

Vocabulary of tactile language



Elena Gileva

Selected works

Landscape





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Ornament



II



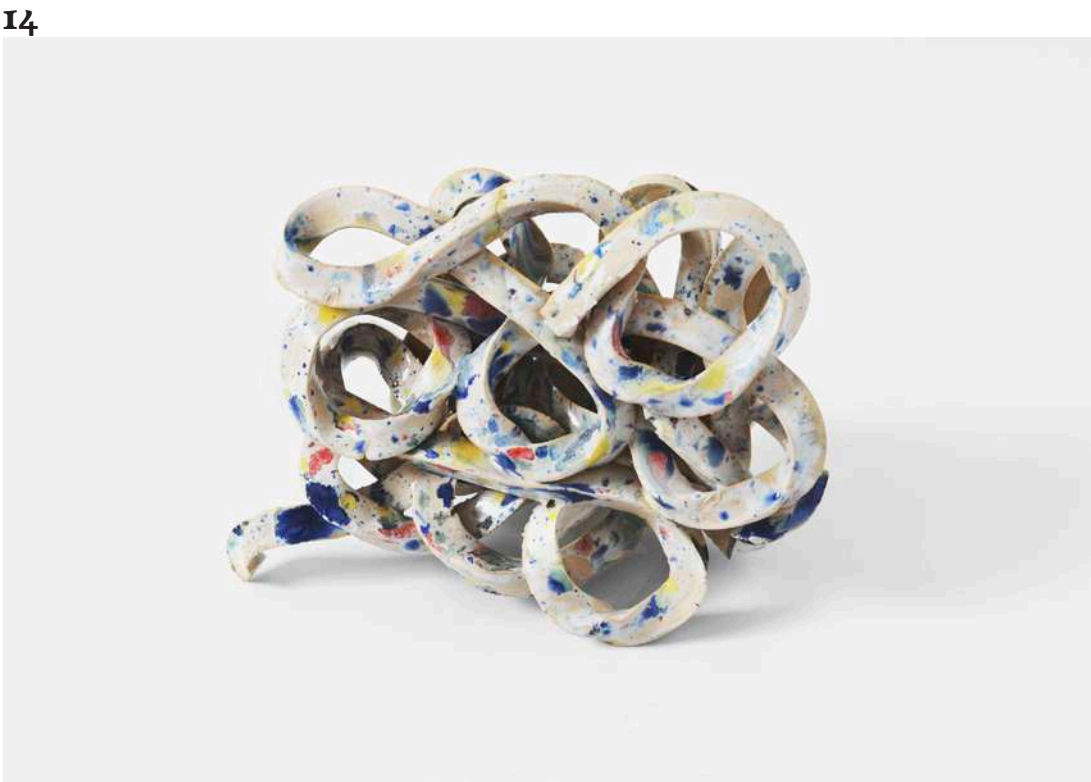
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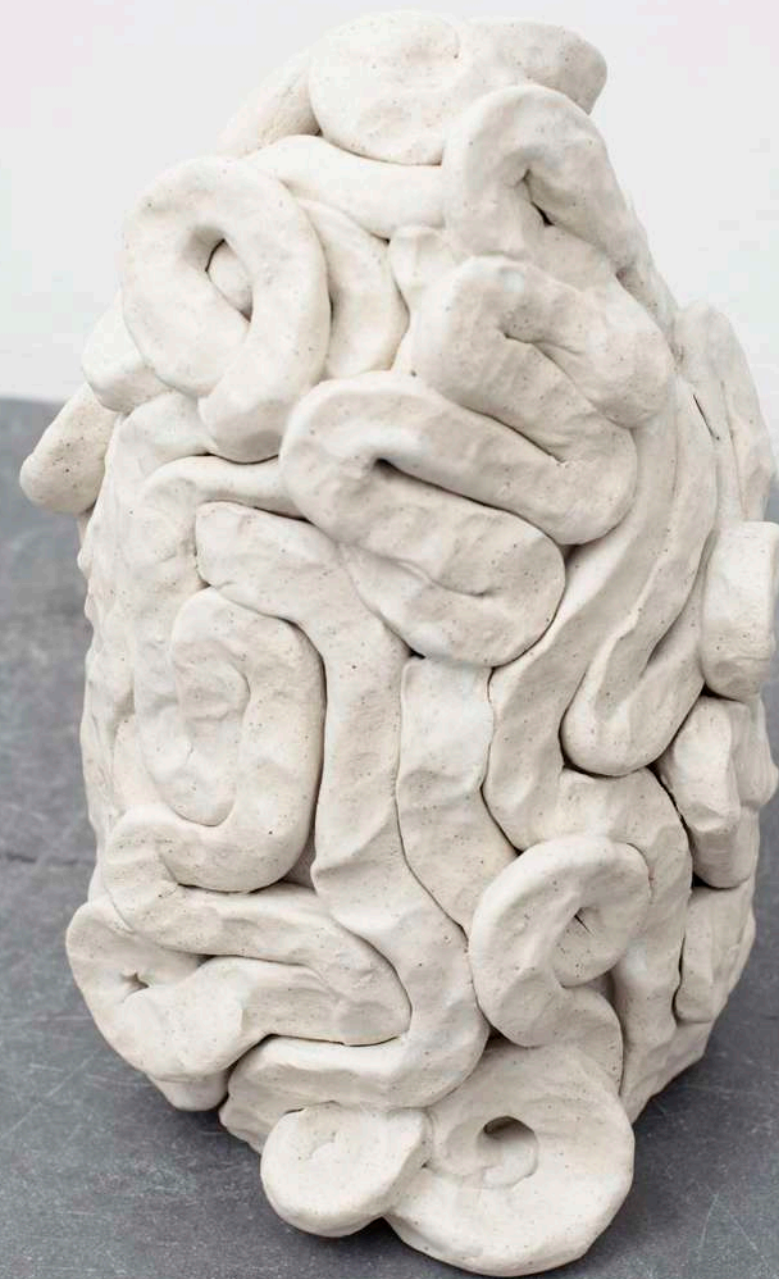


