

Nathalie Doyen

COCOONED recent work 2011-2015

I like to model clay calmly and slowly. It is in this way, at this rhythm, that my concentration is at its best. My recent pieces are carried out with much precision and patience; with a lump of clay in my hands, I form a round shape, a sphere which I spread or flatten and in which I carve one, two or three gentle curves, shaped into shallow areas or into plump cheeks.

Next, in the way that stones in nature are covered with lichens or mosses, I cover my still-raw model with a multitude of 'mini balls' made from clay rolled between my fingers. Once they are in position, these small stoneware lozenges stained with metallic oxides are textured one by one with fine holes pricked with a needle. Occasionally, I enhance the surface with a diluted pigment or oxide. From a technical point of view, this is simple. But the trick is to maintain sensitivity while making repetitive movements.

The thing which really matters to me is the procedure: I have always worked calmly with clay, searching for tranquillity, but now I am looking further. The slow pace has become a process in itself. In this way, each day, during sessions of 2 to 6 hours, the rhythm of my work proves to be meditative, even hypnotic.

Over there
2014
coloured stoneware
1200°C
30 x 22 x 16 cm
Photo:
Vincent Timsonnet





Assuming this slow motion is of great benefit to me. Very often, people who look at my ceramic sculptures say that they themselves become changed, moved, as though overwhelmed by what these pieces give off: the sensation of a time when one is cocooned, a dense and harmonious time, which our consumerist, competitive, hyperactive society, blinded by greed, tries to take away from us.

This being so, in plastic art terms, the slow pace of making and covering the piece, progressing millimetre by millimetre, suits me perfectly. From then on I can work carefully at a sensitive tempo to create delicately nuanced textures.

I try to make the piece hold on to my gaze so that a breath, a resonance, runs over it.

In my head, before beginning a sculpture, I imagine its colours. I think about it for several days, letting my sight be captured by one hue or another among those that I observe around me. I choose between them and combine some of them. In this way, I achieve a palette of intended colours for mixing clays with oxides or pigments.

top

Lota, 2014, coloured stoneware and metallic oxides, 1200°C
11 x 11 x 10 cm. Photo: Vincent Timsonnet

right

Treasure blue, 2013, coloured stoneware and metallic oxides
1200°C, 10 x 10 x 9 cm. Photo: Nathalie Doyen





Vanity
2013
coloured stoneware
1200°C
26 x 26 x 20 cm
Photo: Vincent Timsonnet

I use oxides of cobalt, copper, chrome and manganese; and turquoise, light blue, moss green, maize, rose, orange or yellow stains. I measure these from 1 to 10%, sometimes mixing some of them together. Cobalt gives me a slate-blue clay, greyer with the addition of manganese, greener when mixed with chrome or copper.

I fire my electric kiln to 1200°C. The colours of tinted clays alter during firing. Also, when I am modelling, I don't have the colours in hand but in my head.

Of course, it's thrilling every ceramicist adores that. There are always surprises when the kiln is opened...

I am also beginning to take an interest in wood firing. I don't making any preparatory drawings.

Suggestions come to me. I feel rhythms: an untroubled surface here, undulations there, a few patches marked out, fragments which seem to vibrate, links made as they flow, clearly defined motifs, blurred areas and so on.

I imagine natural or architectural surface features. I improvise as the hours, days and weeks pass.

The conjugation of the volume of the base, the colours of the clay and the textures' rhythms guide my sight.

The 'curiosity', 'tranquillity', 'vanity', 'resurgence', the 'over-

there', the 'everything-over-there', reflect the differing states of my soul. At the outset, this happens without my knowing it, then I recognise the emotion coming from it.

I choose the dimensions of my pieces in relation to my body. These come from the palm to both hands, to the head and the volume which the arms can encircle. While out walking, I use a magnifying glass to examine vegetation, mosses, bark and stones.

At home, I browse through a natural science encyclopaedia admiring scales, carapaces, lichens, leaves and animal skins.

Clay is a fabulous medium: powder, slip, a 'dough', formless but so rich in plastic potential. It is more than a raw material, it defines every day of my life. As a child I used to make birds' nests from grass and mud.

In my adolescence, I used to go to workshops and took courses in modelling and throwing. I took advanced ceramics courses with Francis Behets and Richard Owscarek at the Académie des Beaux-art in Tournai. Since then, for almost 30 years, I have not stopped researching, creating and exhibiting.

For a long time I was uneasy in spaces with large installations, set up in situ. I had to have air, I needed to extend my field of vision, to open out and be part of space.



left

Just over there, 2014, coloured stoneware, 11 x 9 x 8cm

Photo: Vincent Timsonnet



right

Treasure, 2010, black stoneware and porcelain slip, 1200°C

8 x 6 x 5 cm Photo: Benoît Carpeau

For several years now, the way that I approach the object, the sculpture, brings me into a dialogue with it, an approach which is more intimate. Recent pieces are shown here.

These ceramic pieces, though they may be small and detailed, refer equally to space, coming from it or recalling an imaginary landscape. These new pieces attract the eye with their gentle shapes and mineral colours. Their velvety texture is intriguing;

one approaches, is drawn by the 'astonishing textile effect'. As Nicole Crestou says, 'we need to touch in order to see, to feel in order to understand.'

Indeed, I have always been interested in the appearance of clay: its grain, its pores, the wrinkles, the nerves, the imprints which appear on its surface when I handle it. I often mark it with traces, etchings, with scratches enhanced with oxides and slips.

It is at that key moment when I feel that I want to accentuate the depth of the texture, when I add a little material to the scratches and needle holes, that the outer skin of my sculptures evolves.

The fine holes that I have made with my needle in the clay add an absorbent capillarity, a mysterious interface causing threads of shadow...

Nathalie Doyen was born in Algiers in 1964. She has exhibited in Belgium and abroad since 1987. She has been artist in residence in France, Portugal, Italy, China and in Quebec. She teaches ceramics at the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Namur, Belgium. Work on permanent exhibition in Belgium: in Brussels, at the Galerie de l'Ô - "Barbotine Murale"; in Mons at the WCC-BF in the creators' windows; in Morlanwelz at the Musée Royale de Mariemont - "Un souffle sous mes paupières", installation acquired by the Belgian French Community.

IN QUEBEC: in the regional park Bois de Belle-Rivière, Laurentides - "Préméditation", created in situ for the Laurentides Contemporary Art Museum Art3 trail, commissioned by Suzanne FerlandL, supported by Wallonie-Bruxelles International.

IN CHINA: at the FuLe International Ceramics Art Museum, the FLICAM, Fuping, near Xian, the installation "Flow" and charger "Bien dans son Assiette", created in residence, supported by Wallonie-Bruxelles International.

Member of the Collège des Alumni de l'Académie Royale de Belgique.

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1983 to 1987: trained at the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Tournai X, taught by Francis Behets and Richard Owczarek.

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