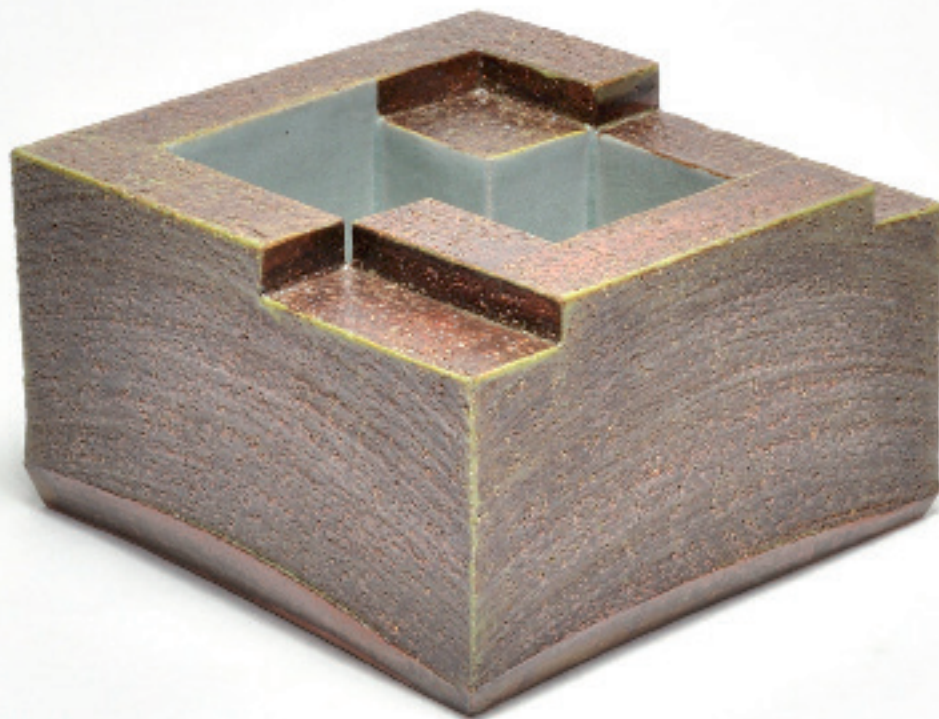


The ceramist

# SEBASTIAN SCHEID



The  
beautiful  
resistance  
of the  
material

by  
WALTER LOKAU

Is it possible to have a complete command of matter? Completely and utterly, from the beginning to the end of a creative process, at the end of which a man-made form is to stand – which, either has to fulfil functional requirements or aesthetic demands, sometimes both? Whatever humans shape is created with the aid of technology based on knowledge and experience. It should not be underestimated that force is unavoidably exercised here, a force that we call culture in the widest sense. The question is how far the measure of that generative force should go. Must one have a complete command of matter?

Modern technology in Europe, with its sophisticated and thus uniform mechanical production promises us just this: the total command of matter. In rapid succession, normed products fall from automated production lines, uniformity multiplying piece by piece, making itself replaceable. The force of design here is no longer linked to rare, arduously acquired, often passionate levels of skill. It has been given away, reassigned, literally from the hand to a mechanical production process whose merciless efficiency and violent perfection take possession and dazzle us by seeming to make the material disappear in the predefined shaping process. But has it really disappeared? Anyone who works in art or craft hesitates, at least initially, to make such a promise, wavering prudently from experience of idiomatic activity, of a special approach to matter, which although used as material, never truly merges with it. A trace of individual character, ineradicable though the work of one's hands, remains and has a significant influence on the result, or even on its individual charm, defining its particular beauty. Subtly perceptible and aesthetically enchanting, there is then a strange tension between a command of the material and the wilfulness of matter, a balance between the force of design and the resistance of the material, which simply cannot be reduced to a reproducible formula. What thus emerges is indeed made, but equally it occurs, not simply but with composure. No matter what field one works in, but especially in ceramics, one can, should and must work on this indefinable balance. One man dedicated to this task in outstanding fashion, although not shrilly or garishly, has



opposite page - Atrium, 2014, stoneware, 21.5 x 21.5, h 12.5 cm

above - Group of Vases, 2012-2013, stoneware, approx. 11 x 11, max. h 53 cm



Lidded Vessel, 2017, stoneware, 19 x 19, h 19 cm

Heavy, solid stoneware vessels with angular forms, as if hewn from trunk or log, architectural right-angled basins, rocky stepped or gnarled and twisted columns and thick discs, as if petrified with structures that evolved as natural bark or through continued erosion follow planes and directions animatedly: the first distant impression of composed coarseness and harmonious irregularity does not deceive. And yet from close up, at the same moment a subtle delicacy spreading into the finest details fascinates the viewer, revealing itself in contrasts, demanding precise observation, palpation, fingertip sensitivity – rough and smooth, glossy and dull, plane and edge, inside and out, form and matter. Furthermore, in terms of form, there is nothing that has obviously sprung from any local canon, either historical or contemporary. Alongside, admittedly, there are also delicate forms, almost dainty. Porcelain thrown into elegant cylinders, cut in repetitive patterns that gleam milkily against the light through the silky pale glaze.

