

This book originates in the research project *Craft Thinking in the Arts*, directed by Sarah Weisman, founder of ClayLab, an experimental program integrated in the art education curriculum of the Campus for Design at the Trier University of Applied Sciences, and co-directed by Giulia Lamoni, collaborating member of Instituto de História da Arte at Nova University in Lisbon (IHA-NOVA FCSH / IN2PAST). Developed in 2022-2023, this one-year project was supported by the Campus for Design and the Strategiefond, University of Applied Sciences Trier, and IHA-NOVA FCSH/IN2PAST.

As reflected in this publication, the project included workshops at Claylab with Portuguese artists Flávia Vieira and Maja Escher, and a series of lectures by curator Lucia Pesapane and scholars Basia Sliwinska and Giulia Lamoni. Under the supervision of Sarah Weisman and with input from the above-mentioned activities, the students at ClayLab explored different possibilities to use clay as a material for their artistic practice. This book documents this collective work process, attempting to represent the dynamism, liveliness and commonality that characterized it.

CERAMIC SEAMS

THINKING  
THROUGH  
MAKING

# CERAMIC SEAMS THINKING THROUGH MAKING



Ceramic Seams  
Thinking through Making

Edited by Sarah Weisman and Giulia Lamoni





## Contents

- 19 **Foreword** Sarah Weisman and Giulia Lamoni
- 45 **Shaping collaborative futures** A conversation between Sarah Weisman and Giulia Lamoni
- 70 **Knowing through hands** Flávia Vieira
- 86 **The Tarot Garden by Niki de Saint Phalle**  
Lucia Pesapane in dialogue with Venera Finocchiaro
- 100 **Craft Matter Matters. Karina Marusińska and matter-scapes.** Basia Sliwinska in dialogue with Karina Marusińska
- 128 **Through Mineral Skins. On some ceramic sculptures by Lucia Pizzani** Giulia Lamoni
- 158 **Hansi Staël: Finding artistic identity in between cultures** Rita Gomes Ferrão
- 198 **Biographies**
- Inlay Poster  
**Reflection map** Yoko Inoue















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This book documents this collective working process, attempting to represent the dynamism, liveliness and commonality that characterized it. It is indebted to the students at ClayLab, the participating authors and artists, and the supporting institutions in Germany and Portugal.

We would like to express our gratitude to all of them, as well as to Christine Rudi, our designer, Michelle Geist, who photographed the work developed in the studio, the artists and right holders who granted permission to publish the photographs illustrating the texts in the book.

It is this collective endeavor that this book embodies.

