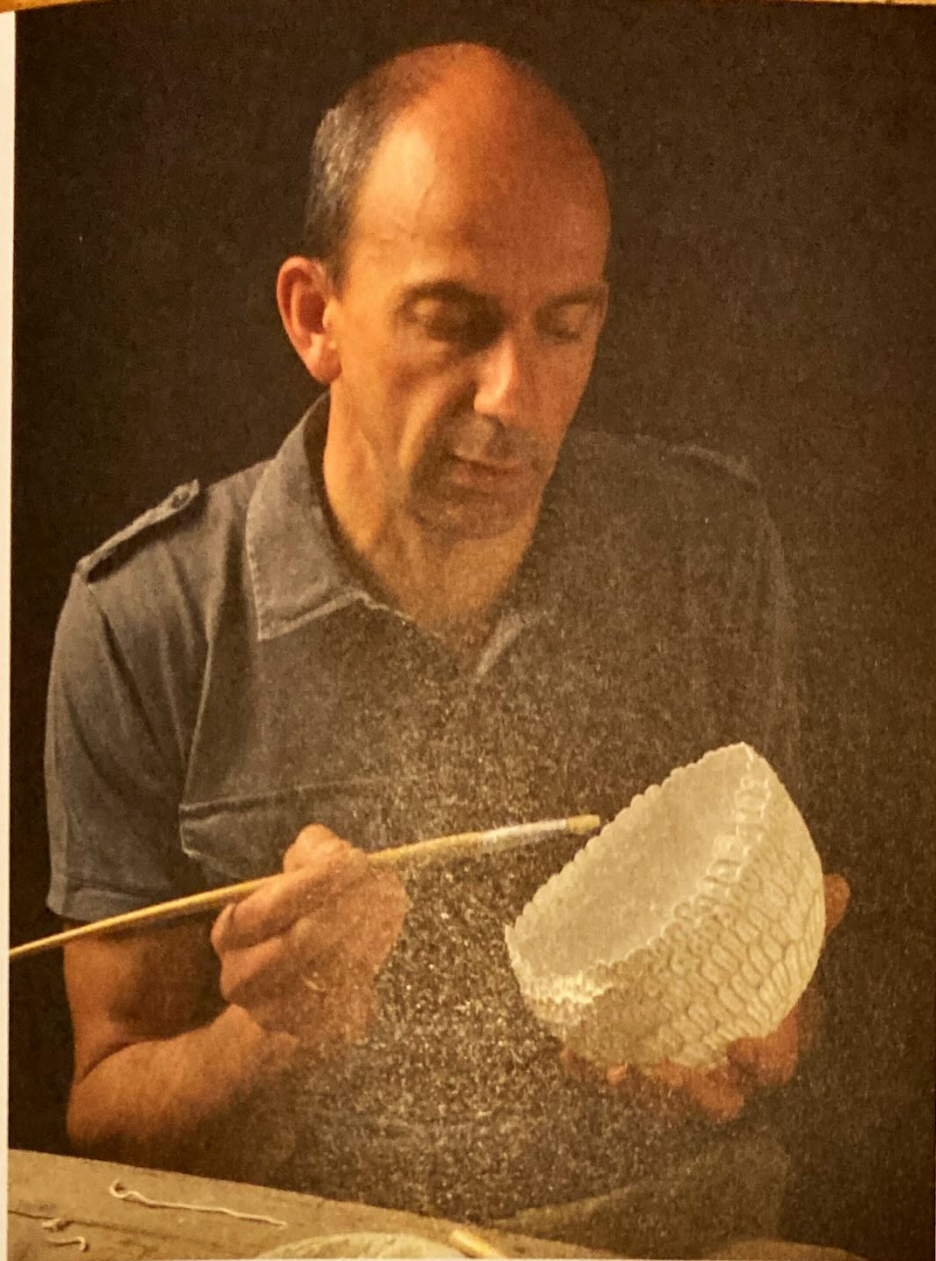
Guy Van Leemput's original life path did not include clay. He studied mathematics at university, became a teacher, married, built a house and had three children. But then, when he was thirty-five, his best friend became very sick and died, which acted as a catalyst for serious change.

Earlier, when Guy was preparing to go to university, he went to a neighbourhood potter and asked if he could help him without pay, 'just to learn things'. The potter agreed, and Guy spent three months helping in his studio, and even when university started he continued to help out in his spare time. He had a very genuine interest – though it was subjugated due to other more pressing commitments. But when his friend died, his priorities were re-ordered. 'That was the moment I decided not to dream of ceramics any longer but to do it. I took good tuition and attended master classes. Then I began to work with clay intensively. I have had my own workshop now for five years,' says Guy. 'For me ceramics is much more than a choice. I do not have the feeling that it came on my path; it was more something I could not avoid. It is very difficult to know why I am attracted so hard by ceramics. Perhaps it is about taking risks and letting go: hoping the kiln is

doing its best for you? Perhaps it is about earth and fire, very simple but also very complex at the same time? Anyway, the "ceramic world" is such a nice world and it will stay my first love forever.'

Guy admits that he really only thinks about his work after he has finished, preferring working methods that allow him to stop thinking. 'I do not make any preliminary drawings, nor do I spend much time thinking about a form or a pattern. I just start working from images that are stored in me and the experience of previous work,' he describes. 'The stomach dictates the form, but the head makes the decisions. Each piece reflects my own self, and the better I get to know myself, the more profoundly I can proceed with my work. Thus each work becomes an investigation.'

In recent years, Guy has mainly worked with white porcelain, inventing a 'balloon technique' that allows him to make very thin translucent porcelain bowls. 'I start by blowing up a balloon, then I take porcelain reinforced with flax. I work directly on the balloon, starting at the bottom of the future bowl. First, I apply a small piece of porcelain with my stamp on it, and then add little cells one by one by manipulating the porcelain with small wooden tools, trying to not touch



Left: Guy uses small wooden tools to place 'cells' of porcelain reinforced with flax directly onto a balloon. Once the form is leather hard, he deflates the balloon and applies a layer of porcelain slip to the inside.

it too much with my hands. I can add only a small part each day,' he details.

Each piece takes some time – sometimes up to a month – after which Guy must be sure that the piece has dried evenly. After a few days he is then able to deflate the balloon, and coat the inside with a layer of porcelain slip. 'As my bowls are fired upside down to counteract the effects of gravity and the melting process at high temperature, I have to make a support for each piece. The piece is raw fired (once fired) in a wood kiln at 1300°C. I can fire this kiln very fast – after one hour of warming up, I go from 150°C to 1300°C in three to four hours. This high temperature is needed for strength and translucency. The wood firing gives the bowl a beautiful white and a sparkling blossom of glaze from ash deposits,' he explains.

In the summer of 2014, Guy was invited to be an artist in residence in Jingdezhen, China, and since then has been inspired to introduce colour into his work. 'For this series of translucent bowls I found inspiration in ancient Italian fresco paintings, both in colour and technique. Using stains for colouring the kaolin, and using these coloured slabs to roll into the walls of the bowl, inside and outside, achieve the same freshness in colour. The pattern on the inside is interfering with the pattern on the outside, depending on the amount of light falling on the pot. Thus the spectacle changes during the day and the seasons,' he says.

When teaching future ceramicists, Guy always tells them to search for silence – there they can listen to their hearts. And only when following their own voice will the making give them full satisfaction.



‘I can learn so much from a stone or a branch, a pine cone or a piece of burnt wood, a beautiful pattern on a fish or an egg, the rippling of water.’

