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artist-run print publication
and project space
featuring contemporary
artists and artist-run
projects

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Yael Braha

FEATURED ARTIST

GALLERY & INTERVIEW →



Pitcher, 2023. Hand built stoneware ceramic with original pattern designs. 4 x 20 x 11 inches

BIO

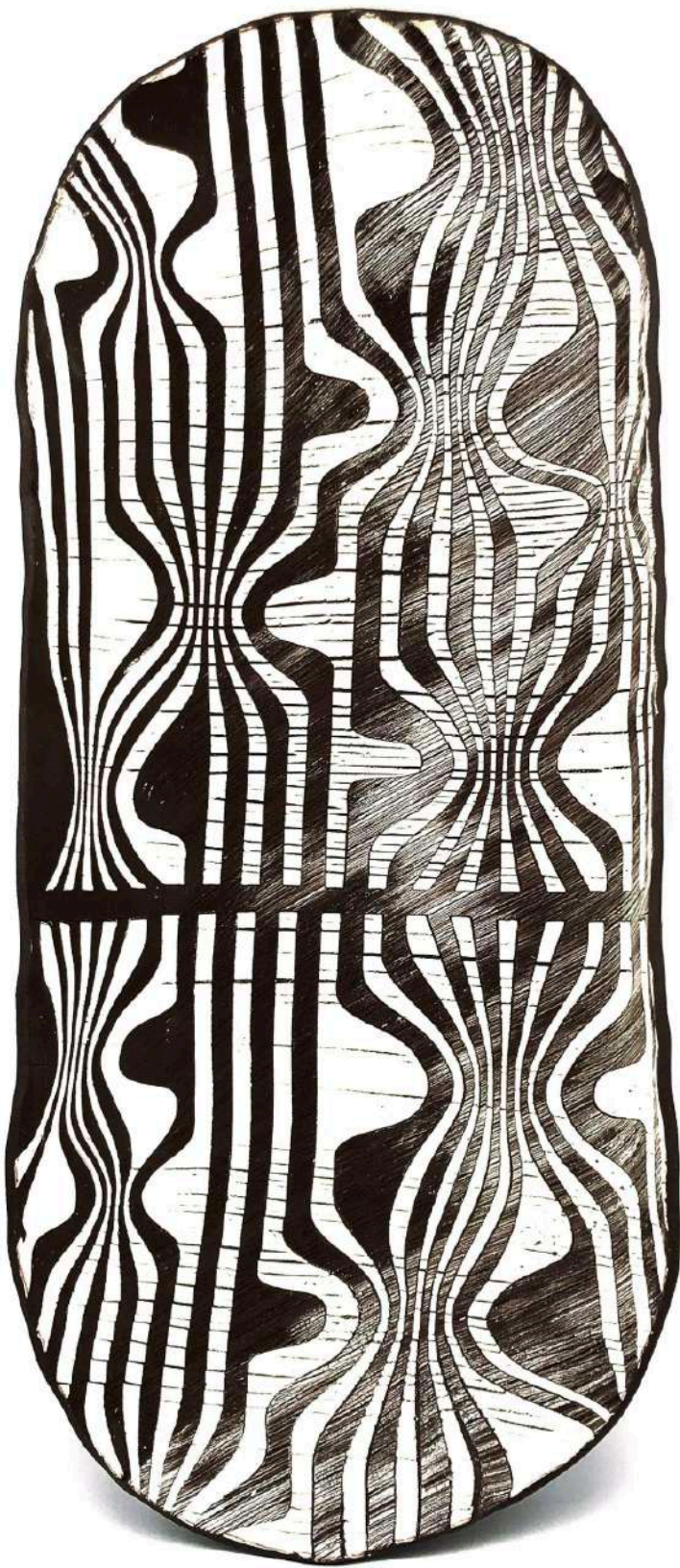
Born in Italy and daughter of refugees from North Africa, Yael grew up in a visually abundant environment that shaped her love for composition, aesthetics, and visual arts. She received a Bachelor of Arts in Graphic Design from the European Institute of Design in Rome, and a Master of Fine Arts in Cinema from San Francisco State University. Her past multidisciplinary background – from graphic design, to cinema, to metal fabrication and installation – informs her recent focus on ceramic work.