Born in 1962, Scheid is a descendant of ceramists, but not just any ceramists. His parents are Ursula and Karl Scheid, and the desire to emulate them was implanted in him in early childhood. He remained in the same trade, but nevertheless ultimately did not do the same. Both parents' work was too dominant, too mature, for decades a landmark and yardstick for the world of ceramics in Germany.

It would have been hard to make his own mark here. His impetus had to come from elsewhere. The young Scheid thus went out into the wide world, to the west and to the east. Whilst still at school he often worked at potteries in England. After graduation from school, he was drawn across the Atlantic to the USA. He spent six months in Chicago with the legendary Ruth Duckworth. He thus became acquainted both with tableware and ceramic art, but the true formative influence that led to something truly his own was encountered by the young clay enthusiast at the other end of the world (or if you will, an ocean further on), in Japan, that imaginary vanishing point of all modern ceramics since the mid-19th century, the Mecca and Promised Land of all lovers of fired earth right up to the present. For two-and-a-half years, from 1984, he trained in Mashiko at the pottery of Tatsuzo Shimaoka, the living national treasure. It is a different culture, fostering a very different relationship from the West to matter and material, to the force of design and ultimately to things themselves, from a tradition, relatively unbroken for centuries. And it is the unspoken, the programme of Japanese craft not orientated to the yardstick of teachable perfection that makes learning difficult for the young German, not least also the apparently anachronistic strict hierarchy between master and apprentice. In 1987, it is thus the heavy thrown, restrained tableware, clad in the classic dark glazes of the Far East that define the period after his return to Düdelsheim. They are not coincidentally reminiscent of the school of Bernard Leach, which would be unthinkable without the Far East, in stead of European table culture orientated towards smooth, thin-walled porcelain dinner sets.

Yet as if this were not enough, Japan, to which he felt a powerful bond in the following years, continued to influence Scheid's

Vase, 2015, porcelain, 12 x 12, h 18.3 cm



Vase, 2014, porcelain, ø 14, h 17 cm



Vase, 2016, porcelain, 11.5 x 11.5, h 17.5 cm





Platter, 2016, stoneware, 54 x 54, h 3 cm

*The various-coloured stoneware bodies are coarsely grogged and come from the Westerwald region. The porcelain body is from Australia.*

work. Up to the mid-90s, he travelled to Japan every two years – friendship with and the works of Japanese ceramists Chikako and Masamichi Yoshikawa finally put him on the path he has trodden into the present. Scheid adapted the latter's technique of assembling large, architectural forms from solid elements, at the same time frankly exercising form-giving, violent force, whilst allowing the material its own intense independent existence. He began to cut his works from the heavily grogged clay with a wire and to develop an aesthetic defined by the carved shape and the surface of the material. The un-European characteristic of Scheid's vessel sculptures was to become the granular structure produced by drawing the wire through the inhomogenous material – modulated by the strength of the pull and speed of the wire, challenging and using the resistance of the material, but with the result never entirely under control. Divided into the smoothly glazed interior and the coarse-grained thinly-coated surface of the exterior, block-shaped basins and lidded vessels develop an aesthetic of form and material that comes more from sculpture than from conventional ceramics.

Other unorthodox techniques are added: clay clamped between boards have openings or the interiors of vases driven powerfully into them with wooden rods. Force is used here too, working against the resistance of the material, also challenging it in its specific character. Then cut in a free composition, the tall vessels receive their faceted shape, visible from many angles. Rhythmic structural surfaces pressed and driven into the material with wood enliven recent work to form articulated, irregular shapes that, rich and poor as they are, natural and artificial, demand their own sensorium.

Success is a balancing act: how far does the force of forming inflicted on matter go? How much does it assert itself? It is from this vagueness, which can never be clarified in advance, that Sebastian Scheid's work lives, witness of the resistance of matter, from which an idiosyncratic beauty springs, thus bearing witness against the regimenting spirit of the age in a technical world ...

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**Sebastian Scheid's** work is on show from

**9 – 24 September 2017**

at the Museum für Kunst und Geschichte in Hüfingen  
(with Elke Sada and Martin Schlotz) and

**from 15 September – 4 November**

at Galerie Brutto Gusto in Berlin  
(with Guido Sengle and Martin Schlotz).

**SEBASTIAN SCHEID** was born in Hanau in 1962. As the son of ceramists Karl and Ursula Scheid, he came into contact with ceramics from an early age, and during school holidays he gathered experience in various English potteries. After graduating from school in 1982, he spent three months at Dartington Potters Training Workshop, England, followed by six months working with Ruth Duckworth in Chicago, USA. In 1984, a 2 ½-year apprenticeship with Shimaoka Tatsuzo in Mashiko, Japan, began. Participating in exhibitions in Japan every two years up to 1996 made it possible to work in the potteries of other friends such as Darice Veri and Masajuki Miyajima in Motegi and with Chikako and Masamichi Yoshikawa in Tokoname. In 1992, 1994 and 1996, there were three exhibitions together with his parents at the Akasaka Green Gallery in Tokyo. Starting a family in 1997 and extending the house and studio put an end to these stays in Japan which each covered several months. Sebastian Scheid participates in exhibitions and fairs in Germany and abroad. In 2010 he received the Grassi Prize of the Karl and Anneliese Goerdeler Foundation at the Grassi Fair in Leipzig. He is represented with his work in numerous public and private collection in Japan, Korea, the USA, the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria, Switzerland, and elsewhere.



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