

Ceramics

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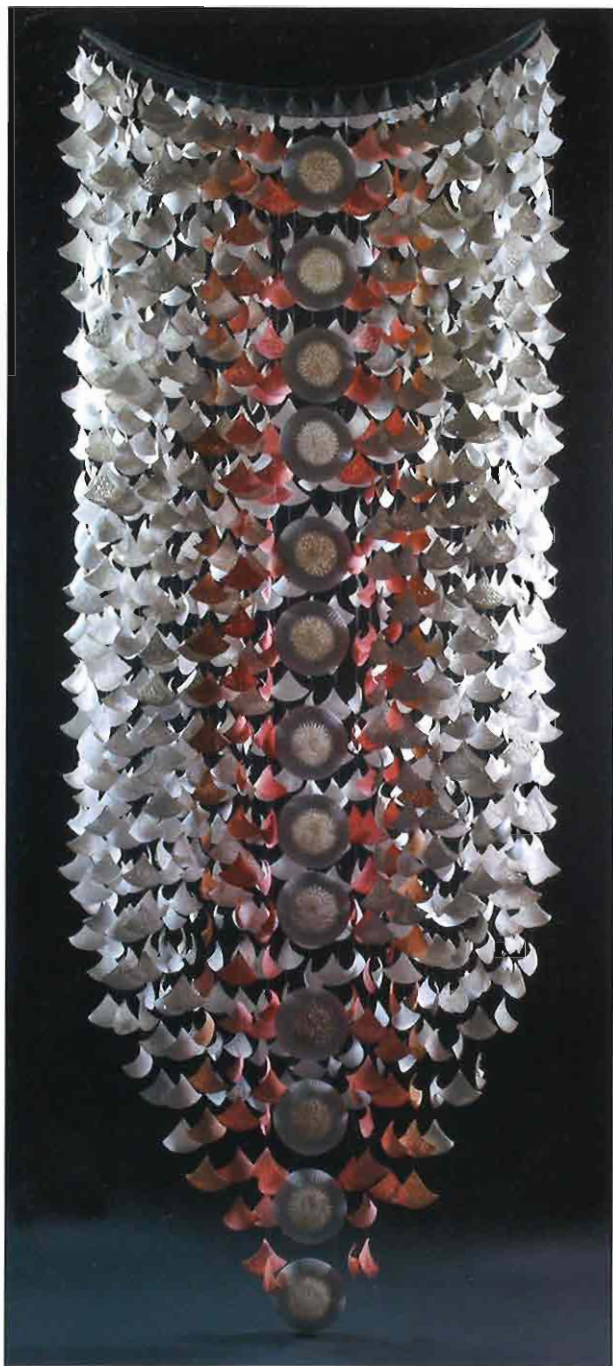
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Martha Pachon Rodriguez Multi-Ethnic Awareness

A Tribute to Symmetry

Article by
Rolando Giovannini

RARELY IN LIFE DOES ONE HAVE THE CHANCE TO WITNESS the stylistic evolution of such a multi-faceted artist. Martha Pachon Rodriguez graduated in Fine Arts from Neiva, Colombia at the Surcolombiana University and from a tender age she taught in the same university where she studied, training young Colombian artists. She completed her studies in Italy at Faenza's State-run Gaetano Ballardini Art Institute, where she completed the two-year specialization course in "Stoneware and Porcelain Art".

Recently she had an extraordinary experience in China where she was the guest of the Fule International Ceramic Art Museum at Fuping. There over the course of several weeks she created a series of works that will remain in the permanent collections and which are dedicated to the themes of life and femininity.

Her technique is meticulous, precise and accurate. Nothing is left to chance, and symmetry underscores every work, whether it is tiny jewellery or as great in value as an installation or environmental work. Her work constantly refers to the organic world of life, the forms that generate it, where the order of the composition is sound and ancient, borrowed from millions of years of evolution of the species. The idea of keeping the future stable, using a flawless technique for treating stoneware and porcelain to represent the most delicate and sensitive parts of human beings, their most fluctuating, lively, active and fertile parts, indicates the sense of continuity, of transcendence of her work. Accordingly her works are comprehensible and can be interpreted by all, just as real art dictates.

Martha Pachon's works are composite, complex



Above left: Manto Nuziale (Wedding Cloak).

Below left: Manto Nuziale (Detail).

objects, like hulls crammed with seeds, echinoderms, primitive objects like the earliest cells that needed flabella to get around. Each work features varying aspects of its relationship with colour. In the installation entitled *Manto Nuziale (Wedding Cloak)* through the soft, light shades of pink and transparent hues, the artist enters into a relationship with the colour tone, with visual communication itself. They are details that seem to have originated from her feminine culture, from her sensitivity towards gentle, soft, graceful and fragrant hues.

In the work entitled *Viaggi (Voyages)*, she goes back to childhood memories when her Spanish, Indigenous and Lebanese origins all lived under the same roof. The fabrics in the Pachon household came from various parts of the world; her great-grandfather was a sailor and brought back items from many places, objects whose colours, weaves, decorations and textures have now been used as inspiration.

The artist looks back over these childhood memories, when as a child she would caress them with the feeling that she could travel through them. Going back to analysing these fabrics has a deep-seated value, because fabrics help us understand the culture of a population, of an ethnic group; they help make up an image of those using them. The fabric is conjured up like a symbol, like a memory of time, as a story, an object of desire, a representation – from days gone by – of the condition of the woman, the person and the standard of life, if it is true that once upon a time they were purposely designed for the individual family. A symbolic representation of these weaves and decorations, borrowed from the process of decalcomania is like a journey across the world. To sum up, the poetic substance is this, as the artist likes to define herself, “a bit of magical realism that continues in recent works, combined with an artistic movement from the South American countries of the Caribbean.”

With regard to ceramics, on the other hand, Pachon describes her interest in a noble material with which anything can be done. The clay allows one to translate the textures of a fabric, or reproduce something out of nature, or interpret a human value; ceramics are a docile yet at the same time complex medium. Managing to dominate air, fire, earth and water all at the same time is fascinating and calls for multiple skills. And the real essence of Martha Pachon Rodriguez lies here, when she states that clay is an unsolved material, and the artist is given the task of solving it; accordingly he or she is forced to design complex objects. Its very complexity allows the artist to be more creative, more ingenious. Perhaps it is for this reason that she expresses herself in a variety of contexts, such as works to be set upon the ground, or on the wall, for furnishing, hanging, for installations and even for jewellery.

Rolando Giovannini is a Ceramics Critic and the Director of the State Institute for Ceramics in Faenza, Italy



Top: *Viaggi (Voyages)*.
Centre: *Objects*.
Above: *Indecent Lace*.

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Fong Choo

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On Ceramic Arts and the Venice Biennale

A Review by Rolando Giovannini



Palazzo delle Esposizioni. Biennial of Venice, Italy.

THE VENICE BIENNALE BEGAN IN 1895 WHEN THE city organized the *Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte della Città di Venezia*/International Arts Exhibition of the City of Venice (22 April – 22 October) and right from the beginning, this biannual event became a model for many of the other international happenings worldwide that followed. By 1934, this exhibition had evolved into the *Biennial of Venice XIX International Exhibition of Contemporary Art*. There was no entrance fee and there were even special discounts on train tickets for visitors travelling to Venice for this purpose. The original vocation of art has been continuously expressed by the 'visual arts'; in painting, in sculpture and then in architecture. The articulation of the *Biennial* happened quite quickly with pavilions representing singular countries, such as that of Hungary which was entirely covered with lustre ceramics designed by the Zsolnay di Pécs Factory. This exhibition also serves to show the leading influence of gallery owners and private art galleries both in the promotion as well as the concepts

of the artists. In particular, the second half of the 19th century is rich with evidence in Europe as museums of applied arts and decoration sprang up, as well as industrial museums and arts and crafts schools in Italy (The Industrial Arts Museum and the F. Palizzi Art Institute in Naples, 1882). In 1908 in Faenza, Italy, with a commendable commitment and will, Gaetano Ballardini founded the Ceramics Museum which was to become international and, since 1932, venue to the *Ceramic Art Competition* winners (international since 1963). And next to it in 1916, he created the Ceramic Production School (which changed its name to the State Ceramic Art Production Institute in 1939, oriented towards art, technique and restoration).

At least for those who are ceramics specialists, experts and art lovers if, by chance, they happen to come from privileged artistic and traditional birthplaces of this art, seeing pieces in terracotta, glazed terracotta, faience, white terracotta, polychromatic clays (such as stoneware or porcelain) at the *Biennial of Venice* is something of notable interest. The artist

who expresses himself with these materials risks comparison between the work of art and the dualism of the object (whether functional or decorative) and must be determined and have a sense of originality. In these cases, the public demands the origin of the creator, evaluates the opportunity and the suitability of his presence in this context. So, in this climate of international artistic competition, the means and the adopted ceramic solutions are appreciated. Through a reading of the various editions, it seems that sustained ideas, techniques and materials with which the artists express themselves are sometimes territorial. Noteworthy is the distinction already proposed by the pavilions for each single nation. Moreover, the simplification of cataloguing separates the works into painting, graphics and sculpture (and in fact each artist almost always emphasizes his or her materials descriptions, citing them with accurate precision and great meticulousness).

When this happens, it refers to an important recognition that ceramic arts receives in the sphere of one of the world's contemporary cultural temples and it is curious to see their expressive and technical contents defined. Ceramics, in fact, is alive at least for a dominant international culture in a three part co-existence, placing itself between 'poetic' expression, (nowadays concept), 'technique' of execution and the 'dimension-space' relationship of the piece.

This is the range of parameters on which the readings of the works of art are based; pieces that were created with ancient and seldom heard of techniques, even if constantly in evolution in both the representation and the technologies. Thinking, for example, of the leaf thin tiles of extraordinary dimensions (1 x 3 metres 3mm thick) and the ideal compactness for industrial architecture. At the *Biennial of Venice*, you are selected poetically and so the creators who are submitted are hardly ever represented as ceramists; on the contrary, the use of the material is the vital upshot of uniting thought with its representation. It is important that the artists who usually express themselves with fired clay in various forms know how to interpret the culture of the times, by means of a personal artistic thread that belongs to a still wider cultural debate of possible criticisms and that they are expressions of a contemporary and *avant garde* style or tendency. For example, Robert Rauschenberg did not escape from anyone in 1984, with his presentation of six ceramic pieces, (*XLI Biennial in Arte allo specchio*). But ceramics experiences in Venice are also within the context of the city and Mimmo Paladino (Italy) in 2005, at Ca' Pesaro-Civic Museum Foundation of Venice, created a show of terracotta sculptures of great dimensions. It is the same Paladino who, in 1964, was left entranced by Rauschenberg at the *Biennial* in that same year and that then became the main attraction in Venice in 1980 as a budding *Transavante-garde* (*Transavanguardia*)

exhibitor planned and curated by Achille Bonito Oliva.

In the last 60 years, there has been more of a presence of creators who are considered actual ceramists: these very artists have been interested in the stage and the distance between master of ceramics and art critic. Starting from the citation of

Angelo Biancini, sculptor, in fact, Fausto Melotti, in 1948 with *Il gatto-cane e La Follia/The Cat-Dog and the Madness* at the *XXIV Biennial of Venice*, Guido Gambone in 1950, as well as Leoncillo Leonardi in the same year, left a trace of a certain artistic know how that did not lie only in the poetic but rather in the process of the work itself. They all are actually considered authoritative and prevalent ceramists, owners of a personal expression born from both expertise and inventiveness. In 1958, at the *XXIX Biennial of Venice*,



Top: Giuseppe (Pino) Spagnolo. *Perseo (Perseus)*. Terracotta, wood and steel. 400 x 300 x 200 cm. Venice Biennale. 1982. Photo courtesy of the artist.

Centre: Leoncillo Leonardi (Italy). *Ritratto di Elisa*. 1946. (From *Il Fronte Nuovo delle Arti alla Biennale di Venezia del 1948* to Giuseppe Marchiori, curator Enzo Di Martino, Ca' Corner della Regina, 1986, XLIII International Art Exhibition Catalogue - Biennial of Venice - Il Luogo degli Artisti.)

Above: Miquel Barceló (Spain). *Grand Pot de Crânes Sur 1 Face*. 2000. 115 x 98 cm. Museu d'art Espanyol Contemporani, Palma. Juan March Foundation. 53 Biennial of Venice, 2009. Photo courtesy of the Spanish Pavilion.



Salvatore Meli presented a suspended sculpture in majolica of 2.16 metres.

From the 1970s on, the international trend of the exhibition in Venice did not always favour the single material object but instead art was being projected in to video and multimedia representations, of a more post-conceptual spirit. In 1982, Luigi Mainolfi and Nanni Valentini were presented by Luciano Caramel in the Italian Pavilion for Visual Arts with a piece in terracotta and one in vitrified terracotta. Two years later, José Vermeersch represented Belgium with 11 sculptures of significant dimensions. Giuseppe Spagnulo (presenting four times from 1972 to 1990) with Luigi



Top: Galileo Chini (Italy). *Vase with Stylized Flowers*. 1919. (From "Galileo Chini: un recupero e una mostra, L'immaginario di Galileo Chini", curated by Luigina Bortolotto, Central Pavilion, Giardini Di Castello - Ca' Corner della Regina, 1986, XLII International Art Exhibition Catalogue-Biennial of Venice - Art and Science.)

Above: Seni Camara (Senegal). *Untitled*. 1998. Terracotta. (From *The Platform of Thought*, curated by Harald Szeemann, Catalogue 49. International Art Exhibition, Biennial of Venice, 2001. Biennali di Venezia Electa). 30 cm/ft.

Below: Mircea Spătaru (Romania). *Torture*. 1990. Faience installation, 320 elements, various measurements. (From *Participating Countries, Romania*, Commissioned by Dan Hăulică, XLIV International Art Exhibition Catalogue, Biennial of Venice, Edizioni Biennale Fabbri Editori).



Mainolfi (he too has been invited many times), effectively appeared in 1986 with great works in *Sculture all'Aperto/Open Air Sculpture* in the Art and Science Edition. Their work stood out because of the spacial sense attributed to themes of myth or universality, where the dimensions of the sculpture took the upper hand.