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Heritage



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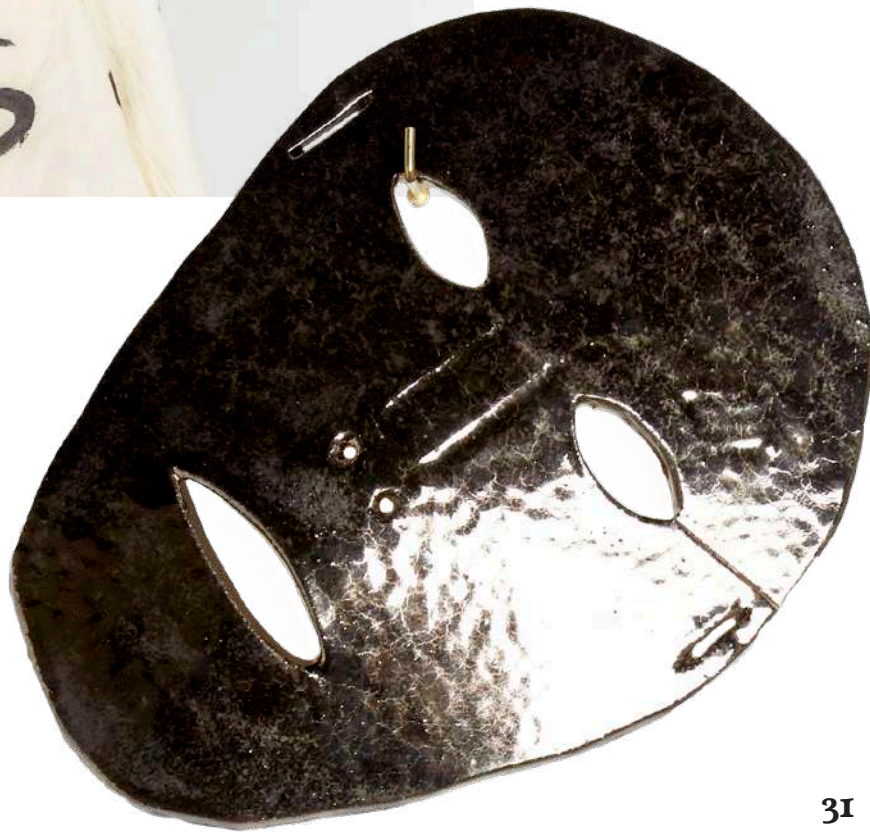


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Objects talking in the work of Elena Gileva

Elena Gileva's fascination lies with the language and history of objects. A myriad of references underpin the work but the artist's interest in Russian folklore is key to understanding her practice. Archetypal functional objects—pots, jars, pillars—are reworked until they take on new colours, shapes and stories. Transmutation is a central motif in Russian folk stories in which frogs turn into princesses, boys into goats and women into swans. In Gileva's work this is a recurrent process; clay becomes form, craft becomes art, the past becomes present and the present past, and reality and fantasy flow in and out of each other.

