

new CERAMICS

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# STEPHANIE ROOS

Craft and art were a part of my life even as a child because my mother was an arts and crafts teacher, she worked in ceramics herself and was in touch with a ceramic artist in my home town. I was particularly fascinated by three-dimensionality and I made ceramic figures from an early age.

The pathway to what I do today led via studying to become an art teacher, a detour into being a commercial artist and the everyday working life of a teacher. Parallel to this, I attended life and portrait classes. Apart from attending courses in ceramics and concrete sculpture, I set up a metalworking shop for myself, tried out printing techniques in my studio and kept coming back to ceramics. However, with family and professional commitments, I was not working systematically in this time frame.

I have been working as a freelance artist since 2011, concentrating on sculptural work in clay.

## I work on the figure

People often make a deep impression on me – their facial expression, the clothing that they have chosen, the way they move – almost materially palpable, sculpturally rememberable.

Although my figures are based on the real world in the way they are presented, I am not interested in a representation of reality. The figures embody the way I reflect reality, they are a kaleidoscope for observations and associations, compositions derived from themes of a personal or political nature. They are created by experimenting with themes and images, from observation and self-observation. The working process itself for me is my own way of gaining insights about what it means to be a human being, which verbal reflection cannot offer and for which there is no substitute.



top - "Karla with Fan", 6 views, right, 44 cm

left - "Girl with Mirror", 22 x 30 cm



"Europa and the Bull", 22 x 30 cm



The inner images from which I create my figures, coalesce after a long process. Current events, stories, photos and memories may be the starting point for my works. The scenes are composed from various times or impressions, like slides that I superimpose on top of each other: a photo, a colour that oppresses me, a physical expression that I want to capture, a body feeling, playing with an object... They are invented, associated images, with quotations, symbols and portraits, but never simply representations or illustrations of an idea.

First I put my ideas in a sketch book. If an image becomes more concrete before my inner eye, sketches or clay maquettes follow, to capture an attitude, or I stage or research photos.

The process of I transferring a photo into a ceramic object is often surprising. Firstly, transferring into the permanent, fired ceramic material robs the original image of its ephemerality. The hardening and firing process makes them into magical objects that seem to be thousands of years old or could survive as long.

Secondly, the kind of photo influences the character of the figure. Unsharpness in the image creates unsharpness in the same places. In a way, the characteristic element of the photograph becomes visible in the figure. Of course a perfectly lit photograph is better for capturing a three-dimensional object, but using a lack of sharpness and the effect of the light in a three-dimensional and painterly way is a special challenge.

The colour of the sculptures is important to me so that they convey a temperature, a lighting situation.

The accessories of the figures should not be understood as the attributes like images of saints to identify them by, even if they do get something like points of reference for a story through clothing, animal companions etc. To me, the accessories are interesting as points of reference for the figure. I find it especially exciting if no proper relationship emerges between the figure and its "accompaniments", unfamiliarity or dissonance. A figure often only develops a background through an alliance with a thing or through an absurd alliance (a dissonance), against which it takes on an outline. The theme of clothing is thus always present:

What we clothe ourselves in, or what others clothe us in has its own magic. Clothing influences our identity, transforming not only how we look to others but it also works inwards. But the clothing often does not go with what is going on inside. To me, this discrepancy between what is being worn and the wearer is what the piece is really about. Clothing is like a background for our personality, and what is immutable, the human element is defined especially clearly along side fashionable accessories and the overall outfit.

My research for the subject of 300 Years of Karlsruhe for the Majolika Manufaktur in that town led me to women's clothes in the Baroque era.



"Games without Frontiers", 22 x 30 x 300 cm



"Puppeteer", 22 x 30 cm

On the one hand, with these figures I tried to trace what it felt like to live in the Baroque age, the aesthetic of the period with all its splendour opulence, and at the same time its severity, which are reflected in fashion and urban architecture; on the other hand, items of Baroque clothing get my imagination going about how a body must have felt in an outfit like that... The hooped skirt, a petticoat spread by rings of wood, whalebone or even spring steel, the laced corset, hairstyles piled up over two feet high on wire frames were typical objects with which you could show success and status within Baroque society. And thematically, this brings us back to "dissonance" – which links my various figures to each other: the dissonance between a figure and an object (e.g. clothing), between figure and figure, between a figure and its role...

This is also a leitmotif in the mother and child series of figures, which was inspired by a visit to the Bodemuseum in Berlin and studying the Madonnas there. What happens if children are not cute and mothers are not motherly, if they reject their role? What does that do to others, if figures do not do what we expect of them? People love to belong to groups and cultivate the roles they play with suitable behaviour and the matching attributes. I am interested in figures that are between worlds, that don't fill their role, that are at odds with it, are flawed, refuse to identify with the attributes by bearing them in a way that is not convincing.

I want the fragility of the role to be palpable.

The group "Games without Frontiers" also has this sense of "not following the rules of the game and not respecting boundaries" as its main theme; it studies the choreography of human behaviour if rules are not clear or are intentionally violated, ending peaceful coexistence.

In this figure-object relationship, I try not to make it look staged. People often show this expression if they are busy with something, are involved with something, are looking at something or are touching it. The expression that people have when they think they are not being watched, perhaps do not look their best according to common ideals of beauty is what I find worth depicting. People who have not been beautified or made to appear cute, not posing, they are beautiful and full of dignity, and if they are not drawing attention to themselves especially so.

In my representations of women, my work is an examination of one's own body image. Women's bodies are always under observation and are rarely viewed without a judgement of their sexuality. The body is a projection screen and an optimizable decorative object. In one's body image, these ideas are stored in the form of judgements, feedback and standards from other people. A sense of not being at home in one's own body arises – dissonance.

Clay is the ideal medium for me with its plasticity, its various states of hardness and its illusionary power. What interests me in ceramics is the point where the disciplines of sculpture, drawing and painting merge. The figure is created in several layers of construction and painting, and the consistency of the material at various stages plays a part in how it looks. I love this material that can be worked in such different ways in its various states: building hollow forms, applying it with a spatula, carving, painting, drawing. When seeking a convincing solution for the illusion, it is sometimes the three dimensional form, sometimes the colour version, sometimes a drawn line or the structure that takes centre stage.



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Stephanie Marie Roos was born in Albstadt (Baden-Württemberg) in 1971. After training to become an art teacher at the teacher training college in Weingarten and computer design course in Munich, she continued her artistic development parallel to working as a teacher and a graphic designer, alone and at the Kunsthochschule Offenburg and the Akademie Bad Rotenfels, specialising in sculpture. Ceramics has been the focal point of her work since 2011. She has been a member of the artists' association BBK and of the Badischer Kunstverein Karlsruhe since 2012. Through various competitions, Stephanie Roos has taken part in a number of exhibitions in Germany and abroad, including the Naspa Talent Award 2013 and the Westerwald Prize 2014 in Höhr-Grenzhausen, last year at the Keramik Triennale NVK at Coda Museum Apeldoorn, NL, at the 59° Faenza Prize and at the IIIrd International Triennial of Ceramics UNICUM 2015 in Ljubljana (Slovenia), where she received the Honorary Award UNICUM 2015 for her piece "Games without Frontiers". Her work is currently on show at the Faenza Ceramics Museum (exhibition of entries for the 59° Faenza Prize until 26 January 2016), at the Stadtmuseum Siegen (D) (exhibition in January 2016), at Galerie Bollhorst in Freiburg as well as at the sales gallery of the Majolika Manufaktur in Karlsruhe. Stephanie Roos lives with her family in Achern and has her studio there.