During those years, material experimentation completely took on the 'conceptual' lesson, extending to which ever type of action and certain creators took advantage of this. In *Aperto 82/Open 82*, Vito Bucchiarelli matched a terracotta ceramic crackle piece with metal, Remo Salvadori presented a vase in terracotta and paper, Shirazeh Houshiary (Iran, then resident in London) arranged a purely conceptual piece with keys combined with wood and clay. In those years, in Italy and abroad, many important art critics approached ceramics with real interest; for example Filiberto Menna with "*De Sculptura/De Sculpture*" (Caltagirone, 1982-84), Enrico Crispolti with the exhibit on *Ceramica Futurista/Futuristic Ceramics* (Faenza, 1984), Franco Solmi and Marilena Pasquali with the *La Nuova Ceramica/New Ceramics* (Bologna, 1981), were seen as significant elements of change by Gian Carlo Bojani, Director of the International Ceramics Museum of Faenza and then protagonist along with Vittorio Fagone of the theorization of the participating artists group at *A tempo e a Fuoco/In Time and In Fire* (Faenza, 1983).

Around 1990, Elmar Trenkwald (Austria), presented a modelled architectural structure 113 cm high dated 1989-1999 *Untitled* and composed of five elements in 'white terracotta'. And there was also the piece of notable dimensions by Mircea Spătaru (Romania), commissioned by Dan Hăulică, entitled *Torture*, composed of 320 elements in Faience.

In the following decade, we are reminded of the presence of, among others, Seni Camara (Senegal) with a terracotta figure in labour and Marisa Mertz with *Testa e Testa Rosa/Head and Rose Head*, polychromatic clay and Rimer Cardillo (Uruguay) with *Cupi degli Uccelli/Dark of the Birds*, mountain of earth and terracotta (49th International Art Exhibition).

On the whole, the initiatives and scopes of the individual planning qualities of each creator or commissioner of every single *Biennial* configures great interest and unique events such as monographic exhibitions: for example the recognition of the Liberty artist, Galileo Chini, expression from 1896 to 1909 of international modernist culture and within this also the art of ceramics, represented by decorated objects and vases (presented at the *Biennial* in 1886).

The idea takes the *Biennial* back, at least occasionally, to the historical function of promoting decorative and applied arts, still belonging to the original project, as noted by the art critic Enzo Biffi Gentili, Director of MIAO in Turin, referring to the 2009 edition, when he observed the fact that, for the occasion, the Venice

Pavilion in the Gardens was destined for the exhibition on glass, in close relation to the Venetian artistic and territorial culture.

In this direction, also Bertozzi & Casoni (Bologna 1957 and Lugo di Romagna 1961, Italy) were protagonists before becoming the protagonists in 2009 with the great panel "Composizione non finita – infinita" in the Italian Pavilion curated by Luca Beatrice and Beatrice Buscaroli, had a previous experience in 2007 at the Ca' Pesaro, Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia/ Civic Museum Foundation of Venice with the exhibition of the life size polar bear depicted and modelled in ceramic and bronze entitled *Composizione in bianco/Composition in White*.

Of course ceramics is not precluded from these important events but the typical characterization is so evident and rooted that it is often complex for the critics to distinguish the aspects which are so connected and associated with the material from the necessity of expression which is unable to be held back. The terracotta in which Miquel Barceló (*Felanitx*, 1957, Spain- already having been present in Venice with a painting in *Aperto 84/Open Air 84*) represented extremely well in the Spanish Pavilion in 2009 at the *Biennial of Venice*, however, had to transcend from its material dimensions to become a narration, an instrument, in any case a model and place of memory acting as a representation of the artist.

It is in this way that the artist Barceló did not only propose in Venice in 2009 an extraordinary collection of large studded and pod-patterned vases with measured plastic and painted material additions, devoid of glaze or crystalline, such to give more power and intensity to the actual action on the clay. He also presented a particularly effective video. It portrayed a happening of two artists: himself, Barceló, painter turned ceramist when the wind and heat at Dogon made it impossible for him to paint; and the dancer-choreographer Josef Nadi. The performance exhibited during the *Avignon Festival* and then again at the *Biennial of Venice* in 2009, showed image sequences of a whirling of jets of coloured liquid earth onto a red clay wall. The action of the artists appears decisive and dynamic, in an act of seemingly universal creation, in continuous mutation, amazing for its visual impact of the constantly changing scenes. The gesture is theatrical and the act expresses the idea of wanting to have control over a primordial force of nature to which the problem of being primogenial creator of an unpublished world and original screenplay has been entrusted to.

In any case, Miquel Barceló uses the clay for the sculpture as if it were a vital material, free to give meaning to his evident actions, marking and leaving traces, imprints that he then completes with figures of animals, humans and other living things. From the meticulous perfection and hyper-realism of

Bertozzi & Casoni, this work is primitive, the origin of civilization.



Rolando Giovannini is a ceramics critic and the Director of the Istituto Statale D'Arte per la Ceramica (State Art Institute of Ceramics) Faenza, Italy. Translated by Julie K Shanks.



Top: Elmar Trenkwalder (Austria). *Untitled*. 1989-1990. White terracotta. 113 x 58 x 58 cm. (From *Aperto 90*, curated by Renato Barilli, Bernard Blistène, Wenzel Jacob, Stuard Morgan, Linda Shenrer, XLIV International Art Exhibition Catalogue, Biennial of Venice, Edizioni Biennale Fabbri Editori).

Above: Bertozzi & Casoni (Italy). *Composizione in Bianco* 2007. Polychrome ceramic and bronze. 150 x 600 x 300 cm. Ca' Pesaro, Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia, 2007. Photo courtesy of the artists.

Below: Rimer Cardillo (Uruguay). *Cupi Degli Uccelli*. 2001 Mountain of earth and terracotta. 195 x 445 cm. (From *Countries Paesi*, Uruguay, Commissioner Clever Lara and added Commissioner Angel Kalemberg, Catalogue 49. International Art Exhibition, Biennial of Venice, 2001, Biennali di Venezia Electa.)



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Bertozzi & Casoni, recently at the 53rd Edition 2009, this contrasting work appears primitive, remote, the origin of civilization.



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Lightness

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Above: *Finite Infinite Composition*. 2009. Polychromatic ceramic. 1000 x 285 x 27 cm.

Photo courtesy of Cardì Gallery, Milan, Italy.

Facing page: *Finite Infinite Composition* (Detail).

Bertozzi & Casoni

Living Ceramics

A Review by Rolando Giovannini

IT IS TRULY EXTRA ORDINARY THAT IN THE CULTURAL AND artistic circles of the *Venice Biennial*, well known for its visual and plastic arts, a wide birth and importance has been given to the area of ceramics, or better yet to art forms in both stoneware and terracotta. In fact, in the last 30 years, few ceramic artists (including Luigi Mainolfi and Pino Spagnolo) have had the opportunity to show their own works in such a Western-culturally important exhibition and model (that of the *Biennial*) a relatively new way of exhibiting works from 1897 to today, which has been copied both in expression and manner now in so many parts of the world.

Giampaolo Bertozzi (Borgo Tossignano, Bologna,

Italy 1957) and Stefano Dal Monte Casoni (Lugo in Romagna, Ravenna, Italy 1961) were pupils of the Istituto Statale d'Arte per la Ceramica "Gaetano Ballardini" (The Ceramics State School "Gaetano Ballardini") in Faenza. They graduated in 1978 and 1980, with their final thesis being a fireclay slab sculpture with silk screen printings of Charlie Chaplin in Charlot and compositions under porcelain glass film, created by means of gauze imbued with the phrase *Strutture Fragili* (Fragile Structures).

Their particular sensibilities towards ceramic material, their sculptural and plastic modelling capabilities and decorative sensitivity are dominant elements for them. Their work consistently shows





technical and representational virtuosity that are contemporaneously and markedly hyper realistic.

There are two pieces by Bertozzi & Casoni at the 53rd Biennial 2009, having been invited by Beatrice Buscaroli and Luca Beatrice, inside the new Italian Pavilion at the Arsenale site. One is entitled *Composizione non finita infinita* (*Finite Infinite Composition*) and is entirely in white stoneware with many intricate minute details. The other is *Rebus*, a bronze with soft earthenware parts using several different decorative approaches with attention to the smallest details.

Finite Infinite Composition is a minimalist-inspired piece that brings to mind modularity in a sequence that could be infinite. The larger the series, the more it gives a sense of humanity. With this thought in mind, they created a series of portraits using self-portraits done by actual students from the The Ceramics State School "Ballardini". These were made by hand and are works of different hands, in order to represent the idea of diversity.

"Within the same piece," explains Bertozzi, "there is an homage to the world of art and in particular to that aspect of humanity which strikes us most, that which leaves a mark, that which renders us a little bit more diverse or a lot more so than animals: we leave our marks, in contrast to animals who try to cover them. One of the prominent traces of humanity



Above: *Rebus (Christmas Tree)*. 2009. Polychromatic ceramic and polychromatic bronze. 150 x 415 x 175 cm.

Left: *Rebus (Detail)*.

Images courtesy of Sperone Westwater Gallery, New York.

of our civilization is art, that which remains."

The idea and the image of the crowd is strong and represents the theme of this work; the idea of the crowd is rendered by hands reaching upwards, raised in the last row of boxes at the top. With particular vigour, the artists wanted to manifest the idea of the crowd, of anguish, to represent the idea of suffering that humanity communicates through the image of a protest, a mob.

"In this case wanting to contain it in a first aid box seemed," continues Bertozzi, "like finding medicine, a sort of traumatological sculpture, that could in some way promote the benevolent progress of humanity, which has then been lived as a sort of utopia and so obviously will be like that."

The contents of these recent works are beautiful, truly extraordinary and moving. Art criticism is shifted now to aesthetics, to an apparently decorative aspect, to the relationship of repetition, linking concept with industry. "In effect," explain the artists, "there is only one three dimensional stylistic element that is repeated in many of the first aid boxes, their perfect organization on a wide wall; all that aside, even if the stylistic method is that, the colour is ivory, neutral, the sign of the cross is strong; the stylistic content is that of aesthetic research, which is the first aspect with which the artist is confronted while carrying out his work."

In the works of Bertozzi and Casoni the colours are muted, in this case by means of a certain strict intension; from neutral ivory into light blues, to reds. While still being complex, it is almost monochromatic even if colour is also present, it is particularly visible only upon opening and closing these doors. The other stylistic reference that can be made is a tribute to Spacialism, because in fact these first aid cabinet doors open and close, invade, communicate and relate to the internal space.

The tree, *Rebus*, is bronze combined with soft earthenware pieces, decorated with different methods with many types of surface treatments such as silkscreen, hand painting and reflective metallic methods. "The



All images on this page: *Finite Infinite Composition* (Detail). Images courtesy of Cardì Gallery, Milan, Italy.

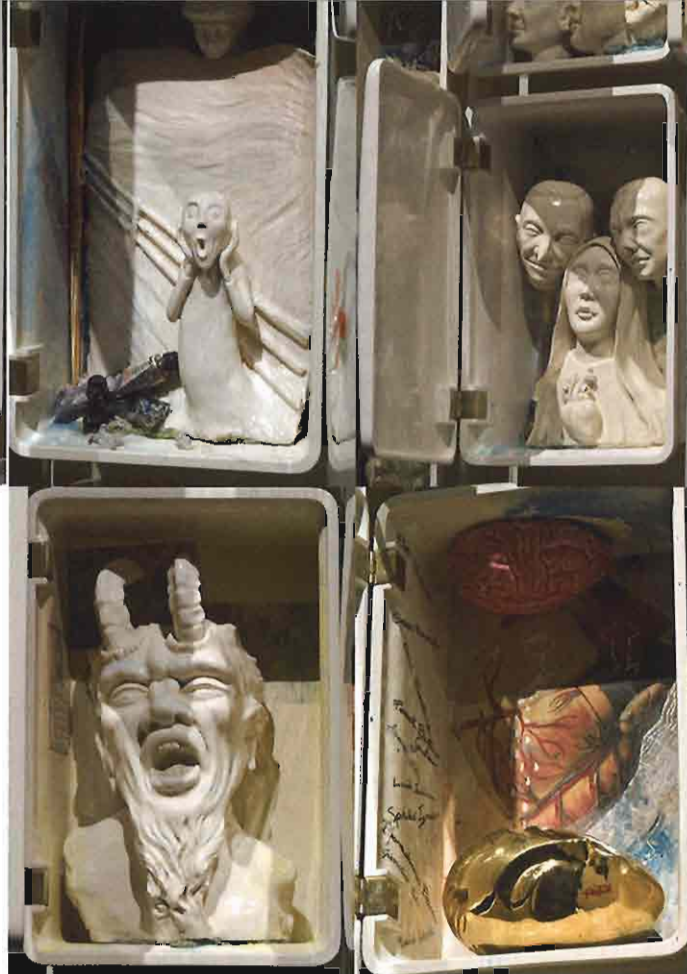
sense of this work," says Casoni, "is the fall of an opulence that we live, for example, in our celebrations and conventions, above all with reference to the 'Kennedy-esque' Christmas tree, typically American, a tree that has been thrown down by a hurricane." The idea is that of an explicit fall from splendour, of a symbol of our contemporary civilization, hurled to earth by forces of nature greater than us of the type we so often forget.

"In the Christmas ball decoration there are images taken from different cultures (Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Oriental [Buddha], Western [Madonna and Child])—that speak of figuration, of images that resemble each other which are found in these cultures; and give the sense of belonging and connectedness that we often don't see." It is a piece in which ceramic has been fused with an experimentation of different media.

"We have created a daring fusion from a technical point of view," continues Casoni, "because we have fused a fir tree, using an old technique preceding the model in wax; the concept is still that of the lost wax process but we actually burned the tree directly with the needles and the wood in a fire resistant material. It is a little more complicated but doable."

In substance, the process required direct cutting of the tree's branches, the immersion in ceramic shell and an extremely slow combustion quite similar to that of the traditional method. The ceramic shell is a mixture of plaster and kaolin, where the branch remains included. It all gets placed into the kiln, the organic substance of the branch burns out, just as the wax would have done and the shell remains hollow; after this, melted metal is poured inside which is done only once because, at the end, the external mould is destroyed. The only trick is to make lots of vent holes, because, for example, residual ash can create problems with the fusion.

Then there is the assembly of the ceramic parts. We are talking about artists who study this type of work in depth and who know well how to commit themselves to and converse with hand manufactured



construction, according to the great Italian tradition of knowing how to be innovative, drawing force from the capacity to research and renew past experiences. And they conclude, "Fundamentally we always work with the same earth, the antique one that man has known since antiquity. Just as industry has been able to create advanced ceramics, to make innovative products and, through this material, create new hand manufactured articles that hold a dialogue and are inserted into the art circuit, there is constant advanced research into aesthetics. Since you begin, without exception, from this point only then you may fall into design and trend." And they share with us their thoughts, "Those who know how to seize them, the first signs of transformation are always those in the field of art."