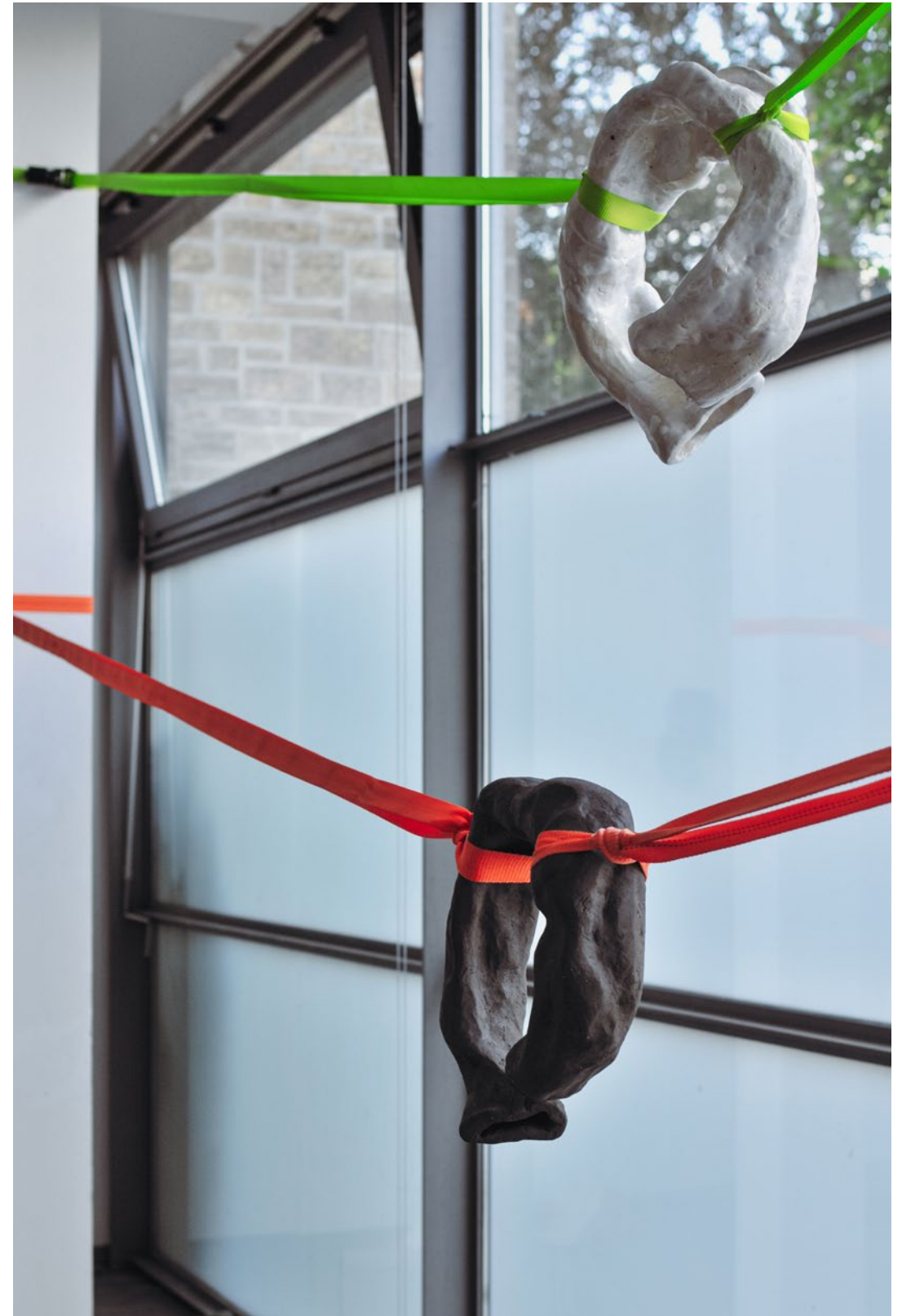
Sarah Weisman and Giulia Lamoni













# CERAMIC SEAMS

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## Shaping collaborative futures

A conversation between Sarah Weisman  
and Giulia Lamoni

GL Giulia Lamoni  
SW Sarah Weisman

**GL Can you tell me how you developed the idea for this project and how it relates to the ceramic workshop that you initiated at Trier Hochschule?**

**SW** I think that I have to back track a bit. I was appointed as a professor at the University of Applied Sciences Trier in 2019, and when I arrived here the studio was only used as a drawing space where I found nothing but some rickety easels and drawing tables. I knew that the space was planned by the sculptor Thomas Duttonhoefer in the nineties, with real attention to the light and spatial requirements for sculpting, so it has been a pleasure building up the studio to its original purposes. The structure that I developed here at the atelier relates very much to my own research, spanning many years and evolving through different international residencies and studios. Part of my own work has always been to explore and use different techniques and materials in the regions I have been working in - thinking within the material. As modelling is the basis of my work, clays have always been very important, their regional diversity and cultural references and the related shaping of techniques has intrigued me as well. This has constantly had a repercussion on my artistic research, the multi-layered approach to this universal material – this prima materia –, which is available almost everywhere but with different meanings and artistic working methods. As these experiences with working methods, materials and processes mingle in my work, the thought arose to build up this thinking and practice laboratory - thinking through making - in which experiences can connect transnationally, both on the material level, like using different clays and tools, and in exchange with artists and researchers who work both locally and abroad. The aim is to create an international working environment in which extensive skills and artistic thinking are compared and linked together through collaborative processes. Thus, the ClayLab.

**GL What about the students?**

**SW** I wanted to find a way of transferring amassed clay related experiences to the students in the Trier studio, which is why I started to speak with my fellow researchers from my strongly nomadic past. I first met the New York based artist, Yoko Inoue, when we both had our studios in Paris in 2011. It was a great coincidence that when I got the position in Trier in 2019, she was appointed as a Special Research Affiliate by Kyoto Seika University's Traditional Industry Innovation Center, then a new research initiative that considered the new craft thinking very broadly - for cohabitation of nature, people and community, knowledge retention and translation.

