

The Ceramist

PETRA LINDENBAUER

Plates have their own philosophy

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Among celebrity chefs in Austria, it has become customary to serve their unique culinary creations on equally unique plates and bowls. One of the main “suppliers” of such distinctive tableware is the ceramist Petra Lindenbauer. She works in Stadtschlaining, Southern Burgenland, close to the border with Hungary. She has her studio in a row of Burgenland houses from the 17th century. She was born in Waidhofen/Ybbs, Lower Austria in 1967 and grew up in a family of artists – her father is a sculptor. She says, “This access is important because it makes a difference if you have a background in art or in craft.” Craft is of course the basis when you interpret ideas but it is not the starting point for the artist’s ideas when she develops designs.

Blue-green modelled bowl with octopus
foto - Per-Anders-Jørgensen



She received her basic training in ceramics from 1983 – 1987 at the Ortweinschule in Graz in a higher art course, specialising in ceramic design. In 1998, she graduated from the University of Vienna in art history and archaeology with a dissertation on Etruscan ceramics in the 6th century B.C.E. Between 1989 and 2010, she worked together with her husband Georg Lindenbauer in a studio for large-scale ceramic sculpture and contemporary heating units in Klosterneuburg. Since then, she has had her own studio in Stadtschlaining.

On her website, it says, "Petra Lindenbauer sees herself as an applied ceramist, the communicative element in ceramics is important to her. When she works with clay, there is always a counterpart, a person, a

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space the ceramic refers to, the form and the idea." This means she is always fully focused during the production process, she sees the space that will one day surround it, the food that will be served on it, sees the guest who keenly anticipates engaging with the culinary wonder. It is an interplay, like in an orchestra, an artistic synthesis that emerges with each new guest. "This," she says, "requires a great deal of trust on both sides (Author's note – this refers to both the restaurateur and

Table-Tales, solo exhibition, Galerie Mauroner Vienna *photo - Peter Garmusch*





Shallow plate and smoke-blue bowl *photo - Peter Garmusch*

Plate with recessed central area for presenting food *photo - Peter Garmusch*



the artist) and of course a great deal of patience." Thus the plate – "it is amazingly variable!" – only achieves its true beauty in combination with the dish.

In cooperation with the leading *maîtres de cuisine*, Lindenbauer always takes an active role. But she never strives for what she calls a "polished" effect. Her vessel needs by no means to be perfect but she has to give her full backing to it, and thus every piece that leaves her one-woman studio is imbued with her entire personality. Throwing rings may still be visible, as well as warping that has occurred in the firing. Every piece is permitted to retain its personality and its expression, nothing is sacrificed or subordinated to straightforwardness of whatever kind or "beautiful appearances".

Lindenbauer is an avowed thrower, who even today marvels at what the wheel is able to produce. Far Eastern thought has had a great influence on Petra's attitude to her work and her materials. It was the Japanese ceramist Masakazu Kusakabe in particular who taught her that perfection only achieves beauty through small faults and thus becomes complete. This includes making the material itself visible. She tries to avoid smoothing and straightening, sponges and knives are used as little as possible. On the contrary, she uses inhomogeneous bodies to give the clay as much space as possible to show itself in many facets. Additionally, she learned in the Far East how much meaning a plate or a bowl could have: the bottom of the vessel is the Earth we stand on, the walls are the mountains, the landscape that surrounds us. It is the interior of the vessel that is important, not its outer appearance. For Petra Lindenbauer and her clients from the field of *haute cuisine*, this means that their cooperation cannot be a matter of leafing through catalogues or ordering by mouse click. She designs with reference to a project or a person. Petra treats every vessel as unique, she consciously produces only in small numbers every day so that she can take the appropriate time for each piece. This approach is made visible in her solo exhibition, *TABLE TALES* in December

2018 at Galerie Mauroner in Vienna. She arranged a 7.5 mtr long table in the middle of a room with a variety of individual pieces closely related to each other, submerging the visitor in a sea of diverse forms and nuances of colour.

For the production of this “tableware”, as she calls her products herself, she prefers stoneware clay from the Westerwald region of Germany. She fired up to 1240°C in an electric kiln. In contrast to many other ceramists, she does not mix her glazes herself because they have to be certified as food safe. Her glazes are supplied by a friend, a silicate chemist, who mixes the various ingredients in accordance with her specifications. But now she admits fluctuations of colour as well as form because “it is what cannot be a hundred percent planned that is the interesting thing about working as a ceramist”.

The concept of perfection in ceramics is no longer a criterion of quality for her, it is out of place. To her mind, the term needs to be redefined to include many aspects in one vessel such as the relationship between rough and smooth, regular and animated. But absolutely not how long the form and surface were touched

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Plate with recessed central area for presenting food Foto: Per-Anders Jørgensen

up to rob the clay of its individual character. To Petra, a piece has beauty if it has character – this applies especially to her chawans. In the Petra Lindenbauer’s oeuvre, a Far Eastern and Western sense of beauty combine to form a very individual philosophy – especially the philosophy of the plate.

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