It is a good thing that those thoughts come out of life and cultural experiences closely connected to the art of ceramics.

Rolando Giovannini is a ceramics critic and the Director of the Istituto Statale D'Arte per la Ceramica (State Art Institute of Ceramics founded by Mr Gaetano Ballardini in 1916 and known for Art, Technology and Ceramic Restoration), Faenza, Italy.
Translated by Julie Shanks.

Ceramics

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Nino Caruso

Ceramics Sculptor

*A great Italian artist
devoted to research and promoting culture*

*Article by
Rolando Giovannini*



ANYONE WHO IS INVOLVED IN ART CRITICISM AND who studies ceramics would be honoured to deal with the work of this great Italian master, certainly the most internationally renowned Italian artist of the second half of the 20th century. Nino Caruso owes his fame, first of all, to the ongoing artistic research work he has

done in the field of ceramic sculpture and its application in architecture and urban design works. He has devoted himself to this activity for more than 50 years now, mainly in Rome, where he founded the Centro Internazionale di Ceramica (International Centre for Ceramics) in Piazza S Salvatore in Lauro (1965–1985). The centre was housed in a building overlooking

the beautiful *loggia* of a Renaissance monastery and was attended by dozens of artists from all over the world. Among these, mention must be made of the young Japanese artist Tomokazu Hirai who, after two years in Rome, moved to Faenza and attended the Ballardini State Art Institute (there he met Carlo Zauli) and the famous Japanese ceramist Hideto Satonaka. The Centro Internazionale di Ceramica was attended by other artists such as Winifred Lutz, Howard Shapiro and Tom Kerrigan from the US and Ulrike Bogel from Germany.

Caruso's biography also includes details about the many universities where he held courses in the US. The great respect in which he is held is also due to the many books he has written that have been published by the Italian publishing house, Hoepli, based

in Milan. The first book he wrote was *Ceramica Viva* (*Live Ceramics*), reprinted many times (1979, 1989, 2003). His most recent book is *Dizionario illustrato dei materiali e delle Tecniche ceramiche* (*An Illustrated Dictionary of Ceramic Materials and Techniques*) 2004. Another cornerstone of ceramics literature, published in 1984 with an introduction by Gillo Dorfles, is *Decorazione Ceramica* (*Ceramic Decoration*), a topic intimately connected to artistic production. Gillo Dorfles wrote a critical essay on the state of the art of ceramics and he describes in it, with extraordinary clarity, the way Caruso works and his poetics, calling him "one of the few true lovers of this art, deeply initiated into all the deepest secrets of the technique" and also adds "and by contrast the most free from traditional schemes", recognising his important role in the now strengthened relationship between ceramics and architecture.

Caruso's reputation as a teacher makes him a good speaker who is able to talk about his projects and poetic art. A good example of this is the "*Dieci Lezioni sulla Ceramica*" ("Ten Lessons on Ceramics") broadcast back in 1981 on the third channel of national Italian television (RAI 3) in 10 episodes lasting 30 minutes each. The episode that obtained the highest audience ratings was the last lesson on Raku ceramics, a technique that, at that time, had been practiced in Italy only by Caruso at his studio in Rome (with a Raku master, who had been invited by the Japan Cultural Institute in Rome, in 1972-1973). The Italian ceramics culture was (and largely still is today) closely linked to traditions and to the accuracy and perfection of the technological processes, that should ideally be controlled in their entirety. Illustrating the ceramics production process collectively, within an organised set and involving several people, all of them called on to take part in it, was amazing and extraordinary. This is why the Raku technique and the seminars and workshops he then held on a

Previous page: *Arch/Sculpture*. 1980. Terracotta. 200 x 110 x 30 cm. Photo by Cheil Studio.

This page, top: *Evangelic Church*. 1967. Continuous low relief, ceramic. Savona, Italy. Photo by Maurizio Di Puolo.

Below: *Master shoto*. 2010. Clayarch Gimhae Museum, Korea. Photo by Cheil Studio.

Facing page: *Pala Rossa*. 2005. Terra sigillata. 65 cm/h. Photo by Gianfranco Tommassini.



regular basis were so successful and enjoyed great popularity. This *modus operandi* is something that must be attributed to Maestro Caruso. Following this success, he wrote a specific book also published by Hoepli in 1982, with the title *Ceramica Raku* (*Raku Ceramics*): the book illustrates this special technique, the way kilns were designed, built and managed, the various formulations and artists.

"This book on Raku ceramics led to something interesting: aggregation. We ceramists" the artist says, "normally work alone in our studio, load the kiln with the pieces to fire, wait until the right temperature is reached, then wait until pieces cool. With Raku, instead, people are brought together, they exchange information, other groups of people join in, they all keep in touch with each other on Facebook™. This means there are thousands of people out there who are interested in this."

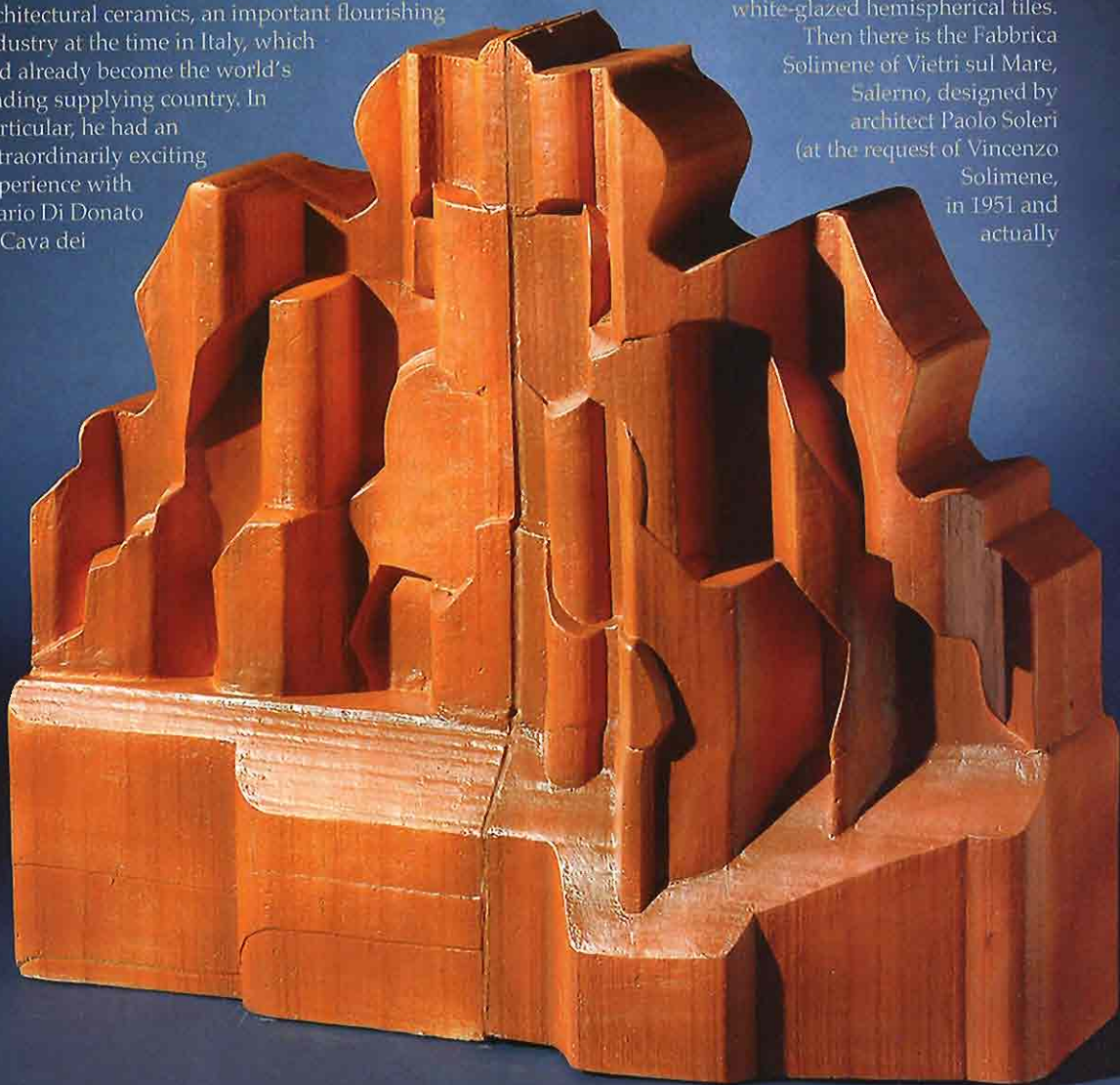
Caruso was not foreign to designing for ceramics manufacturing companies and in particular for architectural ceramics, an important flourishing industry at the time in Italy, which had already become the world's leading supplying country. In particular, he had an extraordinarily exciting experience with Mario Di Donato at Cava dei

Tirreni (Salerno): in 1966–1970 he designed several tile collections with a relief motif for the Ceramica Cava company.

He then later designed some decorative, modular units for the UDA and "D'AS" brands using black and white and a geometrically-inspired iconography. He also designed the famous *Canne d'Organo* (Organ pipes) for the ceramics firm Ceramiche Marazzi of Sassuolo in fire clay at 1250°C with a 50 x 50 x 8 cm moulded relief texture (1970); these exceptionally large tiles were an innovation at the time and they were used to give the wall a musical feel, vibrating and pulsating with tiles put together to create a defined pattern, made up of full and empty areas, of continuous and broken lines. This desire of Caruso to shape and compose architectural surfaces has other examples in Italy, in the work done by Giò Ponti for the brand Joo Gresite (1960), with the famous 'diamond' small tiles, or in that of D'Agostino for the Hotel Parco dei Principi in Sorrento, consisting of

white-glazed hemispherical tiles.

Then there is the Fabbrica Solimene of Vietri sul Mare, Salerno, designed by architect Paolo Soleri (at the request of Vincenzo Solimene, in 1951 and actually



produced in 1954). Finally, mention must be made of the great wall created by Giampolo Bertozzi and Stefano Dal Monte Casoni *Ditelo con i fiori* (The Language of Flowers) for the hospital Nuovo Ospedale of Imola (1990-94), made up of bas-relief tiles and large embossed flowers.

Caruso taught ceramics design at the State Art Institute in Rome from 1970 to 1985 and was the Director of the Academy of Fine Arts in Perugia from 2002 to 2005 (the second oldest art academy in Italy, founded in 1573). He has always been a great entertainer at events, generous in promoting young artists and artistic gatherings and was called upon to promote discussion and debate on poetic art and contemporary art themes. One such event was *CottaTerra*, held in Deruta-Gubbio-Gualdo Tadino in 1998, when the essentials of contemporary sculpture were formally defined: also present were the artists Nedda Guidi from Rome, Alessio Tasca, Pompeo Pianezzola, Betty Woodman, Kichizaeamon Raku and other international artists. Caruso's poetic expression is based on a personal way of creating and designing, which he himself invented. Looking at a piece of cut polystyrene, he realised that by

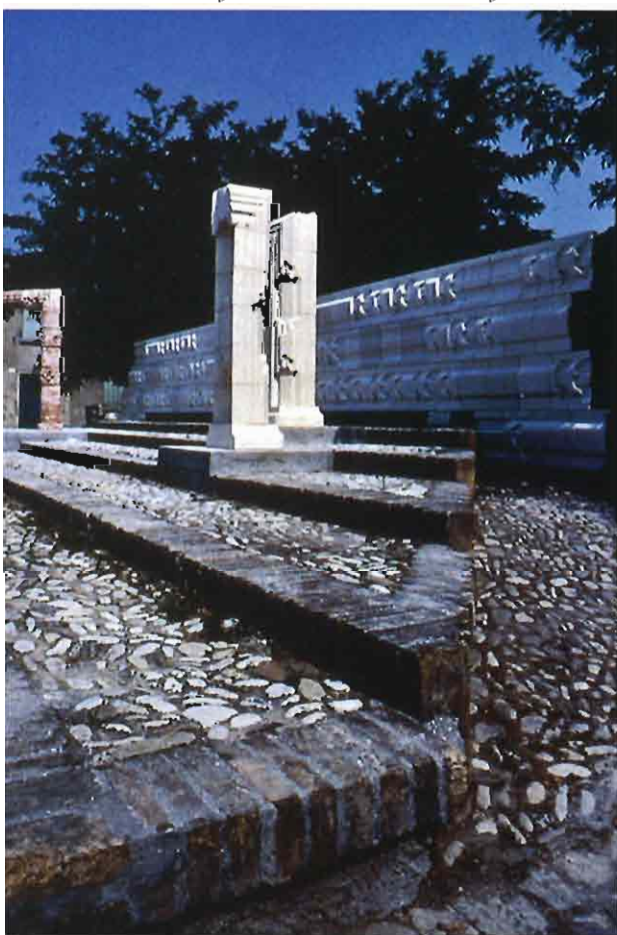
cutting it with a hot metal wire, you obtained various modular units with a similar style. Gillo Dorfles already had talked about this in the 1960s, when he described how Caruso was able to obtain interlocked shapes using blocks laid down following different directions of force. "When you are working, it often happens that things occur and discoveries are made by chance. I once happened to cut a piece of polystyrene, I opened it and found a negative and a positive. I used to create objects with these pieces, at the beginning. I put some of these pieces together and the idea came to create a system with two or four pieces, which would give me the possibility to vary the surface and make it continuous." Then there is the essence of his poetics: "a continuous surface, which you can keep on developing horizontally or vertically: it is exactly from here that integration with architecture has come naturally."

This experience gave him the stimulus to transfer this technique to ceramics. On this subject he says: "Clay is generally used initially to make a ceramic piece. I used Styrofoam instead. And the approach is so different from what you normally use in the manipulation of clay that you can get a new aesthetic language." In other words, "the technical process is so unusual that it takes you to absolutely new results far from traditional ceramics production processes."

It is important to mention here the monumental ceramic walls created in Japan by Shino Toseki of Kyoto, on a design by Caruso for the famous collection *Artist Series* published in 1983 and, since then, also produced for public use. The walls were made up of original textures, never produced before, put together following a varying rhythm, a sheet music, with repeated sequences and cadences, rhythm and sound pauses.