By
Nathalie
Boobis,
Curator

The influences of growing up in post-Soviet Russia run through the artist's practice. She is fascinated by the plurality of Russian cultural and personal identities that were stifled under the homogenising hand of the Soviet Union. Childhood encounters with

the decorations and votive objects in Russian Orthodox Churches and the collections, displays and tableaux vivants of St Petersburg State Ethnographic Museum mingle with fairy tales and filter into her work through the lenses of memory and nostalgia. Gileva collects images and stories, particularly those of hand-crafted objects. She has a huge personal archive of imagery relating to prehistoric ceramics, folk costume, museum displays, standing stones and artists' work relating to all of these.

“From the colours and aromas of this world,
a poet's lyre my childhood did make, and
offered it to me.”

The above is a quote by the 18th Century Armenian poet and musician, Sayat-Nova, lifted from one of the title cards in Soviet filmmaker Sergei Parajanov's 1969 film *The Colour of Pomegranates*. At the time of its release Parajanov's film was subject to scrutiny and editing by Soviet censors for reasons of its religious imagery, poetic rather than social realist style, and celebration of an Orthodox Christian cultural and Armenian national luminary. For these same reasons, the film is a cornerstone to Gileva's practice in which Parajanov's symbolic use of the diversity of visual, folk and literary references from the Caucasus can be seen reflected. However, beyond being a direct influence on her work, the words of Sayat-Nova quoted here evoke well the relationship between Gileva's collection of visual memories and images and herself as an artist. The extent of her archive is not visible in her oeuvre, however, as the poetry of Sayat-Nova's childhood styled him, so her references guide her hand as an artist and sculptor.

The elemental nature of clay and its use is a key concept in Gileva's work. Her practice is rooted in ceramics made using the coiling method, one of the

oldest known techniques in ceramic production. However, of equal importance to the work are the additional materials and techniques of digitally cut birch ply, digital textiles, and staged photography. The 2019 work *Orthostat* evokes the scene of an ancient ruin; a fallen pillar lies at the feet of four others that stand at varying heights, one supported and another underlaid by CNC cut birch plywood. The conscious positioning of sculptural elements made with the oldest and the newest technologies adds to a narrative landscape in which each surface texture, colour, technique, material and process echoes a different history. Parajanov spoke with his influences and interests through moving image and Gileva does so with hers through craft and matter. Within *Orthostat* exists a myriad of these associations: the birch wood evokes the birch tree's ubiquitous presence in Russian culture and folklore; the archetypal form of the pillar conjures human structures from the Neolithic to the neoclassical; surface textures recall ancient Japanese Jōmon pottery; and Cyrillic lettering speaks of the folklore it has told.

The importance of staging in the work cannot be overlooked and the influence of Sergei Diaghilev's Ballet Russes is evident in the aesthetics of these scenes but more critically, the dissolution of boundaries between art and craft, fine art and folk art. Diaghilev's ballets animated Russian folk tales through costume and scenography, as much as dance, and notable artists worked on the design and craft elements of these productions. Natalia Goncharova designed backdrops and costumes and Sonia Delaunay was asked to make costumes. Operating outside of Russia during and after The Russian Revolution, Ballet Russes enabled an interest in folk culture and idiosyncratic artistic expression by Soviet artists to thrive. The resulting collision of European avant-garde art, theatre, and Russian

folklore and craft reverberates in Gileva's work. Her sculptures perform scenes that recall forgotten craftsmanship—museum displays of long-gone potters' pots or archeological heritage sites of national interest.

There is a sense of magic in the work; tableaux populated by sculptures of familiar-seeming objects are suggestive of a world just beyond our grasp. We know the objects so well but only remember how to speak through them, not with them. The past feels like another place but Gileva conjures the makers of it by employing their techniques. Her own visual language is distinct, yet by interweaving it with that of others there is a sense of a conversation across time and place. The work is haunted by the billions of intersecting personal stories and histories left in objects and the swelling of those into traditions and myths. As an artist Gileva summons these ghosts to observe the grander narratives that rise and fall with governments, states and civilisations. As a craftsperson she ensures that her own story is also embedded in the objects that she will leave behind.

