

In Studio with Lynn Frydman Kuhn

Lynn's showpiece objects are made in a "mould" she has sewn herself from absorbent cleaning cloths. There is no end to her imagination. The moulds can only be used once as they are saturated with porcelain slip. This lively artist tells us in the interview how she got the idea of using sponge cloths.

by Evelyne Schoenmann

Lynn, recently you suggested Richard Sennett's book *The Craftsman* to me. So let's start with philosophy: can people learn about themselves through the things they make?

Yes, life is a process like ceramics. There is a time for everything: for creating, for firing and for looking at your work with a critical eye. What you make definitely represents your values and your personal-

has been made with quality and attention. As far as I am concerned, the essence of homo faber is craftsmanship.

Can you define the role of the tool in your work?

As far as homo faber is concerned, the sponge cloth has become my tool and my source of inspiration. Like many artists, I distort the utilization of the tool. It is

the United States and moved to Geneva, Switzerland, in the mid 80s, where there was an active ceramics community and I started working in clay. At first I made utilitarian pieces and from there I developed a source of personal expression and creativity. Now I consider myself a ceramic artist.

You have great success with your sponge ware. Did you invent this technique?



ity. Learning from your mistakes and experimenting are also essential parts of the developmental process.

And what about homo faber – man as maker?

The concept of man being skilful and creative leads me to the importance of craftsmanship. I firmly believe that a hand-crafted piece gives meaning and soul to an object. It carries tradition and the personal touch and expertise of the creator. I love to be surrounded by handmade objects. It is a pleasure to use a cup or sit in a chair that

challenging and stimulating to adapt the form and the purpose of the sponge cloth to create ceramics as though they were textiles.

How and when did YOU decide to be a ceramist?

I grew up in the United States in the 60s-70s so there is a "counter- culture" side to me. I was really put off by the mass production and mass consumption in the 80s. It was like eating without tasting the food. I knew then and there that I needed to revert to other values. I left

Not really. In 2007 I read a fascinating article about the Dutch ceramist Bas Kools who was experimenting with cellulose sponges. Coincidentally, I went to my local grocery store the same day and fell upon some flat sponges with the most wonderful textures. I took out my sewing machine and started experimenting immediately. He was definitely my source of inspiration and I thank him for sharing his ideas!

Please lead us through the different steps it takes to make those fish sculptures.

The first step is to sew the flat sponges

together to make the moulds. Sometimes, I think that my work is more of a sewing project than a ceramic project because I spend quite a lot of time in front the sewing machine. You have to anticipate how the liquid porcelain will react in the mould and how it will be emptied out before sewing the pieces together. I work with gravity and evaporation. The fish moulds are suspended on a rack so the porcelain can be poured into the mouth of the fish. A thin porcelain layer is formed as the water evaporates through the walls of the sponges just like a plaster mould pumps out the water. This step can be quite long (1-2 hours) and it depends on the temperature and humidity in the studio. The bottom part of the mold is then

tions I felt the need to add colour to increase the textile aspect of the work. The colour also allows me to develop playful rhythms and connections among the pieces. The colour is applied very thinly through multiple firings so I don't lose the delicate texture of the surface under a layer of glaze. Transparent glaze is saturated with oxides and industrial colours. I gently rub or paint the colour onto the piece, bisque fire and repeat the process until I am satisfied with the intensity and quality of the colour. They are fired in an electric kiln at 1260° C

You mentioned that you adhere to the Japanese aesthetics of Wabi-sabi.

Wabi-sabi celebrates the appeal of

Is your future full of sponges, or do you have other ideas you can already talk about?

Both! July of 2017 for instance is full of sponges. I am excited about showing my work and doing demonstrations with the sponge moulds at Terralha, the European Festival of Ceramic Arts at Saint Quentin la Poterie in France. I am also very excited to have been invited to work at the FuLe International Ceramics Art Museum in Fuping China to represent Switzerland in the autumn of 2017. I will certainly take advantage of being in China and having access to bigger kilns to develop some work on a larger scale. I am sure that working in FILCAM will be very inspirational.



slit open to let the excess slip pour out. Once the cast shape is leather hard, I cut the seams open with a sharp edge and gently peel away the sponge to reveal the fish. This part of the process is the most gratifying because it is the magical moment when I realize that the sponge cloth has been transformed into a porcelain object. The result is definitely "textile" as all of the textures, wrinkles and seams of the sponge cloth have been imprinted into the porcelain. Spongeware, my utilitarian series, is all white. As the technique evolved into toys on wheels and installa-

crafted objects that resonate the spirit of the maker's hands and heart. The concept of beauty as something imperfect, impermanent and incomplete corresponds to my personal ideology and to my ceramic process. There are so many variables you cannot control while making ceramics. I accept and embrace the imperfections that give the clay its charm and originality and I respect it for being delicate and fragile. Loving ceramics is the appreciation of an ancient and traditional process that is constantly evolving through creativity and imagination.

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Evelyne Schoenmann's next interview is with **Martin McWilliam**, Germany/UK

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