The entire production of Caruso is characterised by this special approach and method of working. The union of these solid modules would be used to create self-bearing structures. So we have these "quasi-architectural", three-dimensional structures: arches or large columns (alike and yet differing from each other), articulated on a geometric basic composition that is rational and yet relates with the environment in which it is set, playing the role of the protagonist. Then, there are the walls. Walls are flexible structures, according to him. Given a certain

Below left: *Art in Town*. 1989. Terracotta and ceramic. Conserve Square, Cesenatico, Italy. Photo by Rolando Baraghini.
Below right: *Wall sculpture*. 1972. High fire ceramic. 129 x 1500 x 30 cm. Clayarch Gimhae Museum. Photo by Cheil Studio.



space, the pieces that make up a wall are put together following what space suggests to the artist, to create various situations: in other words, becoming a flexible structure.

This is mass-produced ceramic, destined to the public and capable of transmitting a sense of precise expressive quality. The comparison between the 'design' of the 1960s in Italy (Ambrogio Pozzi and Antonia Campi, for Richard Ginori and Pozzi Ginori; Enzo Mari, for Danese and Gabbianelli) and in Europe and the work done by Caruso, is evident: each pursues its own essentiality, elegance, functionality qualities. Both aim at addressing the public and include objects that everyone can understand and use. His functional and commemorative objects also draw from the same images, with modular parts that are composed and then assembled.

His work does have, at its origins, an orientation toward myths and archaic symbols. The studies he has made on the Greek world and culture, his interest in the Etruscans, some ideas he put in his works, recalling the cuneiform calligraphy of the Sumerians or the bas-reliefs of the Egyptians, can be understood as coming from his Mediterranean origins, from the time he spent of his life in Libya first and then in Sicily and finally, from the knowledge and experience he had of artistic and historic finds in the countries where he lived. All this continued and became even more marked and clear after he made journeys to Latin America, Mexico, Japan, Korea, China.

More important, longer lasting jobs, such as works on existing buildings (such as Piazza delle Conserve in Cesenatico 1989 and the Hospital of Tokai, 1984) or new projects designed hand-in-hand with the architect (Cornices in building, terracotta cornices on an important building in the town of Fano in 2001, made under the aegis of the Cultural Heritage), have a different flavour, because they show the desire of others to create things that last, to produce works of architecture that will stand the test of time.

Among his most notable works is that of the interior of the Evangelical Church of Savona (1967–1968)

the walls of which are covered entirely in white relief creating vibrations of strong visual impact and appeal. According to Caruso, "If cooperation starts from the beginning of a building design stage – an example of this is that mentioned above in Savona – a valuable aesthetic solution can be obtained. In that case it was the continuous bas-relief, fully integrated in the building project" with perfect harmony and this means that "ceramic is not something applied at a later stage."

This is the original contribution by Caruso, who will be 85 on April 19, 2013: bringing innovation also in the initial stages of design, using a contemporary material that has nothing to do in a context as old as that of ceramics, acquiring the ability to express his art in a particular, unique, personal way. In *Nino Caruso ON THE ROAD – Tra Arte e Mito*, a retrospective (Edimond, Perugia 2008), this route is well described.

One of the interpretations that Caruso likes best of himself is this one: a self-taught artist, free from the constraints school often imposes, sometimes against the tide – far from the ceramics world – catapulted there by chance, free to experiment. He actually has done this experimenting since the 1950s, when he used sand as a finish as opposed to the prevailing style of the time that required shiny finishes.

Nino Caruso is today an artist who creates his works perfectly in tune with the contemporary world, dialoguing and competing with space, to interpret the requirements of an environmental art.

Rolando Giovannini is a ceramics critic and the Principal of the Istituto Statale d'Arte per la Ceramica/Liceo Artistico per il Design Ceramico (State Art Institute for Ceramics and Ceramics Design School) in Faenza, Italy.

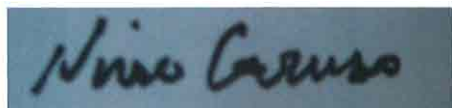
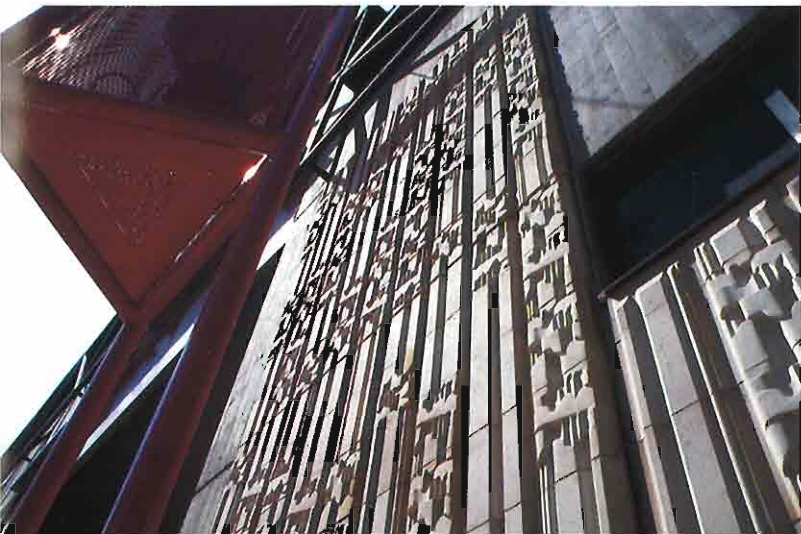
Translated by Domino of Elisa Moro, Italy.

Left: Gijon Train Station. 1992. High fire terracotta. Gijon, Spain.

Photo by Jesus Castagnon.

Top right: Nino Caruso Signature. Photo by Nino Caruso.

Below right: Nino Caruso Portrait. Photo by Niccolò Crisafi.



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Lisa Nocentini, *Between Galestro
Clay and the Red Clay of
Montelupo Fiorentino*

A Review by Rolando Giovannini

TO HAVE ONE'S OWN STUDIO ON THE SO-CALLED "GALESTRO" RED EARTH, IN THE area called "Impruneta" (the worldwide famous clay, the oil jars and the *cotto* floor tiles that are found in the Renaissance buildings of Tuscany) is something quite significant in itself. In fact, it is a true privilege to be a sculptor in Tuscany where landscape is infinite, marked with slopes and gentle hills spotted by clusters of cypress trees emerging here and there, or *casolari* (rural homes) and *castelletti* (rural buildings with an adjoining small castle) surrounded by oaks. A landscape that changes with the light and the sequence of days and gives a stunning feeling, a sudden, striking perception of what is before one's eyes as if it were a theatre stage.



where nothing looks defined, static but moving instead, dynamic, maybe a little concealed and encrypted. It is as if reality were rarefied, made up of many notes and sketches and the context were dimmed off and lowered, just in time to bring the pure artistic thought of each day out of it. A place where inspiration takes shape because it is free to express itself, to come out, born out of the context. Any dream made by Lisa Nocentini, any thought, any story, becomes reality under her master hands that while touching the earth, the mother clay, feel it alive and plastic and mouldable.

It is important to mention first of all, that she was invited by Vittorio Sgarbi at the Venice Biennale at its Florence seat at Villa Bardini from 13 July to 9 October 2011, with her work *La Governante* (*The Governess*), made of terracotta and wood.

To create her sculptures, Nocentini starts making sketches, something she does instinctively well. She does not start from the idea of wanting to create a piece. Her work arises from her unconscious, from the emerging of an idea that she then represents, it is something that has to do with representing moments that are frozen there. Her works are metaphors for what life is, flashes of life. Animals play a prevailing role in her works, then there is the American doll, with her striped socks, recalling the fictional character Raggedy Ann, a popular doll in the US, then there is the human figure. You can define her works as memory containers. The child born from Peruvian ceramics, for example, recalls motherhood. Or the domestic scene where a woman gives birth to her child under the eye of the sterile family cat, as to underline procreation and the eternal balance of life.

This is how one can imagine the environment where Nocentini (an instructor of ceramics at Studio Art Centers International in Florence since 1990) creates her figures, her compositions, her nursery rhymes. She remembers her childhood: "What I do has a lot to do with my childhood memories. When I was a little girl, I liked to look at my toys, the figures that made up nativity scenes, the

Facing page: La Governante. Stained earthenware and wood. 120 cm/h. Photo by Lisa Nocentini.

Above: Il Parassita from the series La Biblioteca di Babele. 2011. Stained earthenware and wood. 47 x 28.5 cm.

papier maché animals that were on the toy trains and other objects that we used to play with."

In the natural quiet of her studio, her words break out clear, phrases and sentences make a composition, necessary to break the silence, to give each of her works a third and a fourth dimension, that of the written language and listening in addition to a formal and pictorial meaning.

It would seem as if the technique – the ancient ceramics know-how, and the materials that play a fundamental role in the process, were overwhelmed by the expressive communication ability of her sculptures to the point of becoming almost superfluous, unnecessary, nonexistent, trivial. Yes, because none of the figures that are so typical of Nocentini's repertoire live just of the methodological, technological, scientific aspects evoked by the glazes, the colours and the engobes that are at the basis of ceramics itself.

The colours and the shades she uses closely resemble the work of Giorgio Morandi, in that they have a savour of earth, of Tuscany, of the places you cross on your way to Siena and its surroundings, of roads that tell of the different types of earth the famous painter Morandi used in his works. And that Nocentini used as well. In the 1930s and 1940s other artists used them for their work, such as Fausto Pirandello, son of Luigi who was a writer, a poet and a playwright, or like Corrado Cagli. Or, more recently, like Bruno Saetti, totally immersed in these shades, albeit with a more calligraphic style.

Her work is sculptural, it is made of imagination, of the outcome of wonder, of the confusion that follows surprise, perhaps expressed in a conceptual, ironic manner. Conceptual because it refers to the poetic and the international and all Italian flavour of the 1970s that partially delegates the task of reading the message to the viewer, giving value to the thinking and reflection abstracted from the work of art in itself.



Il Coccodrillo from the series *La Biblioteca di Babele*. 2012.
Stained earthenware and wood. 61 x 32 cm/ft.

Ironic, because there is a sort of whimsical solution to the representation of the subjects, whose meaning is clear but that are artificially synthesised in their expression or, instead, linger on certain details. And so forms expand and shrink, interlace, twist together, part and rejoin. The narrative is made up of a sequence of stories, tales, illustrated poems but also of wise ways of thinking summarised in a single communicative subject.

This synthesis belongs to the tradition of the Novecento Italiano movement, whose major representative was Arturo Martini, today a point of reference for the artist Alberto Mingotti from Castel Bolognese. Nocerini's work has some aspects in common with them: a closed-pattern story and the representation of the complete scene. And like them, she does not appeal to the poetics of a fragment but to simplification of the figures. The difference between these two contemporary artists who belong to the same generation but have different backgrounds and educations, is in the way they shape their works: Nocerini leaves traces of her gestures, of her touching the material, something that Mingotti has abandoned to smoothing the entire surface of his works with the utmost care.

The artistic education of Nocerini is extraordinary: she was born in Florence and there she attended a linguistic high school, she spent one whole year in France at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Aix-en-Provence and then studied painting and drawing at the Fine Art Academy of Florence, a pupil of Fernando Farulli. After finishing high school she studied for six months in the studio of Marcello Fantoni, where she learned various techniques and how to use the wheel; then she was an apprentice at the studio of Bruno Gambone (1978), son of the famous Guido Gambone from Vietri, the owner, together with Andrea D'Arienzo, of La Faenzaerella. She was also a

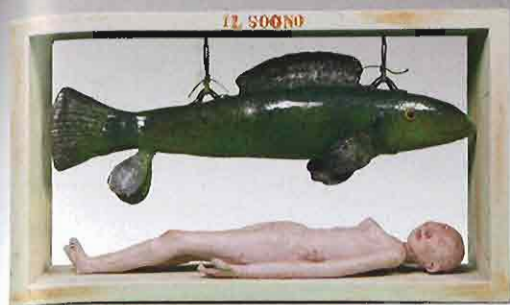
pupil of Salvatore Cipolla at the well-known Art Institute of Porta Romana of Florence (this school hosts the valuable Gipsoteca, today organised and arranged as a real, wonderful museum).

The pleasure of aesthetics, the figure of the crocodile with its scales carefully detailed one by one, the selection of colours and shades, the composition and the use of colours are all important aspects, however always mixed with shape and the image. The human body is distorted with elongated limbs and stupefied faces, a mixture of realism and *naïveté*, of simplified figures that have a meaning by themselves because irony and a playful mood prevail in the comic situations.

The wolf that is often represented as a wild animal, is kept in check by the child, a character who rebukes it as did San Francesco. The story of the wolf eating the sheep and the chicken belongs to old rural tales and is also found in fairy tales and the stories told by the elderly.

Then there is, frequently, the subject of the fish, a bit slimy, intrusive, insidious, an ancient image coming from the deep, emerging from hidden places unexpectedly. The symbolic relationship between the female figure and the fish is dealt with also by the American artist Cynthia Siegel (in November 2011 in New Delhi in India, at the Sanskriti Foundation); she focuses on the expressive possibilities of figures, exploring the functioning of thought, imagination, desire.

From here the *Corteo (Parade)* was born (a quite interesting work as it offers more stimuli) and the collection *Pensierose (The Thoughtful Ones)*, a series of sculptures in which the female head is represented with a 'thought' on her head, similar to a child with the body of a dog and a baby face. The faces of these *Pensierose* pieces appear to be absent, well-painted and with an impenetrable sense added on to them, where no smiling but not even fear or thrill can be seen. A face immersed in the presence of thought and the absence of the presence if not left alone with physicality.



Today, her work lives in harmony within a frame, such as a package that contains its iconographic, expressive theme. The wood and the boxes were originally conceived for practical purposes, to facilitate packaging and shipping. *La Biblioteca di Babele* (*The Library of Babel*) (a composition of 51 boxes-packages, on show at the Davico Gallery in Turin, from 17 May to 23 June 2012, just nine months after the Solo Show at the Gallery Arianna Sartori in Mantua, 1 to 15 September 2011) was inspired by Jorge Luis Borges, the Argentinian writer, essayist, poet, philosopher and translator who raised the issue of combining the 26 characters of the alphabet in all possible ways, with different combinations, to represent the infinite possibilities of the ideal library.

Borges was especially popular in Italy during his life, to the point of soliciting on several occasions his nomination for the Nobel prize. This interest probably derives from the fact that he was familiar with Italian literature and with many of the insights of Italian poets, which are found in his writings (just think of Dante Alighieri in the first place). Borges' predilection for fantasy literature, apparently far from realistic references, is the bond that unites the Argentinian writer with Nocentini.