SW On one of her stopovers between New York and Kyoto, Yoko and I were able to meet in Amsterdam to exchange ideas. I still remember the coffee place with tiny tables where we spoke about our future depending on “collaboration” and “collective thinking and process” in creation and about our work with clay. We met up with her Dutch friend Marianne Peijnenburg, based in Tilburg, an independent researcher who also teaches at the Rijks-akademie and was a former manager of the EKWC (European Ceramic Workcentre) for fourteen years. It was great to meet Marianne at EKWC, hearing about her ceramic research and knowledge during an informative tour of their studios. All these impressions later helped me to think about how to build up the studio in Trier! Additionally, the EKWC has this beautiful collaborative kitchen with tiny transparent fridges where we talked about our research fields and projects concerning craft thinking in the arts, mapping ceramic knowledge to preserve and transfer it to a younger generation and practical structures of transmission.

GL **This idea of connecting different artistic practices and developing collaborative work seems key to the way you envision the ClayLab. Can you tell me a bit more about it?**

SW This idea of transmission of thinking through making and connecting is at the very origin of the ClayLab. When the studio started to take shape the idea of interweaving international art practices related to ceramics emerged, and this was the moment when I called you, Giulia! I thought your research focusing on the relations between contemporary art and feminisms, artistic production and migratory processes would be perfect to develop this project together! When I told you about the idea of exploring the relations between artistic practice and ceramic craft, you immediately connected through subjects in your field. I was especially intrigued by your work on transnational perspectives of contemporary art and the history of the relations between artistic practices and experimental art education. Can you retrace how this developed then?

GL **I can see that the interviewer is becoming the interviewee! It is an interesting reversal! I was very happy when you invited me, first of all because I thought that this could be a fantastic opportunity to reconnect and work together again. Secondly, it was because the relationships between craft and contemporary art have interested me very much in the last few years, both from the perspective of curatorial work and from that of art historical writing. Although I wrote on the textile work of artists like Ghada Amer and Tracey Emin many years ago, I think that visiting the studio of Venezuelan artist Lucia Pizzani in London in 2017 has been a key moment for me – one that stimulated my desire to engage with ceramics from a feminist and decolonial standpoint. And it is no coincidence that in this book I propose a text about Lucia's ceramic sculpture. In the context of this project, we decided together, very early on, that it should have both a practical dimension and a more historical and theoretical one, the two being interconnected and crosspollinating each other. Thus we invited two artists based in Portugal, whose work we both appreciate very much – Flávia Vieira, who wrote her PhD dissertation, in Brasil, on contemporary art and craft, and Maja Escher, who has personal ties with Germany –, to do art workshops with students at the ClayLab in Trier. We also invited, as guest lecturers, Lucia Pesapane, who co-curated the international exhibition “Ceramics: Art and Ceramics from Rodin to Schütte” in 2015-16, and feminist scholar Basia Sliwinska. Lucia had been a colleague of mine at the Musée national d'art moderne – Centre Pompidou in Paris in 2009, where we both worked on the show elles@centrepompidou. Basia is now a Researcher at the Art History Institute at Nova University in Lisbon, where she is developing very innovative work on feminisms, activism and ethics of care. Rita Ferrão, one of the main special-**

GL **ists of modernist ceramics in Portugal, and also a member of the Art History Institute at Nova University, took part in the conversation that followed one of these lectures, and kindly agreed to participate in this publication with a text. Finally, the artist Yoko Inoue, whose dialogue with you is – as you mentioned – at the heart of this project, proposed a reflection map for this book. Going back to the multifaceted structure of this project, do you think that collaboration played a decisive role in its conception, from the start?**

SW Yes, that was also part of this project, how collaborative processes emerge – our future lies very much in collaborative thinking. This collaborative approach in practice was also reflected, for example, in the workshop in the ClayLab, initiated by Maja Escher, where students collected materials from different regions during the year and used them to construct a Shelter in the studio in Trier, which was an emphatic image – everyone under one self-built roof! Questions about collaborative processes and migratory backgrounds and visibility in artistic practice were raised.

GL **Could you tell me more about how the two workshops in the studio, led by Maja and Flávia, unfolded and why it was important to you that the students meet and establish dialogues with these artists?**

SW As I gained knowledge through different places and encounters, I wanted to make it possible for the students to experience these collaborative practical and conceptual transfer possibilities on site at the ClayLab. Maja Escher, for example, brought various earths that she had collected in a quarry in Portugal for her work into the studio and explained her methodology with these materials.

GL **This seems to reflect the importance of the situatedness of materials and crafts practices, and their different histories. What about Flávia's approach and her relationship with Brazil and Brazilian art?**

SW I spoke with Flavia – she works in Portugal and São Paulo – about how differently the subject of craft thinking in the arts is reflected upon in Europe and, for example, in Brazil, and how it materializes in practice. Collaborations – and also the straightforward taking up of craft – is integrated into the research there, in her opinion, in a more unbiased way. In Europe, we have historically created a separation between craft and art that is sometimes very difficult to bridge over. Flavia has also referred to cooperation using traditional color processes and here the students also took up collaborative working methods in the workshop in relation to narration and material.

