

NEW CERAMICS

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In Studio with Julia Saffer

Julia's objects are reminiscent of whirlpools, wheels, fancy hats, spinning tops, cocoons ... In their ice colours, they seem to be frozen in their spinning motion and topple when they stand on a level surface. The artist tells us if this "motion" might have to do with "emotion" in the following interview.

by Evelyne Schoenmann

Julia, tell us something about your background please.

My professional career began un-ceramically as an electronics installer. After nine years in the job, I decided to pull the plug so that I could finally do what I had wanted to do for years – ceramics. My dad had done some pottery with my

lot in the ceramics scene. Congratulations on all the nominations and honourable mentions!

Thank you! Since 2015, I have taken part in a great many competitions all over the world. Fortunately I have been successful! At the 1st International Ceramics Biennial in Latvia, my work was among

something special to be one of the nominees there.

In 2017, my works have travelled further around the world than I have myself! Currently they are being exhibited in various competitions in Spain, Hungary, Romania and France. In September, three of my pieces were on show in the 1st Southwest German Ceramics Prize at the Kera-



brother and me when we were little, so I had had contact with clay right from my early childhood. Ceramics has accompanied me for many years now and the decision to make it my profession was very close to my heart, for which I had to make distinct sacrifices. I have given up the regular income I had before – but it's been worth it! I have had my qualifications as a ceramic designer in my pocket since 2015 and now I am working on getting a foothold in the ceramics scene.

You are the youngest guest to date in my series but you have already achieved a

the six international nominations for the Martinsons Award and I received a commendation. In Croatia, I also received a commendation for emerging ceramic artists for the work I submitted in the International Festival of Postmodern Ceramics. A truly wonderful experience was taking part in the Terralha 2016 Ceramics Festival in St. Quentin la Poterie. A wonderful festival with fantastic artists and an incredible atmosphere. The most extraordinary success was my participation in the Gyeonggi International Ceramics Biennale 2017 in Korea. The large number of applicants speaks for itself. It is really

mikmuseum Westerwald in Höhr-Grenzhausen. I am very happy about all of this.

The forms of your works are usually spirals. This seems to be an important movement in your work. What can you tell us about the design of your works?

That's right. The spiral is always the basis of my work. Symbolically, the spiral stands for movement, development, infinity, inward concentration and outward expansion. It is the fundamental form of all energy and thus it is the starting point of all my work. One is often caught

in a spiral oneself – every day, various processes are repeated again and again. Sometimes you are caught up in a vicious circle. I have often been in this situation myself and I wanted to take up this idea in my ceramics, and to a certain extent to come to terms with my own journey through life, my own development. In the course of one lifetime, there are so many steps you take, so many phases you live through. Many of my objects represent this development, which really never ceases. That is the basic idea. Symmetry, balance, equilibrium are also important factors. In terms of form, I am usually in the area of round shapes, which is intended to emphasise and enhance the themes behind my work.

Do you imagine a finished form before you start work or do you work in a free flow?

Before I start working on a piece, I prepare a stock of clay spirals. For this, I roll out a number of clays slabs 2 mm thick.

I cut these in thin, even strips. I then take the cut strips and twist them to form spirals, which I then store on a damp cloth and cover them with a plastic sheet.

If the spirals get too dry, they do not stick together properly and they break easily. The right degree of dampness is therefore vital for the success of a piece.

As soon as I have stocked up with enough spirals, I determine the basic shape of the piece and start with the first layer.

I join the various layers just with a little water. The structure is actually very stable because of the spiral form. It is almost as if screw threads lock into and reinforce each other.

I should add that where I start is cru-

Your slab roller looks interesting. Did you build it yourself?

My dad built it for me! He always gives me a hand when I need something and often makes things. When I started to work with my technique, a rolling pin was too much work so my dad simply built me the slab roller, which I now use for all my work.

What if...: What are your aims and ambitions for the future, Julia?

Of course I have dreams and wishes for my work. A big solo exhibition in a fantastic gallery or a light-flooded studio with a view of the countryside! But really speaking, I just hope that things continue to go so well for my work and I manage to stay in touch. Ceramics just fascinate me!



There is always a certain idea at the start. As it is very important for the drying process at which point I start and finish the form, I have to decide in advance which direction I want to move in. It still happens that a form develops its own momentum as I am working. As you say, some things happen in the “flow” and they grow more than they are designed and planned.

In the photos here, we see that at the beginning you twist the narrow strips of clay. Just talk us through the various stages of your technique.

cial for the structure of the piece. During the laborious making process, some areas unavoidably dry out – whereas in the upper part everything is still damp, the bottom part of the piece is already leather-hard and has shrunk.

To avoid any breakages, it is important that my form works with the shrinkage. After drying for several days, the piece is bisqued.

I then spray on terra sigillata with a spray gun, which is sometimes coloured with stains. After a second firing to 1080°C, in the final stage I generously brush on lustre glazes and fire to 790°C.

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Evelyne Schoenmann's next interview is with
Shamai Sam Gibsh, Israel

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