The sculpting method and the paints applied are sometimes so obvious and gestural that a comparison with the *papier mâché* technique is obvious, replacing the clay subjects with those of the floats of the Carnival of Viareggio. The playful vein typical of authentic Tuscany and some of the colours make one think however, of Mino Maccari, an artist of the 20th century who was born in Siena.

Nocentini's work is like a book where one page follows another, creating a dynamic whole in motion. It is fascinating to summarise the artistic life of Lisa Nocentini, as every page contains something essential. This is how she shapes her self-portrait, in a somewhat hidden, mysterious way as if following, in her work, the outline of the *sinopia* (underdrawing).



Top left: *Il Sogno* from the series *La Biblioteca di Babele*. 2011.

Stained earthenware and wood. 45.5 x 26.5 cm.

Below left: *Allarme!* from the series *La Biblioteca di Babele*.

2011. Stained earthenware and wood. 62 x 33.5 cm.

Above: *L'Intellettuale* from the series *Le Pensierose*. 2009.

Stained earthenware. 53 cm. Photo by Lisa Nocentini.

Below: Lisa Nocentini.



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Mirco Denicolò A Ceramics Poet

Article by Rolando Giovannini

IN ORDER TO PROPERLY PRESENT MIRCO DENICOLÒ, ITALIAN artist in his prime both artistically and professionally, two aspects must be explored. The first refers to his presence in the 54th Venice Biennale, Italian Pavilion Emilia Romagna Region, when in July 2011, he was invited by the art critic Vittorio Sgarbi to exhibit his piece at the Cloisters of Saint Peter in the city of Reggio Emilia. The second is to note a consistent artistic journey rich with both graphic and painterly sensibility. His expressive experience has been profound, not at all accidental and is definable as specialised in the field of drawing. Such gifts are the privileges of some artists and, in this case, the creator is also particularly technically inclined and respectful of methodologies. Another of his particularities has been the progressive goals he has set for himself and his consistent determination along the way.

He spent his formative artistic years in the Art of Ceramics department at the Mengaroni Institute of Pesaro, well-known thanks to the likes of Franco Bucci, Nanni Valentini and, even earlier, for painting on ceramics by Bruno Baratti, Vincenzo Molaroni and Ferruccio Mengaroni himself. He then completed his studies in the two year training program Art of Majolica at the State Art Institute Gaetano Ballardini, learning wheel throwing from Professor Manlio Tassinari, as well as multiple aspects of design, the alchemy of formulas and the art of technology, which are main features of this school in Faenza, Italy. Speaking of himself, he maintains that "for more than 30 years I have been living every day surrounded by ceramics. I am not bored and am still able to be moved by a piece in an exhibition window or interested in laboratory tests or by reading technical articles." The artists in our discipline are sometimes distinguished or characterised by the dimensions of their work; for example there are some who produce monumentally, while others the opposite.

Denicolò has established his own dimension, often

made up of works belonging to the realm of objects, of comprehensible things, utilitarian. For example, towards the end of the 1990s he created a series of 60 vases identical in dimension, extraordinarily refined, each one boasting a different iconographically inspired representation (objects from the world of nature; animals, shells, stylised fossils). The handcrafting remained functional, staying true to his original mission, while the aspect of communication evolved. The idea of the 'series', of 'sequence', typical of Denicolò, is due to his demanding and effective experience within the ceramics industry where, for nearly 30 years, he ran the Research and Development Workshop at the Maestri Maiolicari factory in the city of Campogalliano. It was a job based on a typical Italian creative model, where technical knowledge were fused with manual labour.

Only this type of synthesis can bring one to such a high aesthetic level, being made largely possible by working in a production plant in the industrial zone of the Sassuolo district, an area of worldwide fame for its wall and floor tiles in the construction and architectural sectors. In fact, the artist was also impressed by other serial expressions connected to the world of design. This refers to 100 percent made up conceptualised by Alessandro Mendini, who in 1992 for the famous Italian Alessi trademark, designed a limited edition collection of vases. This signified one hundred pieces of the same ceramic form entrusted to as many as 100 artists and designers using their own distinct expressions, interpretations and styles. The concept of series, of repetition and of the development of a sequence is the foundation of Denicolò's poetry.

During the course of his research, he has carefully and sequentially explored iconographical themes, that is to say that at each stage in his artistic endeavours he has built upon the theme of the preceding work, taking it in new directions. For example, he is passionate about designing sets for theatre, side by side with directors (such as Tiziana Asirelli) and theatre companies. This type of show is supported and substantiated by the

Left and right: Fuoco sul palco. 2011. Animated video. 4 min. 21 sec.



representative context of the backdrops, by the succession and alternation behind the scenes, by the colours and treatments used in order to create the context.

Denicolò tends to create ceramic backdrops, stories and narrations either through the sgraffito technique or with brushwork to create a similar effect. In order to complete this picture and to highlight this way of expression, the "A picture a day" project should be mentioned (where 400 unedited drawings were published on the web in one a day starting on 6 October 2008 and finishing on 8 November 2009).

The fascination with/of design, which is fundamental both in the production and in the interpretation of his work, is due to his formative years, when his drawing teacher, Piergiorgio Spallacci, pushed and encouraged him to synthesise his vision. Even today he punctuates each subject by choosing its most important formal value, this outcome is the quality of light, the task of volumes, as well as the value of the graphic mark making.

When speaking about ceramics, there are some parameters that reveal the artist's personality and his way of approaching the material. Among these, the setup and treatment of the studio space indicates a way of measuring the methods the artist uses in his approach to the creative process; for example, Denicolò has this to say about the subject, "My studio is dusty, with low light, with a lot of useless objects, set up for painting on ceramics: it is a bachelor's studio, a den. The most important elements are the brushes, the scale and the mortar, the base materials for making glazes and pigments, all the jars to conserve them, the wood and cardboard used to make boxes and crates for transport."

In fact, visiting his atelier requires having a global vision of the tools and materials. Colour samples, containers with raw materials, he measures out depending on his personal formulas, chromatic glaze test trials of wide ranges of colours, several small tools for engraving and painting catch the eye. His studio is spacious, deep, extremely tidy and divided into work stations. He adores explaining his work in terms of processes, detailing the numerous firing phases, doting on the various themes confronted. Sometimes he reveals some little secret resulting from his experimentation and research. For example, to reach the desired depth of colour, typical of his deep blacks, he layers multiple colours and fires them several times. In some cases up to eight firings at 1040°C.

While being inspired in his youth by the works of Paul Klee, from whom he has still retained the influence in his geometrically structured background paintings, more contemporarily his influence has been that of Katsushika Hokusai's elegance and use of negative space within the composition. With respect to the dynamics of other artists working around him, he particularly appreciates, dialogues and feels in synthesis with his colleagues Danilo Melandri and Nedo Merendi, painters and ceramists from Faenza.

He says in his own poetic definition "I have two aptitudes, one for storytelling and the other for composition. When I compose an image I can use anything, the goal is the harmony of the finished piece, the journey I use to get there is not so important."

There are two aspects that best characterise his recent



Above: *Polipi fritti in salsa d'assenzio*. 2010. Refractory body glazed and painted and fired at 1040°C. 33 x 33 x 3 cm. 2010. Author's collection. Work selected for the 54th Venice Biennale, Italian Pavilion Region of Emilia Romagna.

Below left: *Fuoco sul palco*. 2011. Animated video. 4 min. 21 sec.

Below right: *Ci sia più pace nel tuo cuore che azzurro in cielo*. 2011. Opera e contenitore, refractory body glazed and painted and fired at 1040°C with a wooden painted box. 25 x 25 x 5 cm. Collection of UNESCO Club Forlì, Italy.



artistic journey relevant to his creative approach with mixed competencies: ceramics and communication. In the work *Fuoco sul palco* (Fire on the Stage), Denicolò wrote an animated narrative, which resulted in a four minute video. It is a story created by digitally combining his own ceramic pieces and others from the collection at the International Ceramics Museum (MIC) in Faenza. It was a collaborative effort; Andrea Pedna curated the animation, while the soundtrack was created and performed by Paolo Geminiani and Donato D'antonio.

The video was broadcast in spring 2011 on You Tube at MIC. Then, on October 4th of 2011, the same MIC of Faenza entered in the UNESCO program *Monuments Expressing a Culture of Peace in the World*. To celebrate this recognition, a piece by Denicolò was commissioned, resulting in a ceramic tile measuring 25 x 25 x 6 cm depicting a dove in flight. You can tell at a glance that the artist feels the

need to capture, to represent and to uncover the beauty that captures his spirit. His method is the narration of perceived reality, told through engraved surface design. His ceramics involve the viewers, as the work evokes mental images of all the possible processes that lead to the finished piece.

In his way of working, he tries to eliminate any unnecessary phases. This mental clarity in the realm of manual production helps to amplify its poetry, which some viewers are able to understand, even when it is not so apparent at times.

His role as ceramics professor, both at ISIA (The Institute of Industrial Arts, Faenza) and at the prestigious and renowned School of Drawing, Tommaso Minardi, are the privileged settings where Mirco Denicolò is able to express and transmit these feelings and goals.

Top left and centre: *Cartoline d'auguri - vacanze sul mar Rosso*. 2010. Refractory body glazed, painted and fired at 1040°C. 35 x 40 cm. Author's collection.

Right: *Polipi fritti in salsa d'assenzio*. 2010. Refractory body glazed, painted and fired at 1040°C. 33 x 33 x 3 cm. Author's collection – Work selected for the 54th Venice Biennale.

Below: *Tav 1, Historia Naturalis 01* (left), 09 (centre) and 12 (right). 2010. Refractory body glazed, painted and fired at 1040°C. 40 x 35 cm. Author's collection.

Far right: Mirco Denicolò in his studio in Italy.

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Gian Lorenzo Bernini

Model for the Lion on the
Four Rivers Fountain (Detail)

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Ceramic Sculpture During the Age of Adolfo Wildt

Article by Claudia Casali and Rolando Giovannini

THE IMPORTANT RETROSPECTIVE DEDICATED TO ADOLFO Wildt at the San Domenico Museum in Forlì, Italy offered the opportunity to arrange at the International Museum of Ceramics in Faenza a parallel exhibition devoted to the ceramics of the first 30 years of the 20th century. Wildt (1868–1931) was a virtuoso of great culture, a deep talent, but a criticised figure: he was loved by his cherishers and at the same time detested for his work outside the formal harmony, too involved in Nordic decadent contests.

When one speaks of Wildt's art, the 20th century artistic movements must be passed in review (Symbolism, Liberty, Futurism, Realism), it seemed significant to create an itinerary within the MIC 20th century collection that would highlight the main characters closest to Wildt or who had lived the same artistic temporality. Fourteen 'artistic experiences' have been selected for this exhibition, a sort of self-standing overview of the excellence of Italian art until 1931, the year of Wildt's death.

The exhibition starts with Galileo Chini (1873–1956), founder of Le Fornaci di San Lorenzo in the Tuscan town of Borgo San Lorenzo in 1907 and operative until 1944. As soon as 1896, Chini had demonstrated his ability with ceramics, having founded the L'Arte della Ceramica; in Borgo San Lorenzo they also produced wrought iron and windows, following the Anglo-Saxon experience of Arts & Crafts, with the oriental trend that had so

strongly influenced him following his stay in Siam (1911–1913), where he was invited by the Emperor Rama V to decorate the Royal Palace. The brilliant and intense chromatic choices, the harmonious forms, the floral decorations were all enhanced by

metallic lustres. Putti, garlands, festoons, panels and vases were used as architectural coverings or for cabinetry, with decorations in stylised floral, with geometric compositions, elaborations inspired by classicality, by Klimt or oriental themes. He made ceramic architectural intervention of considerable significance in stoneware, a material not commonly used in the Italian production, including exteriors, even if it was well known.

Achille Calzi (1873–1919) embodies the figure of the well-rounded artist, a proponent of the new movements of modernity and of a new role of the artist-designer, committed to architecture and industry. He was a painter, drawer, an art historian and teacher, he designed furniture, household ceramics, ceramics for architecture, salon hearths and tiles for the outdoors, which became the symbol of a change for arts and crafts. His production is marked by the typical Art Nouveau theme of the female figure dialoguing

with nature, swathed in elegant drapery, airy scrolls and phytomorphic elements. His premature death in 1919 from the Spanish influenza put an end to his research leaning towards Decò.

A wide space is devoted to the precociously skilled Domenico Baccarini (1883–1907). In his art, he practiced both symbolic and Art Nouveau poetics. One of the dominant characteristics of his works in majolica, clearly influenced by Della Robbia,



Above: Fig. 1. Domenico Baccarini. *Vase with Flying Girls (Vaso con Volata di Fanciulle)*. 1909–1910, from a model dated 1903.

Facing page, above: Fig. 2. Francesco Nonni. *Oriental Procession (Corteo Orientale)*. 1925.

Facing page, below: Fig. 3. Arturo Martini. *St George and the Dragon (San Giorgio e il Drago)*. 1926.

is the lack of glaze in small details that the artist intends to highlight in the moulded composition (fig. 1). The relation between 'biscuit', called for the earthenware *biscotto* and the white glaze part focuses on the shape that may be appreciated for its freshness and spontaneity. Baccarini died at an extremely young age and his name will remain linked to the Cenacle bearing his name which involved artists of the same generation and was a moment of cultural growth and artistic renewal.

Francesco Nonni (1885–1976) operated in the Decò setting. His creativity peak between 1920 and 1926, is characterised by the creation of Pierrots, ladies and figurines featuring elegant and refined decorations, perfectly in keeping with the fashion of the times. The *Oriental Procession* (fig. 2) is his best known work documenting his passion for the exotic, it was presented in 1925 at the *International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts* in Paris.

Arturo Martini (1889–1947) must be considered, together with Wildt, one of the great exponents of the evolution of 20th century Italian sculpture into a modern style. Martini was not fond of Wildt, from a poetic point of view, they were both fond of past greats, medieval and primitive culture, Romanesque architecture and the Italian 15th century. After training in Treviso at the Gregorj kiln, Martini had some experience in Faenza in 1918. During the 1920s, Martini created several bas-relief tiles in plaster and earthenware, with sacred subjects and numerous moulded ceramics for small series, beginning in 1926, created in Liguria (Albisola and Nervi). *St George and the Dragon* (fig. 3) belongs to the *Trilogy of the Kings*, deliberately left in earthenware to call attention to the contrast between the sacred content and the poor material.