GL **What about the work of Yoko Inoue?**

SW Yoko is a multidisciplinary artist whose work includes sculpture, installation, collaborative socially engaged art projects, and public intervention performance art. She explores themes of assimilation and cultural identity, often using ceramics as a symbol and transforming them. Recently she told me about a project at the CHCI Global Humanities Institute round table in Senegal about craft as a method – crafting decoloniality – in which she wanted to unveil the ‘ecology of the Global South’ by ‘translating’ craft practices as a visual artist.

GL **This project approaches craft through the lens of contemporary art. As you said, the two have been historically separated in Western culture, a separation that has often translated into a hierarchical relationship. Nevertheless, whereas some contemporary artists produce their own works in ceramics, others prefer to collaborate with highly specialized ceramists. In fact, the possibilities are manifold and strongly dependent on the working methods of each artist, as well as on the cultural, historical and political contexts of production. Would you like to comment on this?**

- SW Today, traditional techniques have different significances depending on the culture, and approaches differ greatly in terms of how craft is seen in art and how artists integrate it in relation to their working methods. Especially in the field of ceramic materials, this is very multifaceted, since a high degree of technique and knowledge is often required here.
- In many cases, artists then join the workshops of ceramists, a prominent example being the artist residency program of the Manufacture de Sevres, another being the EKWC or collaboratively organized artists' workshops such as those of the BBK (Berufsverband Bildender Künstler) Berlin.
- This is also exemplified by the interview of Lucia Pesapane in which the ceramist Venera Finocchiaro describes how the collaboration between her and Niki de Saint Phalle for the realization of the project in Tuscany took place.
- GL **You mentioned Lucia's interview with Venera Finocchiaro and the way it unearths the specific working methods used in creating Niki de Saint Phalle's Tarot Garden. Other texts in this book explore the work of women artists and ceramists. One could say that the preoccupation with gender relations in the field of art and craft are an underlying current traversing this book and the project itself.**
- SW As you mentioned, the collaborative and also the gender approach are reflected in the texts of both Basia and Rita. It is about life paths and obstacles that form a decision for certain materials and techniques. In many cases, working methods and innovative techniques and approaches are also overlooked for various reasons. What was, in your view, the reasoning behind building a focus on some of these questions in this project, as well as how migratory transits can inform material and artistic production?
- GL **I think that this book gathers many voices and many ways of making – a diversity that is key to this project. Somehow, nevertheless, all these contributions show an interest in discussing and supporting the modern and contemporary practice of women in the fields of art and craft – and those working in-between them. This concern is at times associated with the question of situatedness – as in the work of Maja and Flávia, who explore specific craft traditions and their histories –, with migration and negotiating one's place in-between cultures – as in Rita's discussion of the work of Hansi Stael, or in my exploration of Lucia Pizzani's ceramic pieces –, or in shaping one's agency in a patriarchal system that oppresses women – as in Basia's analysis of Karina Marusinska's practice. Another thread connecting these contributions is of course the use of clay, and, as Basia puts it “ceramic matter matters.” I would like to get back to your work, this time as a sculptor. Can you tell me about your relationship with ceramic?**
- SW I came to ceramic materials and processes through bronze casting.
- After my studies, I initiated a collaborative foundry with colleagues in Greece. Through building different kilns there we also had the possibility of directly firing works in clay. This process made it possible to inscribe thoughts directly into the material without the need for transitory plaster and wax.
- Starting my sculptural work with Charles Auffret and Arlette Ginioux at the EnsAD in Paris, I came into contact with the Independent Sculpture Movement. They are both successors of the movement, which spans several generations from Rodin to Bourdelle to Giacometti and Germaine Richier. The process of modelling is a common element among the artists of this movement. This immediate and reflective work in the material clay - a thinking through making - and the passing on of practice-based knowledge is very much anchored in the Independent Sculpture Movement. It is passed on from hand to hand above all through collaborative studio practices.
- Bourdelle, for example, worked in Rodin's studio as a practician and there experienced this immense knowledge in practice before he himself em-