In 2021 she was awarded the Multicultural Fellowship Award from the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts (NCECA). Yael’s work has shown in galleries across the Usa and Japan - such as Companion Gallery, Charlie Cummings Gallery, Clay Akar, Atlantic Gallery, and Gandee Gallery. She has been invited to participate in the 2024 American Pottery Festival and in the 2024 Southern Crossings Pottery Festival. Her work is part of Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts and Starworks Ceramics permanent collections. She has been invited to participate in Ceramic Artist in Residencies across the Usa and in Japan.

ARTIST STATEMENT

In my work I integrate innovative digital fabrication methodologies with traditional clay processes. I create functional ceramics with bold and stylized surface patterns which feature tessellations, optical and geometrical illusions. I use lines and curves to distort and add dynamism to the surface of the work, and I use seams and negative spaces to create contrast and tension within a form. The surface patterns reliefs add a surprising tactile experience when the work is held, touched, and used. The way that patterns are framed within a form, where they are cut, assembled, and overlapped, alludes to the process of film editing – assembling separate but related parts to create a sequence that is larger than the sum of their parts. I fire my work in both atmospheric and electric kilns, and I am excited to advance my explorations surrounding the synergy of forms, surface design, and materials research.

Interview with Yael Braha



Can you tell us a bit about your background and how you became interested in becoming an artist?

Growing up in Italy and having had the chance to see the works of Bernini, Borromini, Caravaggio on a daily basis, was a feast for my eyes: the visually abundant environment shaped my love for composition, aesthetics, and visual arts. Graphic design was my first passion, so I pursued a Bachelor of Arts in Graphic Design at the European Institute of Design in Rome. Subsequently I became interested in applying a time-based element to a static graphic design image, so I pursued a Master of Fine Arts in Cinema at San Francisco State University. I was curious to learn more art practices, so I sought opportunities to explore metal fabrication (welding, metal casting), electronics, kinetic sculpture, mold making, and later on I applied all these skills to create interactive installations and immersive environments.

Every field that I have explored in the past contributes to my current ceramic work. Cinema, for example, has taught me the relevance of storytelling, lighting, and the art of editing – juxtaposing two images to create a new meaning. I realized that I could apply these principles to ceramics – by considering the juxtaposition of form and glaze, for example, or how form and surface take on another dimension through light and shadows.

Can you tell us about some of your most memorable early influences?

I grew up in a family that was forced to flee their native country to survive, and start life anew in a country of asylum - this was the most memorable influence of my childhood. Growing up in a multicultural family meant that I heard speaking Arabic, Hebrew, and Italian in the same sentence, and ate spaghetti on one side and Lubya and Haraimi on the other. My upbringing was permeated with the acquired assumption that “home” is ephemeral, and things can change in a heartbeat. This led me to cherish the notion of “acquiring knowledge” and skills – they can be carried with you no matter where you live – which has led me to learn and experiment in various art fields throughout the years.

In terms of art influences, while growing up under the care of my mother, I remember being exposed to artwork from the Impressionism, Modern Art, and Surrealism periods. Seeing the works of Vasily Kandinsky, Amedeo Modigliani, Joan Miró, Henri Matisse, Alberto Giacometti, and Paul Klee made a long lasting impression.



Double Pyramid Vase, 2023. Hand built stoneware ceramic with original pattern designs. 5 x 5 x 12 inches

Where are you currently based and what brought you there? Are there any aspects of this specific location or community that have inspired your work?

I am currently an “itinerant” artist: I am pursuing a time of discovery, research, and developing new bodies of work while pursuing national and international Artists in Residencies. Every community I have joined – whether in the Usa, Canada, or Japan – has offered an incredible amount of inspiration, opportunities for learning, and I had the pleasure to connect with fellow artists.

What is your studio space like? What makes your space unique to you?

The common denominator for my studio tends to involve a window to let the gaze wander, an infinite amount of plants, copious shelving racks, multiple work tables, a potter’s wheel, buckets and buckets of reclaimed clay, various raw materials and tools, music, endless piles of books, and a dog (hopefully soon!). I enjoy having a large wall where I can pin sketches, ideas, templates, and visual reminders of the work to be done in the coming weeks. At a first glance, my studio space seems to be on the messy side, but there is indeed a method to the madness!

What is a typical day like? If you don't have a typical day, what is an ideal day? Do you work in large chunks of time, or throughout the day?

In the morning, I enjoy sitting down with a coffee, looking at my notes and slowly consolidating the plan for the day. I like a good moment of stillness and calm before diving into my studio work.

I tend to work throughout the day, and take breaks whenever needed. Sometimes, as the work evolves, and because to the materials used in my work, I have to take some unplanned pauses – for example if the clay needs to firm up a bit before I can continue working on it, or if I need to wait for a kiln load to cool down – so I try to weave in other daily activities during these studio breaks.