Ercle Drei (1886–1973), contemporary of Martini but artistically far from him, was slightly oriented towards modernity: between symbolism, Art

Nouveau, Neo-Classic canons and the complexity of late Romanticism, as is evident above all in certain portraits. Many of his sculptures in plaster and in bronze are reminiscent of classical stylistic features, destined to earn him participation in exhibitions as well as public national commissions during the Fascist regime. The artist absorbed and reproduced

recognisable clichés in a highly personalised manner. The ceramics had strong references to mythological elements (such as the *Pegasus Holding a Chalice*).

Domenico Rambelli (1886–1972) is the great sculptor of these 30 years. He participated

in various Venice and Rome *Biennials*. From 1919 he taught at the Regia Scuola di Ceramica di Faenza where, thanks to his new teaching style inspired by modern notions, he created an innovative didactic system. He joined the drawing to the shape, enforcing its role in the creation of full spaces and volumes. Several executives of Rambelli's pupils are today preserved at MISA, Museum of the State Art Institute Gaetano Ballardini in Faenza, sometimes they are signed by the master together with the citation *da eseguire* (to execute) devoted to the quality and feasibility of the work. Highly considered by Futurists, over the years his poetics reached an essentiality of forms tending towards the 20 year Fascist regime classicism. Wildt liked Rambelli, as documented in their correspondence discovered in the Rambelli Archive at the Town Library in Faenza. They shared the thought of a great sculpture born of a glorious past, from a long-standing tradition deeply rooted in Roman,

Etruscan and Romanesque eras. Unlike Rambelli, who succeeded in finding his own extraordinary modernity, even while respecting tradition, Wildt maintained due distance from the art of his own times. The male head by Rambelli, *Portrait of an*



Ill Man (fig. 4) can be defined as homage to Wildt in its form, for the clean and squared cut that strongly evokes his formal solutions.

Pietro Melandri (1885–1976) was a painter, ceramist and set designer; he took part in Baccarini's Cenacle and lived during the Symbolist and Art Nouveau revival of the period. He perfected important results on third firings, which allowed him to create significant works and inexorably link his name to this technique. He collaborated with Gio Ponti in the creation of ceramic decorations for large decorative panels: the medium had to have a sort of immaterial transparency that he was able to render tangible, thanks to the iridescent effects of lustres, evoking Persian, Byzantine and Moorish images. The decorative models continuously renovate themselves through the creation of new techniques and formulas for pigments and third firing. Lustreware and third firings are not merely coverings, but offer a three-dimensional vision of the work. The masks of the Satyr became the symbol of a poetics and of an expressive innovation in form linked to mythological subjects that would reappear in later years.

Anselmo Bucci (1887–1959) collaborated with many artists and factories, in addition to creating his own ceramics. Skilful, meticulous and a virtuoso, he was assigned to teach at the Faenza's School for Ceramics since 1920 having Rambelli as a colleague and bringing national recognition to the school for its didactic-training levels. Bucci reached the perfection of decorative processes and a high technological knowledge, these characteristics became elements of excellence at the School for Ceramics. Teaching was to occupy much of his time, it is

documented by several works created by him or by his students and today preserved inside the school. He also enjoyed a significant collaboration with Drei, Rambelli and Nonni who from 1925 consulted him to create his figurines in Decò style. His name remains linked to his perfectionism and his research on lustre techniques, crystallisation and stoneware, importing innovations from abroad (above all from France) to Faenza and creating unique effects with clay paste lustres, perfect in their iridescent luminosity. He won the silver medal at the *International Exhibition* in Paris in 1925.

The world of ceramics in Faenza was touched by the Futurist movement for a brief time between 1928 and 1929, thanks to the work of Gatti, Ortolani and Bucci. Faenza's craftsmen were to lend their own kilns, transcribing the decorative element provided by the sketches of Futurist artists in non-traditional decorations. It was the leader of Futurism Marinetti who created the first Futurist plate at Gatti's kiln. From Balla's original sketches, Gatti reproduced motifs on cachepots, tiles, plates and a coffee service in a daring hexagonal form that resembled a mechanical bolt.

At the end of 1929, the Futurist parenthesis closed in Faenza to continue in Albisola, with a long and complex production. Tullio Mazzotti set out on a career linked to the involvement of contemporary artists (and later Futurists) as early as 1925, reorganising the family workshop.

The first exhibition of Futurist works dates back to 1929 at the Galleria Pesaro in Milan. This was an important event that attracted widespread critical acclaim in full Futurist spirit. Unlike Gatti, who applied decoration to everyday objects, Mazzotti invented brand new 'controversial' forms for that period, such as the vase-container *Flowers From My Gardens*, with blatant Futurist graphics deriving from advertising. Mazzotti collaborated over the years with great



Top: Fig. 4. Domenico Rambelli. *Portrait of an Ill Man (Ritratto di Uomo Malato)*. 1920. Private Collection.

Above: Fig. 5. Fausto Melotti. *Bowl (Ciotola a Cartoccio)*. 1950.

Facing page: Fig. 6. Lucio Fontana.

Spatial Concept (Concetto Spaziale). 1968.

artists such as Diulgheroff, Farfa, Fillia, Fontana, Munari, Prampolini, just to mention a few of the most famous. Wildt never sustained Futurist ideas, but was considered by Marinetti, Boccioni and the Futurists to be one of the greats of Italian sculpture.

Gio Ponti (1897–1979) architect, decorator, interior designer, creator of Decò ceramics, was an eclectic personality with an international appeal. His activity in ceramics began in 1921 in Milan, then with Richard-Ginori in Doccia (1923–1930), producing products with decoration of the utmost quality for industrial applications, a compromise between a unique piece and serial methods. His was a cultural project rather than a simple stylistic-decorative proposal, truly cultivating taste: the popularisation of beauty, of cultured and studied décor for spreading it throughout the circles of the wealthy bourgeoisie, from Art Nouveau to Decò, from rationalism to the Viennese Secession, in an idiom representing the modernity still valid today. In future years, artists, ceramists and designers will look toward him.

Two artists were direct students of Wildt at the Academy of Brera: Fausto Melotti (1901–1986) and Lucio Fontana (1899–1968).

Melotti's ceramic works date to the period 1930s–1960s and can be distinguished by the use of thin sheets of majolica, paradoxically almost diaphanous, iridescent colours and metallic effects. His vases,

the theatres, the masks, the frames, the figures and bowls (fig. 5) are indeed sculptures that recall the poetics of the informal, the luminosity of Oriental and Islamic ceramics, but also the false imperfection of raku in showing the traces of how the material was worked. His works are sculptures that go beyond the concept of sculpture when it is inevitably associated with the heaviness of the material, Melotti is free from every material contingency, his work appears 'anti-matter'. From 1930 he collaborated with Richard Ginori, creating small sculptures in porcelain, celadon and earthenware. Melotti through the manipulation reaches a particular technique of the slab in thin layers, focusing the concept of plasticity, almost malleability, of the clay and creates a new way of joining materials such as metal blades and glass slabs. The actions of extending and pressing evidence the real property of the clay that can be modelled and marked.

Fontana was also a student of Wildt with Melotti. He was fascinated by the sharp cuts that the Master inflicted on his sculptures and by the powerful effect

of *chiaroscuro* given to the hollows of the marble: hence the form and its occupation of the space were the key elements gathered from Wildt for the interpretation of a new sculpture. The sculptor, according to Wildt, had to be capable of seeing the object with the matter and the voids that encircle it and penetrate it and that induce it to create new voids and new spaces in the figure (*The Art of Marble*, by Wildt, 1921). Fontana created ceramics after 1929, in Albisola in 1935 at the Mazzotti factory, still life and Expressionist figurines, as a prelude to the subsequent informal period. In 1937 in Sèvres, he created sculptures on the marine theme with high fire, a brief parenthesis of an experimental nature. Fontana was enchanted by the dialectic relationship between matter and form, sign, space and colour, but above all between matter and space as moments to refine an effective experience that ceramics imposed. From 1948 onward, the artist surpassed the expressionist dialectics to concentrate on the spatial problem that occupies research of later years. The first 'spatial ceramics', preceded in 1947 by graffiti and friezes on ceramics, date back to 1949, the same date of the first 'holes' on paper, then

picked up again during the 1950s on ceramics (fig. 6). The sculpture and the art of ceramics are liable to innovations and specific knowledge of time over the techniques. For example the diffusion of stoneware in place



where only earthenware and white clays fired at a low temperature were used, carried a new modality of representation such as new codes and expressivity.

That is noteworthy for the contemporary wide diffusion of porcelain and for the semi-refractory materials for great installations, considered porous ceramic mixtures used for monumental works, sometimes built in segments.

In this field Adolfo Wildt and his contemporary artists created a sort of collection of samples of 20th century ceramics, where the great masters represented in the exhibition stand out for their assonances and poetic similarities and for their personal actions.

Claudia Casali is an art historian and since February 2011 is the Director of the International Museum of Ceramics in Faenza (MIC). Rolando Giovannini is a teacher at the Brera Academy of Fine Arts in Milan and the former Principal of the Istituto Statale d'Arte per la Ceramica (Liceo Artistico per il Design Ceramico (State Art Institute for Ceramics and Ceramics Design School) in Faenza, Italy, from 1986 to 2012.

Translated by Monica Gori. All works are courtesy MIC, Faenza, Italy, unless noted.

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Cover:

Gian Lorenzo Bernini

*Model for the Lion on the
Four Rivers Fountain (Detail)*

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Steven Montgomery

The Poetics of Space and Time



Article by
Rolando Giovannini

IN THE END OF SUMMER 2012, THE TOWN OF NOVE, (LOCATED near Bassano del Grappa in Northeast Italy and a famous centre of ceramic production) hosted the exhibition *Forward Archeologies/Archeologia del Divenire*. The works by the New York artist Steven Montgomery were displayed in the beautiful setting of the old Mulino Pestasassi mill. In Italy there are amazing venues to present artwork.

Besides the most important international museums such as the MIC of Faenza, the MIAAO of Turin dedicated to Applied Arts and the MIDC of Cerro Laveno Mombello on Lake Maggiore for ceramics design, other exhibition venues, most of them public buildings, such as the Rocca Paolina in Perugia, or the Palace of Bonaiuto of Calligarisone, have hosted major events.

Otherwise, the *Triennale of Milan* and the PAC (Padiglione Arte Contemporanea/Contemporary Art Pavilion) in Milan, exhibit contemporary design and art and, occasionally, ceramics works. These venues are all of the highest quality. In addition to the above, the following venues are committed to preserving ceramics traditions: the Factory House Museum Mazzotti 1903 Albissola Marina; Bottega Gatti in Faenza; the Museum Foundation Alviero Moretti in Deruta in the Region of Umbria. Similarly, the venue in Nove was originally an old ceramics factory, the Mulino per la Ceramica Baccin-Cecchetto-Stringa (18th century). In these regions there was a great deal of collaboration between artists. For example, Tullio da Albissola, Torido and Bepi Mazzotti, Tullio Mazzotti worked with Nicolaj Diulgheroff, Lucio Fontana and Alessandro Mendini. Dante Servadei and Davide Servadei worked with Alberto Burri and Mimmo Paladino. Alviero and Giorgio Moretti with Piero Dorazio and Paolo Portoghesi, and in Torgiano there is a large collection of works by Nino Caruso.

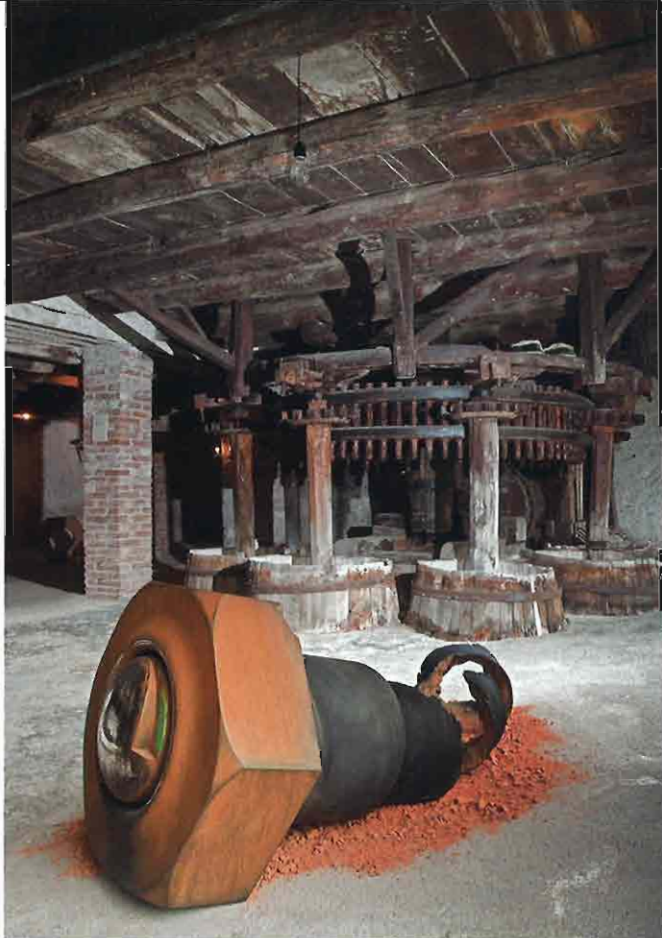
These top artists drew each other to the region. The Steven Montgomery exhibition at Nove is all the more significant if it is considered in this historical context. Montgomery, however, brings an international dimension of excellence.

Thinking about this extraordinary event attended by a large number of people among whom were scholars, art critics and artists, Steven Montgomery says: "The context in which any art is exhibited can, obviously change the way it is perceived. When they were shown in America the works in *Forward Archaeologies* suggested decay, impermanence and fragility. In Nove, in the extraordinary environment of the Pestasassi Mill, the objects connected to history and a slow, almost nostalgic passage of time."

Geraldine Blais Zodo is the one who first conceived this project. It was then supported and fostered by the municipality of Nove. The choice of Nove, this prestigious town in North-eastern Italy and in the Pestasassi Mill as the venue of this exhibition, was made after careful research.