- SW ployed sculptors in his international studio in the Avenue de Maine.
- Germaine Richier was one of the last of his collaborators there, and she has experienced this transmission of studio practice, thinking and poetic construction in the material and poetic development of form through direct modelling in clay, which she herself then continuously passed on to her students, even in exile in Switzerland.
- When I was appointed as lecturer to the Weißensee University of Applied Sciences, the students immediately wanted to model life-size sculptures. In teaching them, the memory of how practice-based knowledge had been passed on to me about working with poetic geometries was then very present. It is important to pass on thinking through making, which is related so much to artistic practices and thinking, from hand to hand, otherwise it simply disappears.
- This directness of the modelling process is also reflected in the complex surfaces of the sculptures. In order to widen the field of research for the students, the ClayLab was expanded to include a GlazeLab for experimenting with ceramic surfaces. This is creating additional interdisciplinary research opportunities.
- GL **We have explored many possibilities of reflections here. Perhaps, to conclude – or better to temporarily suspend this conversation –, could you tell me why this book is called Ceramic Seams?**
- SW This also came through making. It was a spontaneous invention in the studio while using the slab technique, a ceramic building technique in which you kind of fuse ceramic slaps together, making seams. I loved that image of building different layers together, representing very well the idea of ceramics as an expanded field that articulates and dialogues with other fields and knowledges. Throughout the project we referred to that image as interstices that connect techniques and matter and thoughts or multiple layers reflecting the complexity of communication, where things can fold together or also simply co-exist as an imagery of thinking and therefore building possible spaces. Thoughts mingled through matter and making. In the studio, the joints of the floor tiles are still stained with traces of this special red tone of the clay from Portugal that was used during the workshop, the experience living on physically as well as in the minds of the participants.

# Craft thinking in the arts

## 2nd of December, 2022



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Craft thinking in the arts

2nd of December, 2022

### Artist Talk and Workshop: Ceramics as narrative

INSTITUTO DE HISTÓRIA DA ARTE



„Brasilina“, installation, wool and cotton dyed with brazilwood and ceramics, 2022, Credits: Júlia Thompson.

in cooperation with the Art History Institute at NOVA University, Lisbon

### Flávia Vieira

Porto/São Paulo

**Artist Talk 13:00 – 14:00**  
**Workshop 14:00 – 16:00**

This Artist Talk is part of a series of Workshops and Lectures in relation to the research project *Craft Thinking in the arts: Exploring the relationships between artistic practice and ceramic craft in the 20th century and contemporary art* under the direction of Professor Sarah Weisman at the Trier University of Applied Sciences in cooperation with Giulia Lamoni/Art History Institute at NOVA University, Lisbon.

The Project is supported by the Campus of Design and Strategy fund of the Trier University of Applied Sciences and NOVA University, Lisbon.

To register for the Workshop, please send an email to:  
weismans@hochschule-trier.de

At ClayLab of the Trier University of Applied Sciences /  
Irmminfreihof 8, 54290 Trier/ Room Q36



Flávia Vieira, *Brasilina*, tapestry, wool dyed with brazilwood, 800 x 220 cm, 2021

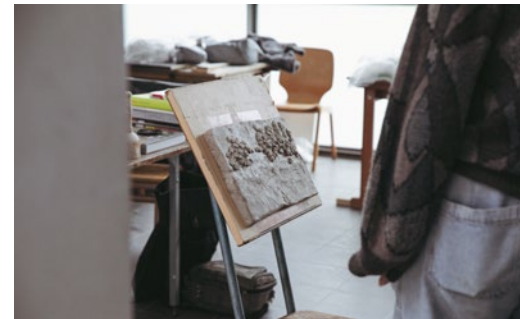


This workshop aims to explore the relationship between artistic practice and craft practice, focusing on ceramic technology. More precisely, it seeks to understand how the hand-making of ceramics can emerge in artistic practice not only as a technology that responds to a technical need, but as a discursive language and critical reflection that works from a narrative.



Flávia Vieira, *Prêt-à-porter #2* (above), *Prêt-à-porter #4* (below), stoneware and steel, variable dimensions, 2021



















Jusepe de Ribera, *The Sense of Touch*, 1632, oil on canvas, 111.9 x 88.3 cm

## Knowing through hands

Flávia Vieira

Looking at the painting *The Sense of Touch* by the Spanish naturalist artist Jusepe de Ribera (1591-1652), one understands that touch, more than a functional sense, represents a means of communication and knowledge of the world - a link between the self and the other, between the self and the world (Montagu 1986; Wilson 1998). Forming part of a pictorial series about the five senses (touch, sight, hearing, smell, and taste), the painting makes an allegory of touch through the representation of a blind man (suspected to be the 17<sup>th</sup>-century blind Italian sculptor Francesco Gonnelli) who, with his hands, touches a sculpture of a bust. We can imagine him touching the bust for hours, going over every inch with care and thoroughness until he is able to reconstitute the object in his mind in an illuminated way, as seems to be suggested by the beam of light coming from the upper left corner. Although he has no sense of sight, the represented man can 'see' the object he is holding, perhaps even more than if he could see it with his eyes. By touch, he knows not only the shape, but also its volume, weight, texture, temperature and even color.

