

[Maria ten Kortenaar: From Gold to Porcelain](#)

By [Chicago Art Magazine](#) on Oct 07, 2011 in [Articles](#), [Featured](#)

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Crazy Lovestory, Biennale Korea 2009, winner of the Special Prize

Working row by row, somewhat like a mason, Maria ten Kortenaar builds squares and rectangles of Limoges porcelain into open-topped cylindrical objects that are about the size of quart paint cans. Each square or rectangle is an individual unit, outlined in blue and slightly curved so the finished object comes out round. The artist incorporates bits of red and blue porcelain into the walls of each piece, creating forms, patterns, and lines that recall plant life, land contour, maps, and stained glass. The rim of each object is uneven, a bit like crenellations on a stone tower.

The walls of ten Kortenaar's objects are just one millimeter thick, which means that the blue lines and colored forms are visible both inside and outside. A completed piece is translucent in strong light. As we view it, we see a structure of lines that appear to support and enclose colored shapes in a luminous white space. When the light is normal, ten Kortenaar's lines and shapes activate the object's inner and outer surfaces to create imagery that seems to have been drawn there.

“Porcelain ‘allows me to express that which I perceive, feel, and experience in daily life.’”
--*Maria ten Kortenaar*

“Many tiny pieces”

“From origin I am a goldsmith,” said the artist in a presentation at the opening of her show in Chicago’s Dubhe Carreño Gallery. This “accustomed me to a precise way of working and putting many tiny pieces together to create an object.” The artist, a native of the Netherlands, made gold and silver jewelry for a decade until 1995, when she took up stoneware because she wanted to work with color.

On a visit to Hong Kong in 2005, ten Kortenaar was impressed by the skyscrapers she saw and the “cacophony of advertising signs and neon lights.” Seeking to “epitomize” this experience, she made her first body of porcelain objects. Her initial experiments with porcelain had convinced her that it is “a very beautiful, but also a very difficult material” that has a memory. Even so, she liked porcelain’s whiteness, translucency, and the intense colors that she could get with it.



Castle in the Air 12x15cm

By trial and error, Ten Kortenaar found ways of working with porcelain. “There are advantages in developing the technique yourself,” she says. “One is not confined to the academic techniques and methods . . . as a result I developed bright red porcelain, which astounded people in the field . . . When I explained to colleagues how I made the red, I was told that my method was impossible.” If people ask her technical questions about her studio practice, ten Kortenaar simply gestures toward the work, which speaks for itself.

The work also speaks for her. Porcelain “allows me to express that which I perceive, feel, and experience in daily life,” she says. Intense experiences inspire her and the title of a

piece suggests its origin, but this is as far as narrative goes with her. She adds that her objects are art and not intended for use.

U.S. Debut

Dubhe Carreño is the first U.S. gallery to exhibit ten Kortenaar's work, which has been seen all over Europe and in the Far East. Her thirteen-piece solo exhibition opened in mid-July and was recently extended to October 29th.



Nirvana Blue 23x24cm

Crazy Love Story, the postcard piece, has walls that are three to five squares or rectangles high with everything separated by blue lines that seem somehow electrified. Ten Kortenaar dips each small square or rectangle into cobalt-dyed porcelain slurry before she builds with it. This gives her the edge line. At a later stage in the production process, she removes the cobalt color from the surface of the piece. **Crazy Love Story** has chunks of blue and red in its walls that suggest the world of nature, possibly moving light and shadow in a forest. **Midsummer Night's Dream** is less abstract. We see flower forms arranged in a schematic fashion that recalls stained glass.

Winter Landscape may suggest a new direction for ten Kortenaar. It's a scene, mostly white, with brown spots and lines that suggest snow-covered landscape contours. Color and line are subdued in **Winter Landscape** giving the piece an Oriental quality. The artist takes a different direction in **Castle in the Air**. She makes a few small square penetrations in the walls and lines them with gold (another echo of the Orient) and places gold along the uneven rim of the piece. The wall patterns are severe and geometrical.

Maria ten Kortenaar has transformed herself from a crafter into an artist and now explores the expressive possibilities of porcelain. The future belongs to her.