Ettore Dal Santo, director of the Museo Civico della Ceramica, says: "*Forward Archaeologies/Archeologia del Divenire*, could not find a more perfect venue than this one, the Mulino Pestasassi. It is a unique example of industrial archeology dating back to the end of the 18th century and an extremely charming place where the works by Steven Montgomery, distinctly mechanical and industrial in their language and spirit, have interlaced an interesting aesthetic dialogue." Then, with a vision and a hope for the future: "It would be positive indeed if this place became a permanent venue for artists from Europe and other countries around the world to exhibit their works or even for some to come and create their works here."

Jerome Zodo Gallery of Milan provided well written supplementary information to accompany Montgomery's artwork. The

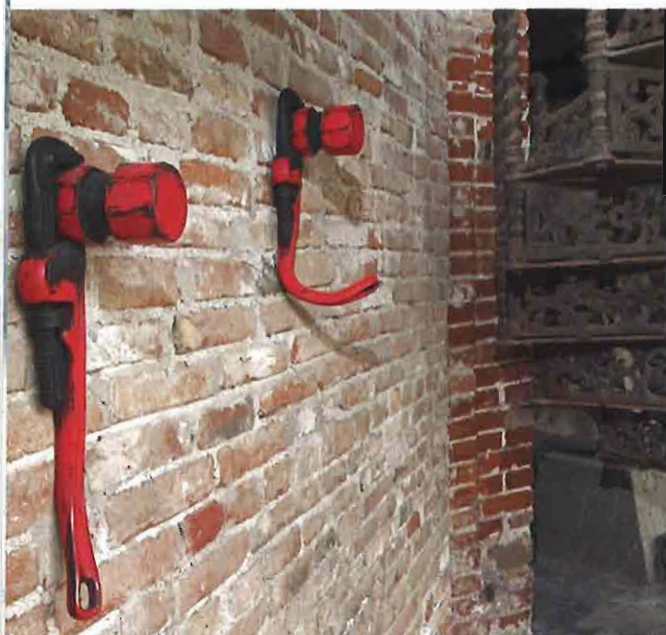


Facing page, foreground: *Test Site, Nut*. 2007. 61 x 68.6 x 20.3 cm.
Facing page, background: *Test Site, Structural Bolt*. 2006. 45.7 x 67 x 48 cm.

Above: *Test Site, Structural Bolt with Core Failure, Fragmentation*. 2006. 68.6 x 142.2 x 73.8 cm.

Below foreground: *Test Site, Structural Bolt, Hollow Core*. 2006. 58.5 x 157.5 x 68.6 cm. Below background: *Test Site, Nut Fragments*. 2007. 20.3 x 76.2 x 76.2 cm.





news releases from Zodo created a sense of anticipation and curiosity about the artwork. "Malleable clay is the medium that the American artist Steven Montgomery (Detroit, US, 1954) prefers to create his works. Montgomery's imagery could be described as a post-apocalyptic vision. Steven Montgomery creates imposing massive sculptures that accurately reference elements of the industrial world, such as screws, bolts and keys. Works such as *Test Site* and *Red Wrench* immediately come to mind.

Montgomery's post industrial works are presented in a state of decomposition, apparently worn out by the time they become a pretext for and an extended reflection of the social and intellectual decadence of our age. His works are poetic ruins.

Montgomery's artistic practice makes us realize that nature and form are the sole sources of beauty, yet conversely, Montgomery switches us to the work of artifice and object. The work thereby signifies a state of crisis in the artworld.

The above text was made known to the Director of the Museo Civico della Ceramica di Nove, Katia Brugnolo, art critic and professor of Contemporary Art History at the Academy of Fine Arts of Verona, who spent a few hours in conversation with Montgomery during his stay in Nove.

The work of Montgomery is perfect. Not only because of its extraordinary hyper-realism (prepared with a secret and inimitable technique) but also because in it you mark the time of catastrophic events. The partial destruction, the partial decay of the object, the references to metal that make up the work, give the sense of the passage of time. These elements indicate the exact moment in which the observer participates in the work itself – deciphering it. The compositions placed on the floor, on the ground, give a sense of reality, the unveiling of an unstoppable situation, now corroded, inevitably lost in its original mechanical fictionality. The colours act as mediators of aesthetics, they are greeted by the eye of the explorer or archaeologist – so captivating. The shades and tints in the sculptures are familiar, pigments that belong to daily life. The geometries remain and even create linear topographic conjunctions. Despite the tangible concrete drama of a thing already made and finished, the object retains something of its own that speaks of family, of personal and pleasant elements in life.

Much appreciated in contemporary ceramics are works that embrace technological processes. These can range from computer-generated works, to the use of decals and to mixed media works that have a scientific character. Margie Hughto, an important New York master, calls works such as these, "science projects".

Another diffuse, important direction at this time is artwork that is highly crafted with great and impressive skill, complication and detail. While process is paramount in such works, viewers are

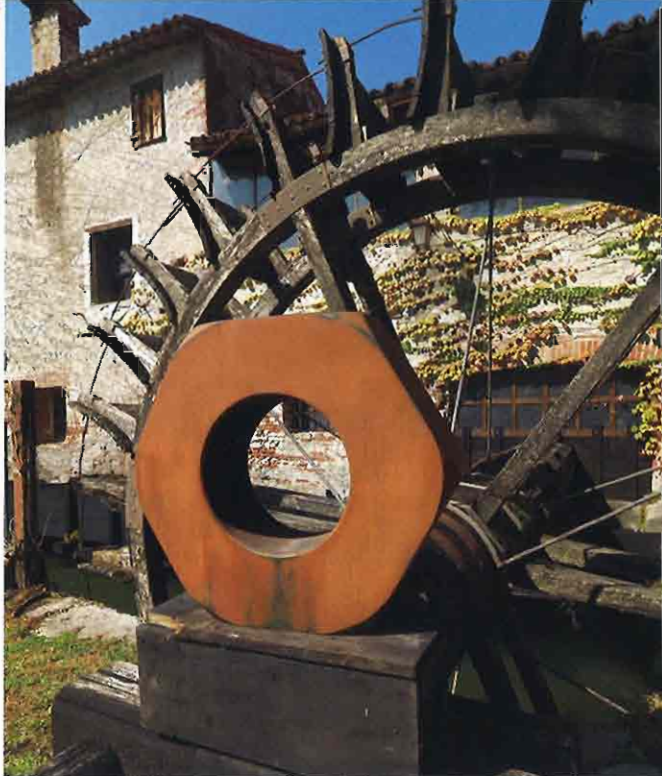
not able to see the artist's hand in the work. A subset of this genre is *trompe-l'oeil* ceramics. This trend in Italian ceramics was in strong evidence in the *Venice Biennale* in 2009 (curators Luca Beatrice and Beatrice Buscaroli) and 2011 (curator Vittorio Sgarbi with Giorgio Grasso), in the exceptional ceramic work by Bertozzi & Casoni. A New York colleague of sculptor Marc Leuthold, Montgomery and his work falls within this representational genre. Montgomery creates sculptures that reference machinery. Working with clay with painted surfaces Montgomery creates highly detailed, invented and decayed machinery. These sculptures appear to be actual machines, but in reality, they are clay and deliberately inaccurate representations. One only notices the 'problems' with Montgomery's machines after carefully studying them.

Leuthold and Montgomery met when their works were curated into the seminal exhibition, *Clay into Art* at the Metropolitan Museum in New York City in 1999. Leuthold observes: "I am interested in Montgomery's work because of the way that he distorts and takes liberty with form. Some have said the flutes in my work have a mechanistic quality, but in recent years I have introduced curves, cracks and interruptions that one would never find in a working machine. These deviations in my work correspond with the intentional dysfunctionality one finds in Montgomery's machines."

Work of this quality naturally brings to mind some examples of late 20th century international ceramic sculpture: Marilyn Levine for the relationship between object identity and semantic value; Ron Nagle for perfection and total control of matter; and Carlo Zauli for the evolution of the form in its own decay and regeneration.

The Ceramics Festival of Nove was inaugurated on 8 September, 2012. A younger artist, Paolo Polloniato, commented on the exhibition *Forward Archeologies / Archeologia del Divenire*. For Polloniato, Montgomery is an "extraordinary interpreter of the ceramics medium and was a stand out at this Festival. He effortlessly dominates, shapes and embellishes the clay with the finest painted surfaces." Without direct evidence, Montgomery has left his mark. What artist has not collected even small fragments of poetic craft and technique from mature artists who, in their expression, appear to be perfect. Steven Montgomery; this is artwork where everything is created and nothing is destroyed.

Rolando Giovannini earned a degree in Geology and a diploma at the Academy of Fine Arts in Bologna, Italy. He is a teacher at the Brera Academy of Fine Arts in Milan and the former Principal of the Istituto Statale d'Arte per la Ceramica Liceo Artistico per il Design Ceramico (State Art Institute for Ceramics and Ceramics Design School) in Faenza, Italy, from 1986 to 2012. He is the author of books on ceramics and founded the NeoCeramica Movement in 2007. Giovannini has done research on ceramic and neon. His works are held at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and at the Shin-Kobe underground railway station in Kobe. He was



Facing page, top to bottom: *Test Site, Structural Bolt with Core Failure, Fragmentation*. 2006. 68.6 x 142.2 x 73.8 cm. *Red Wrench 2*. 2011. 30.5 x 10.2 x 20.3 cm. *Red Wrench 1*. 2011. 45.7 x 10.2 x 12.7 cm. *Montgomery and Test Site, Structural Bolt, Hollow Core*. 2006. 58.5 x 157.5 x 68.6 cm (left). *Test Site, Nut Fragments*. 2007. 20.3 x 76.2 x 76.2 cm (right). *Forward Archeologies / Archeologia del Divenire*. Top: *Test Site, Nut*. 2007. 61 x 68.6 x 20.3 cm.

Above: *The Pestassassi Mill (Mulino Pestassassi)*. The inauguration of the exhibition *Forward Archeologies / Archeologia del Divenire*.

invited to the 54th International Art Exhibition of the Biennale of Venice (2011) and BLA BLA, Milan (2013). He is a Member of NCECA and of MI.MA (Milano Makers, 2013).

Translated by Domino di Elisa Moro, Italy.

All works are painted and glazed ceramic. All photos by Mario Bozzetto and courtesy Jerome Zodo Contemporary. Information about the origin and functions of this venue were supplied by Nadir Stringa, a ceramics scholar. The Mulino Pestassassi mill was built in 1791 with a grant from Venetian Magistrates Court to the ceramics businessman Giovanni Maria Baccin. Powered by a canal of the Brenta River, it pulverised quartz stones and calcium carbonate. The Baccin-Cecchetto-Stringa ceramics mill is on the list of protected monuments under the care of the Superintendent of Cultural Heritage of the Veneto Region and has been declared a venue of special interest by the Italian Ministry for Cultural Heritage.

Ceramics

Art and Perception

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Paolo Polloniato

Orchestra Leader

Article by
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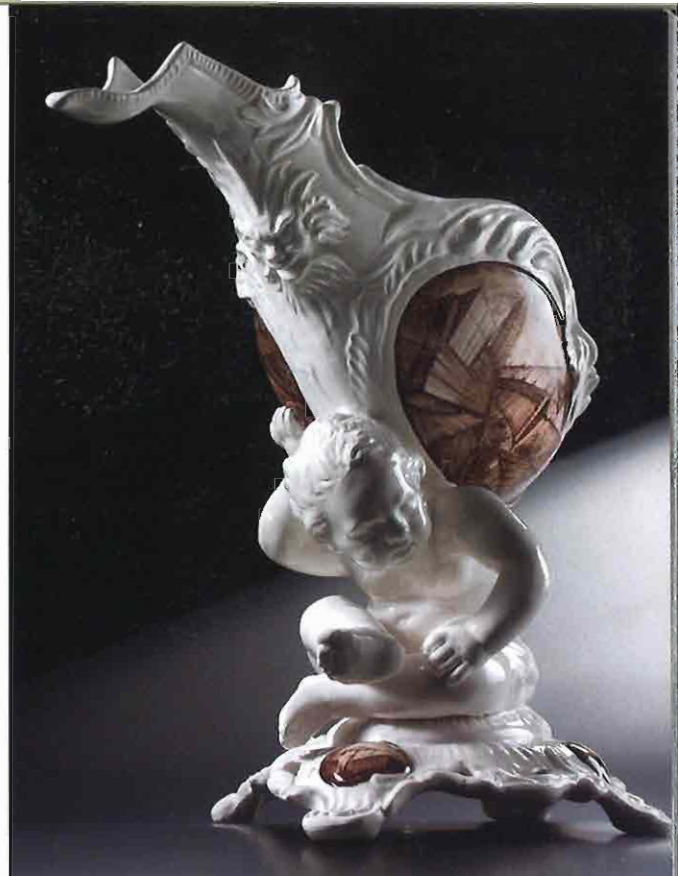
The artist interprets the contemporary through the study, dismantling and reassembly of disparate original forms, creating a monochrome compendium of sculpture and plastic mould. ~ Rolando Giovannini



PAOLO POLLONIATO WAS RAISED IN THE TOWN OF Nove in northeastern Italy, an historically important area in the field of ceramics. Son of Giulio Polloniato, master-painter of majolica, Paolo Polloniato was immersed in both an artistic and artisanal environment from an early age. Much of his childhood was spent in the small workshops of his relatives – his uncles Domenico (a modeller) and Aldo (a painter) and his grandfather, Pietro, a potter. The entire family was engaged in artistic practice. In the wider local context of Nove, various artistic styles and practices over time developed and intertwined to create a distinct character. Beginning in the 19th century, the sector expanded significantly

with the quality and quantity of artistic production spreading throughout the world. The characteristic ceramic from Nove is a white paste composed of soft earthenware and porcelain. Production is based mainly on forming and casting.

After his technical studies, Polloniato attended the Accademia di Belle Arti of Venice, graduating in Decoration in 2007. The following year, during an exhibition of master-ceramist Alessio Tasca, he became drawn to the creative and expressive styles prevalent in the Tuscan city of Montelupo Fiorentino. Still today, he continues to define himself as a painter. Speaking of himself he says "I remain first and foremost an artist who engages in the



craftsmanship of each stage of the finished piece of work." Living in the context of ceramics from a young age, he assumed an inherent understanding of the craft, while, at the same time, creative consciousness in other fields continued to grow within him.

Contact with Tasca, a ceramics artist known for his large ceramic works created through extrusion, changed the perception and the direction of the young Polloniato, who began to see a new way of expression; a niche in which to create and process his own poetry. In the docility of earth, in white colour, in the lucidity and opaqueness of surfaces, in the complexity of shape, he felt greater harmony in which to express his own creative instincts.