Cups, 2022. Hand built stoneware ceramic with original pattern designs. 3.5 x 3.5 x 3.75 inches each

What gets you in a creative groove or flow? Is there anything that interrupts your creative energy?

Working in the sunlight gets me in a creative groove. Depending on the time of year, if I notice that a ray of light will hit a particular area of my studio at a particular time of day, I plan ahead for a specific task and look forward to that ephemeral moment of working in the studio while bathing in sunlight.

Music also gets me in the flow, and repetitive noises or loud chatter tend to interrupt it. When this happens, a pair of headphones usually does the trick to keep my focus.

How do you maintain momentum in your practice? Is there anything that hinders or helps your focus?

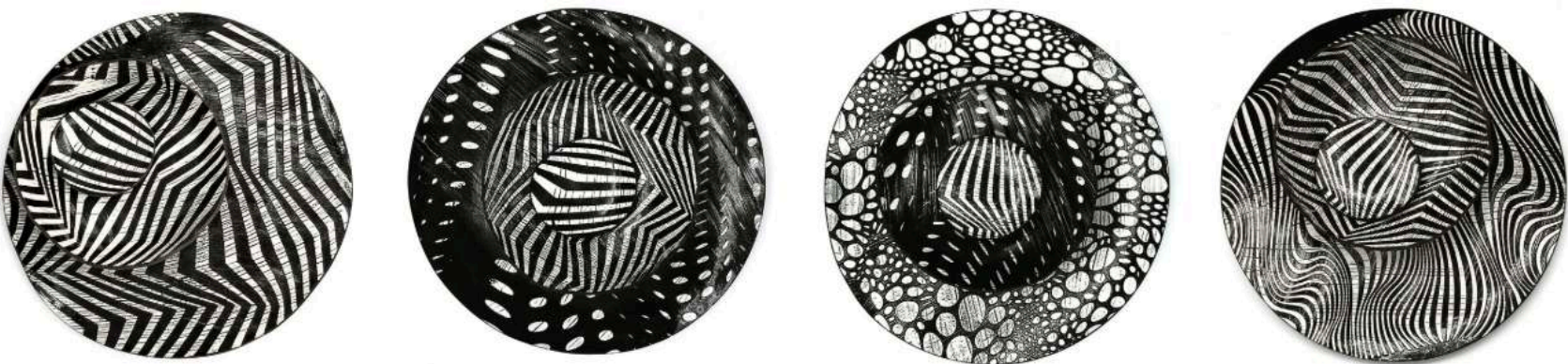
Momentum comes and goes, but most of the time, it comes! Sometimes I lose a bit of momentum due to fatigue - for example when I'm working on a new idea, and its form evolves through many iterations, I get so involved and passionate about the quest, that I easily lose track of time and work myself a bit too much! What helps to regain my focus is to take some necessary studio breaks and either travel for a few days (if possible!) or enjoy a new scenery – whether it is a hike, a live performance, or discovering a new city or countryside.

What medium/media are you working in right now? What draws you to this particular material or method?

Right now I am focusing primarily on clay. I am exploring a variety of native clays, hand harvested clays, custom formulated slips and glazes. I am fascinated by the depth of this medium. There are so many avenues of exploration and experimentation – from raw materials, to surface decorations and firing methods. There is also a fascinating time-related dichotomy: on one side working with clay can be fast and very intuitive - for example when developing new forms or sketching in a three-dimensional space. But on the other hand, there are so many steps to go through (and many opportunities for mishaps!) until I am actually able to see the final result. For me, clay is a challenging, grounding, fascinating, humbling and rewarding medium.

Can you walk us through your overall process in making your current work? Does drawing play a role in your process?

Starting from a sketch, I use clay slabs to prototype an initial form, I disassemble it, modify it, and assemble a new variation, gradually improving and refining the design over multiple iterations. Concurrently, I design original patterns that interact with each element of the form; I paint the patterns using white clay slip onto dark stoneware clay slabs. The layering and the distressed look of the patterns offer an additional level of complexity: a bold, architectural-inspired, and minimalistic design object, yet also personal and hand-made.



Tableware set, 2023. Hand built stoneware ceramic with original pattern designs. Plate, bowl, and small plate dimensions vary

What is exciting about your process currently?