Education	Selected group	Landscape	Ornament	Heritage
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Royal College Of Art, UK. 2014–2016 MA Ceramics — Emily Carr University Vancouver, Canada. 2011 Study abroad — Parsons Paris, Paris, France. 2009–2013 BFA Fine Arts — Saint Peterburg State College N.K. Roerich 2007–2009 Sculpture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Ceramics in Love...TWO. Castellamonte, Italy 2019 — PIECEMELAS. Eccleston Project Space. London 2019 — The Model Room. ANAGRA. Tokyo. 2019 — London Art Fair. Square Art Projects. London 2019 — In the spot light. Morley College Gallery. London 2019 — Artworks Open. Barbican Art Trust. London. 2018 — Ceramics at Doddington Hall. Doddington Hall, Lincolnshire, UK 2018 — LIMBIC. ArtHub, London. March 2017 — Ibero–American Arts Award Exhibition. Brazilian Embassy. London 2016 — The Ingram Collection’s inaugural Purchase Prize Exhibition for Young Contemporary — Talent. Cello Factory. London 2016 	<p>1 Cultural Landscape. Dimensions vary. Earthenware, glaze, digitally printed textiles. Installation view Royal College of Art. 2016</p> <p>2 Cultural Landscape. (detail). Earthenware, glaze, digitally printed textiles. Installation view Royal College of Art. 2016</p> <p>3 Orthostat. 145 × 100 × 100 cm. Stoneware, glaze, cnc milled birch plywood. 2019</p> <p>4 Orthostat. (detail) stoneware, glaze, cnc milled birch plywood. 2019</p> <p>5 Pillar. (detail) stoneware, glaze. 2019</p> <p>6 Pillar. 190 × 22 × 22 cm. Stoneware, glaze, cnc milled birch plywood. 2019</p> <p>7 Current landscape of uncertainty. Dimensions vary. Stoneware, glaze. dimensions vary. 2019</p> <p>8 Stone arrangement. Dimensions vary. Smoke and reduction fired stoneware. 2014</p> <p>9 Third eye. 27 × 12 cm. Earthenware, glaze. 2017</p> <p>10 Baluster. (detail). Stoneware, glaze. 2019</p>	<p>11 Qing stool. 25 × 25 × 14 cm. Stoneware, glaze. 2019</p> <p>12 Portal. 220 × 160 cm. Stoneware, glaze, cnc milled birch plywood</p> <p>13 Veawe. 65 × 30 cm. Hand built earthenware, stoneware, crank, celadon. 2018</p> <p>14 Clown swirl. 18 × 15 × 9 cm. Stoneware, glaze. 2017</p> <p>15 Golden cloud. 10 × 4 cm. Irish embroidery, digital textile. 2016</p> <p>16 Deep wave. 45 × 32 × 2,5cm Stoneware, glaze. 2018</p> <p>17 Over the rainbow. 45 × 52 cm. Earthenware, majolica. 2016</p> <p>18 Matt pebble. 35 × 18 cm. Stoneware, glaze. 2016</p> <p>19 Ulfberht. 35 × 11 cm. Stoneware, glaze. 2019</p> <p>20 Blue lunch. Dimensions vary. Stoneware, glaze. 2019</p> <p>21 Persimon chalice. (detail). Stoneware, glaze. 2019</p> <p>22 Persimon chalice. 23 × 19 cm. Stoneware, glaze. 2019</p> <p>23 Blue pumice. 16 × 18 cm. Stoneware, glaze. 2019</p> <p>24 Mish–mash. (detail). Stoneware, glaze. 2018</p> <p>25 Hand of Fatima. 19 × 14 × 4 cm. earthenware, glaze. 2017</p> <p>26 Playing House. 144 × 45 × 43 cm. Stoneware, glaze, sycamore. 2018</p>	<p>27 Kraznij ugol / Red corner. 45 × 20 × 4 cm. Earthenware, glaze, digital textile. 2017</p> <p>28 Rubaha. 180 × 100 cm. Earthenware, glaze, digital textile. 2017</p> <p>29 Go wither I do not know, bring what I do not know. Installation view at Florence Trust, London. 230 × 90 × 65 cm. Earthenware, digital textiles, cnc birch plywood. 2017</p> <p>30 Ritualistic Objects. Dimensions vary. Hand painted garment, ceramics. 2017</p> <p>31 Iron Mask. Earthenware, glaze. 25 × 16 cm. 2017</p> <p>32 Ritualistic Objects. Dimensions vary. Hand painted garment, ceramics. 2017</p> <p>33 All that glistens is not gold. 190 × 75 × 60 cm. Earthenware, glaze, polyurethane foam. 2016</p> <p>34 Notes of a hippocrite. Dimensions vary. 2014</p> <p>35 Sin Eaters. 180 × 80 × 50 cm. Earthenware, slip, glaze. 2015</p> <p>36 Waste Land. 200 × 80 × 95 cm. Foam, plaster. 2014</p>
Solo/duo exhibitions	Residencies			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — FRACAS. Brussels. 2019 — Cultural Landscape.Part 2. Gallérie de l’ancienne poste. Toucy, France. 2017 — FOUNT. British Ceramic Biennale commission. AirSpace gallery. Stoke-on-Trent. Sept. 2017 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Nakanojo Biennial 2019. Nakanojo, Gunma, Japan. 2019 — Biennale International de Vallauris. Creation contemporaine et céramique. Vallauris, France. 2019 — GICB Competition. Gyeonggi Ceramic Biennale. Korea. April 2017 			
Biennials				