From the prestigious Manifattura Antonibon Barettoni in 2008 he created his first 18 ceramic artworks called *Capricci Contemporanei*, reflecting – as is the case with other Nove artists – an influence of the Venetian Master Guardi, who now enjoys renewed interest and relevance today thanks to Polloniato.

Beatrice Buscaroli, editor of *Venice Biennial 2009* with Luca Beatrice (during which they exhibited in Italia Pavilion the unique and monumental ceramic work by Bertozzi & Casoni) published in her text "Paolo Polloniato *Capricci Contemporanei*" (La Ceramica in Italia e nel mondo, September 2012) says "the way Paolo Polloniato enters and exits forms, the way he quotes them, toys with them, worships and contemplates them, being ironic but not overly, giving them everyday meaning, in order to show a simple instinct of his personality, is unique."

In 2009 he entered the *International Competition of Ceramic Art* in Faenza with two pieces. His poetry is

Facing page: *Modello* Manifattura Barettoni. 2009. White earthenware with decoration. 21 x 21 x 12 cm.

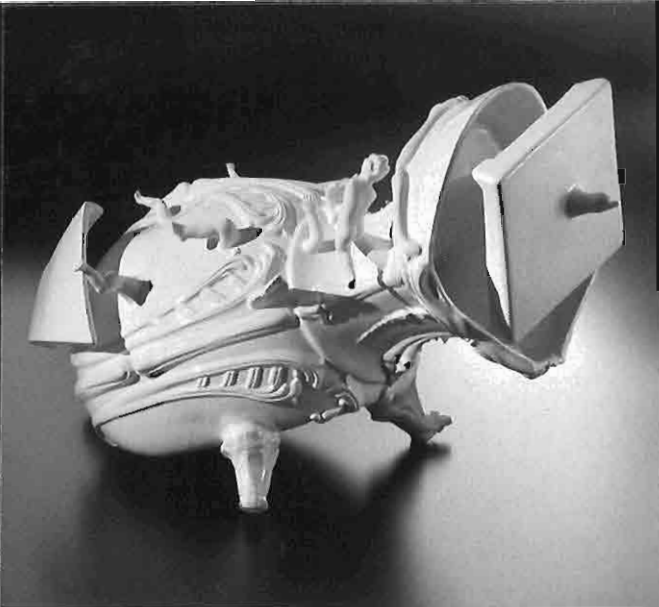
Above left: *Metamorfosi*. 2011. White earthenware and white glaze. 38 x 29 x 21 cm.

Above right: *Modello* Manifattura Barettoni. 2008. White earthenware with decoration. 42 x 25 x 45 cm.

Above and facing page photos by Fabio Baggio.

often based on axioms made of actions such as I change, I transform, I edit. It represents a form of response to the matter of how one should make pottery in the city of Nove, in view of its long-established tradition of production – something that is difficult and complex to maintain today. It is a contemporary response to 'Territory in terms of iconography and rebirth' (2010). Inspiration comes from the difficult, almost decadent, situation of current production and context, where the numerous abandoned moulds require new interpretation. One needs to experiment, drip and create various, unprecedented, unthinkable shapes, metamorphosis of the same original shapes; a 'third' form that is not the stereotypical depiction of an animal, a figure, or even a bowl, vase, or centrepiece, but a new 'object' because of a new and differently composed cupid head or cupid arm. There is a sense of opening a window to a new, sometimes surreal and fantastic world.

This figurative raising of a curtain also reveals the artist's depth of opportunity and possibility, the seemingly endless creative incentives that he is able to choose. With so many available things (in the Nove area there are thousands of iconographical models) his design becomes even more delicate, purely monochrome, where the plastic sense of the composition, the lights and shadows of the work form the sculpture.



Above: Mutoidi. 2011. White earthenware and white glaze. 27 x 57 x 35 cm.

Right: Mutoidi. 2011. White earthenware and white glaze. 35 x 19 x 26 cm.

Above photos by Fabio Baggio.



Here he assumes the role of orchestra leader, skilfully weaving the various elements together in a harmonious fusion, as if arranging virtuoso individual musicians, revealing a collective beauty but retaining their essential essence and role. The idea serves to produce an artwork in perfect harmony, allowing perfect and adequate space for each element thus allowing excellence to rise to the fore.

Polloniato says, "If I had looked only to Nove I would not be what I am, yet my sculpture speaks of Nove. My sculpture is composed of objects from four to five works from Nove that I combine together; it is the story of Nove, the metamorphosis of Nove. An orchestra leader, I seek to assemble and create harmony among the various instruments that together produce the music."

Like a newly formed business, without agreement or pre-existing relationships, le Manifatture enables Polloniato to pull together the disparate pieces, joining them and bringing a sense of coherence to proceedings. If he wanted he could access thousands of moulds, instigating artistic rebirth from the ruins.

This is Polloniato. His has a determined will to create balance, by adjusting and creating a coexistence of fragments, as in a mosaic, that combine and contribute to produce a new entity.

In a recent work hypothesis he proposes to produce new sculptures from defunct brands' finite models effecting to bring to light forgotten objects, giving them visibility under a new spotlight. It is as if to compose a showcase, giving life to factories, to the manufacturing process.

As with many distinguished artists, his path has been full of influential encounters – transcending different international realities, evaluating various new influences in sometimes unfamiliar situations.

Thanks to the substantial and continuing influence of

Chiara Ronzani (Fashion Designer), he has been able to compete for a year and a half in Paris – a period in which Polloniato, away from the tools of ceramics, painted French portraits on canvas, 'visages' and, on occasion, returned to Nove to make pottery.

Following this, thanks to Chiara, he relocated to Belgium, where he met Danish gallery director Annette Sloth, owner of the Puls Contemporary Ceramics gallery of Brussels who was to give him an important individual exhibition in January 2013. This then led to an invitation from Genevieve Godar of the Godart Gallery in Lille – the second most historically important French gallery for another solo show. Here he presented 15 sculptures from 20 original moulds taken from the famous Royal Boch manufacture, 50 miles south of La Louvière, a town in Belgium with a thriving Italian community at the end of the 19th century. In both of these exhibitions, Polloniato was the first Italian ceramist to exhibit work at these prestigious European galleries.

The factory was about to be demolished when Polloniato, authorised to enter, happened upon a multitude of abandoned moulds, a disused production facility frozen in time. An immense decal laboratory, it represented a cultural heritage of unused and unrecoverable objects and materials. He managed to recover 20 moulds of white earthenware, from which he created 15 sculptures, using porcelain casting.

Vallauris Biennial in France welcomed him in 2012 with two large sculptures, assembled from various pieces and re-composed into something new.

Contact with this French city where Pablo Picasso worked (Madoura Atelier), resulted in a relationship with Sandrine Rousseau (of the C k'OMSA Atelier-Gallery, based in the old atelier studio of Roger Capron – one of the most famous French ceramists) who invited him for a stay during which he alternates lectures to learning artists with a week of work using old local

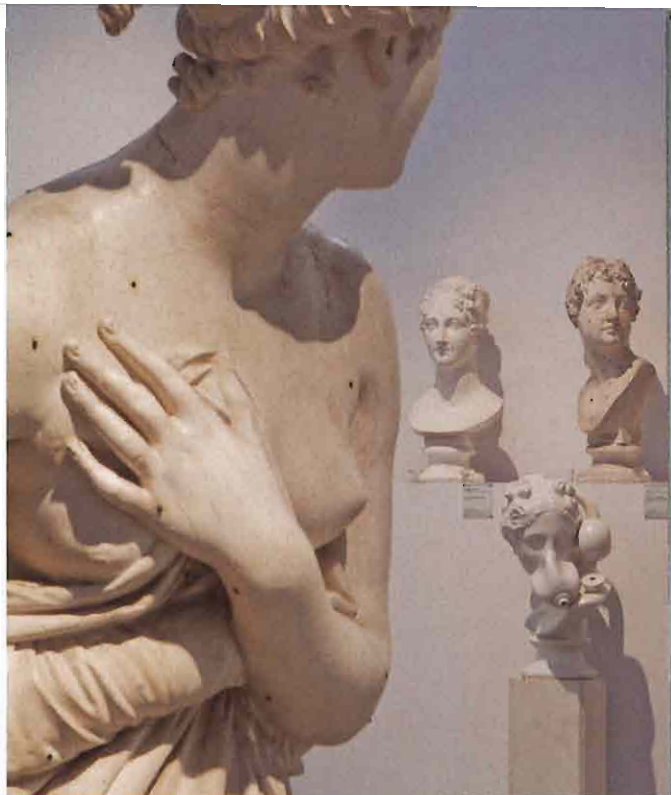


ceramic moulds and producing a new collection with them. In the weeks following Polloniato's stay, other notable ceramists such as Gustavo Perez (Mexico) and Antonella Cimatti (Italy) attended the studio.

Polloniato's work expresses a like-mindedness with English artists Mutoid who work with abandoned iron and industrial waste. The English movement (born in London in 1986, by the Mutoid Waste Company), which also operates in Italy's Emilia-Romagna region (and other parts of the world), makes use of iron and machinery landfills, in the creation of new objects. This reuse is also a characteristic of *teatrini*, a series of small modular works. The artist comments on the series of compositions depicting theatre: "Theatre that contains butterflies, women, other items that I might buy, represents the theatricality of the contemporary."

The change of direction of research took place in a brief period. For example, his work *Hodierna* born from the metamorphosis of the bust of Canova is presented with a mask on its face; a powerful image that evokes a kind of neo-classicism of today, written in white where the strength of plastic is more pronounced. Some of his later works featured at *Festa della ceramica, Portoni Aperti*, where in 2013 he created an open studio with an exhibition installation composed of carts and work tables – a sort of composite architecture of his ceramics from 2008 to the present day.

The poetics of 'reuse', the interpretation of re-assembling disused components in a new context is now accepted practice in the contemporary art world. French artist Laurent Craste, incorporates mechanical tools into traditional ceramic art forms. Monika Patuszynska (Poland) uses and recycles components from old porcelain factories, taking them apart and reconstructing them. Her art works are in



Left: *Hodierna*. 2012. White earthenware and white glaze.
22 x 37 x 55 cm.

Above: *Hodierna*. 2012. White earthenware and white glaze.
22 x 37 x 55 cm.

Above photos by Antonio Campanella.
Below: Paolo Polloniato.

the Museum of Eastern Europe and in Fuping Pottery Village, Fuping, China. Chinese artist Sin-Ying Ho, re-uses multiple parts in the assembly of monumental sculptures.

For Paolo Polloniato, fervour and force are drawn from the context of his territory, from the desire, the courage of having changed things. Afterall, Alessio Tasca commenting on his early ceramic works (where the spaces devoted to painting of sumptuous, authoritative and Baroque forms had been painted with contemporary subjects, depicting current degradation or realities of today's world), exclaimed "It must be so," as if to say that renewal is not made only by complex or divergent things. Creativity is expressed sublimely when it represents simplicity, immediacy and quality of communication, especially when it is done at its best.



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Translated by Francesca Cirinnà.
All photos are courtesy of Paolo Polloniato.

the crouching woman who hugs a baby (*Maturity*). Similarly, Martini uses the device of piercing the eyes and mouth, adopted from masks, to increase the expressive force of some female heads, absorbed in thought, such as the figure of the girl with pierced eyes and mouth (*La Nena*).

"Arturo Martini Creature. The song of terracotta", at Palazzo Fava in Bologna (catalogue Bononia University Press, Bologna 2013) from 22 September 2013 to 12 January 2014, was curated by Nico Stringa, the most important Italian critic of Martini. A series of 10 lectures by the curator and other critics enriched the exhibition, whereas a more personal note was added by an encounter with the grandchildren of the artist.

The 16th-century Palazzo Fava was a fitting venue for the terracottas, displayed minimally with two or at most three pieces per room. The dramatic lighting accentuated the volume of the pieces as Martini himself might have wished and suited the ambitious scale of Martini's works. The title refers to the pieces that Martini produced in a brief period between 1929 and 1932 (12 of 16 included) that Martini described as "the period of song". Four smaller-scale works, of 1920–1922 and 1932 completed the exhibition.

Although the *Marinella* with her 'Archaic smile' and the *Fisherman's Daughter* of 1920–22 demonstrate his debt to Etruscan art and '300 reliquaries, Martini never descends into sheer imitation. Even more complex is the balance of citation and inspired creation in the more ambitious sculptures of 1929–1932, created for the Quadrennial of Rome in 1931 and the Venice Biennial of 1932 respectively. Site-specific for the rooms assigned to him in these important exhibitions, Martini projected a central horizontal figure with vertical figures on the walls in each case. The result was a triumph, which confirmed Martini's position as the leading sculptor of his time and the most important to work in clay since the della Robbias.

The production of these works, after a series of failures, was rendered possible by Martini's collaboration with the ILVA refractory clay factory, whose owner offered to build a studio/kiln that obviated the need to move pieces that weighed up to 4000kg. The majority of the pieces are in refractory clay, although some such as the *Mad Mother* and *Marinella* are in the more traditional terracotta. The range of techniques demonstrates Martini's versatility and refusal to fall into the trap of artistic complacency, always pushing the material and his ability to their limits.

The earliest of the large-scale figures is the *Mad Mother*, whose head, child and bell-shaped skirt are wheel-turned. The handbuilt slabs of her drapery are influenced by the technique discovered by Martini in his study of the Etruscan terracottas. In the Villa Giulia Museum, Martini contemplated also the over



Above: *Aviator*. 1931–1932. Refractory clay. 120 x 145 x 70 cm.
Private Collection
Photo by Paolo Righi, *Meridiana Immagini*.
Below: Arturo Martini.

life size terracotta *Apollo of Veii* (510–500 BC) whose 'Archaic smile' he described as the Etruscan's "only magic, the fourth dimension, eternity".

More impressive still are the pairs of figures that Martini sets in three-dimensional space, whether the two sisters of the *Moonlight*, set in a Bernini-esque raised balcony or the surrealist scene of a nude woman glimpsed from behind as she stares out a window in the *Vigil*. In other works, such as the *Aviator* and the *Wounded She-Wolf*, Arturo Martini conquers the horizontal, challenging the downward force of gravity. At the same time, he invents a new iconographic

image of flight on the one hand and a primitive alternative to the Roman she-wolf on the other.

The works of Arturo Martini embody memory and innovation in Italian ceramics of the 20th century.



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All photos by Elena Giacometti, Archivio fotografico MIC Faenza, unless noted.