I am very excited about continuing to develop new ceramic design objects for everyday use. I design patterns to visually distort and add movement to the surface, while physical seams – where two clay slab edges meet – create contrast and tension within the form. The way the graphic patterns are cut, assembled, and framed, produces a stimulating visual experience with nearly endless possible variations, while the surface pattern reliefs provide an equally interesting tactile one. The emotional drive is to create an alluring work that expands perceptual assumptions and creates illusions of movement that can be held, touched, and used.

When I explore new ideas, I prototype and iterate many variations with an exquisite sense of freedom, curiosity, and playful learning. Lights and shadows, materials choices, surface decorations, and atmospheric firings offer a nearly infinite number of exciting possibilities that push me further into discovery by exploring the synergy of forms, surface designs, and materials.

Can you talk about some of the ongoing interests, imagery, and concepts that have informed your process and body of work over time? How do you anticipate your work progressing in the future?

Inspired by the Gestalt Theory of Visual Perception principles – where the mind tends to find order and logic in what the eyes see – I design abstract patterns to instigate a dialogue between form and surface, and to challenge and expand perceptual assumptions when experiencing a minimalist yet complex functional design object.

I anticipate that my work will continue to evolve, designing ambitious forms and unique stylish patterns, while also integrating digital fabrication methodologies (such as 3d modeling, CNC milling, 3D printing, laser cutting) with traditional ceramic processes. I also am curious to begin working at a larger scale.

Do you pursue any collaborations, projects, or careers in addition to your studio practice? If so, can you tell us more about those projects, and are there connections between your studio practice and these endeavors?

My previous work spans across many fields – from graphic design, to Creative Direction for live shows (Madison Square Garden, Usa), metal sculptures, interactive installations, immersive experiences (Usa, Singapore, Japan, Canada), and time based media (Cannes Film Festival). Most of this work influences my recent focus on ceramics, and I am always open to opportunities to work on new projects where these different disciplines converge.

Have you had any epiphanies recently that have changed the course of your work or caused you to shift directions?

The loss of my mother at an early age has influenced my work and lifestyle: I don't take anything for granted, and I try my best to live an artful life, in full, every single day.

Can you share some of your recent influences? Are there specific works—from visual art, literature, film, or music — that are important to you?

My favorite film directors are Federico Fellini (of course!) Emir Kusturica, Wong Kar-wai, Hirokazu Koreeda. Among my favorite literature authors are Neil Gaiman, Gianni Rodari, Italo Calvino. I listen to many genres of music, but lately I gravitate towards DakhaBrakha, Fever Ray, and Italian songwriters like Mina, Fabrizio De André, Edoardo Bennato e Rino Gaetano.

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Geometric Vase, 2023. Hand built stoneware ceramic with original pattern designs. 16 x 2 x 14 inches

Can you elaborate on a recent work of yours, and tell us the story of how it came to be?

I recently wanted to design a small item, specifically a bud vase for a single flower: small, playful, and charming. I began to play with paper shapes, and assemble them in different ways. Eventually this exercise reminded me of a folding paper game I played as a kid: it seemed it matched the initial brief (small, playful, and charming) so I prototyped the new vase from paper to clay, and a new series of bud vases came to life!

Have you overcome any memorable roadblocks or struggles in your practice that you could share with us?

Struggles and Roadblocks come to visit me frequently in my studio! They became like those old family friends: they just pop by, uninvited, and sometimes they overstay their welcome. I learned to pull up some chairs, invite them to sit down, and have a laugh.

Who are some contemporary artists you’re excited about? Is there a recent exhibition that stood out to you?

I recently saw an exhibition of Yukimasa Ida in Kyoto, Japan. His large paintings were already breathtaking when looking at them up close, and when I stepped back and squinted my eyes, I realized to my delight that those seemingly abstract wide brush strokes actually revealed people’s portraits. Their mood echoed some of the unsettling paintings of Francis Bacon. I was also impressed with his multidisciplinary skills - from painting to wood sculpture, bronze, and ceramics.

Do you have any tips or advice that someone has shared with you that you have found particularly helpful?

While wondering about the direction in my work, a friend asked me a very helpful question and offered a subsequent advice: “Would you rather change your work to “fit” into a specific gallery and potentially compromise your practice, or would you rather have galleries pick the work you make? Focus on the work you want to do, and find the people that want your work.”

What are you working on in the studio right now? What’s coming up next for you?

It’s going to be an eventful year! I will be participating in two Pottery Festivals, group shows and solo shows, so I will be busy in the studio making work!



Yael Braha

To find out more about Yael Braha check out her [website](#) and [Instagram](#).