The dichotomy between the senses of sight and touch, which has permeated much of Western history, is represented in the scene through the presence of the sculpture of the bust and the painting of a portrait, whose almost imperceptible presence on the table seems to indicate a disinterest in the visual experience in favor of a tactile perception. More than an illustration of the sense of touch, Ribera's work launches a discussion around the hegemony of visual perception in Western culture, proposing other sensory valences in the conception and understanding of the work of art. Ribera seems to suggest that touch is not excluded from the artistic experience at the moments of its creation and its contemplation.

The brief description of Ribera's painting serves as an introduction to this article, which seeks to discuss the challenges of tactile experience through the hand in artistic practice, considering 'practical thinking' and 'practical knowledge' in the field of hand making. It is a fact that the creative process takes place in the confluence of the various bodily senses, but what aesthetic and epistemological assumptions are produced during the manual tactile experience by the artist? What kind of knowledge is generated in the tactile experience? It is understood that these questions are relevant to the understanding of artistic practice, including the practice of ceramics in contemporary art, which is the subject of the present publication. What we will try to highlight is that the use of hands implies the existence of a tactile grammar without which the subject would feel incomplete in his or her human condition.

In this sense, this article may be a contribution to the principle of 'thinking through hands'<sup>01</sup> and the recognition of a *sensorial thinking and knowing*. To this end, the notion of embodied knowledge will be discussed, and, in a second part, the idea of knowing through making.<sup>02</sup>

01 The expression 'Thinking through hands' comes from the expression 'Thinking through making' by the anthropologist Tim Ingold (2013).

02 The text presented here is partly based on the author's PhD study (Vieira 2019).

Towards Embodied Knowledge

The contemporary philosopher Mark Johnson, in his essay ‘The Meaning of the Body,’ writes the following: ‘We are born into the world as creatures of the flesh, and it is through our bodily perception, movements, emotions, and feelings that meaning becomes possible and takes the form it does’ (2007, IX). The author challenges the dominant perspective on the perception of the world that over-intellectualizes the ways of producing knowledge; that is, he seeks to reflect what he calls the conceptual-propositional theory of meaning present in contemporary society (Johnson 2007, 7). Quoting the author again, full knowledge about the subject involves considering what is of the order of the non-verbally translatable or what comes from the body:

I submit that if you want to understand human meaning-making, you should probably not start with theories of meaning put forth in contemporary analytic philosophy of mind and language. You will find there treatments of concepts, propositions, and various language-like structures, but you will not find any awareness of deep, embodied, vital meaning. For this immanent or embodied meaning, you must look more deeply into aspects of experience that lie beneath words and sentences. You must look at the felt qualities, images, feelings, and emotions that ground our more abstract structures of meaning. (Ibid., 17)

It took a while, in the Western context, to recognize the body as a relevant element of knowledge. From Plato to Descartes and Kant, the concept that true knowledge should be independent of bodily perception developed because sensory and affective experiences were thought to distort the essence of truth, and vision was the only sense that provided objective information. The assumption of ocular-centrism denies the role of bodily experience in the construction of knowledge.

In his book *The Eyes of the Skin*, Pallasmaa (2005) states that in Western culture, sight has historically been considered the noblest of the senses, and thought has been associated with the sense of sight. Thus, the link between seeing and understanding has gained a fundamental position in Western thought:

During the Renaissance the five senses were understood to form a hierarchical system from the highest sense of vision down to touch. The Renaissance system of the senses was related with the image of the cosmic body; vision was correlated to fire and light, hearing to air, smell to vapor, taste to water, and touch to earth. (Ibid., 15)

Today, we know that perception does not proceed in a hierarchical way, and that most experiences involve the confluence and dialogue of several senses and, more broadly, constitute a dialogue between theory and practice. But we also suspect that hand making, associated with craft making, continues to occupy a less credible place in contemporary society, despite the fact that some artistic proposals seek to deconstruct these barriers through the integration of formal and discursive strategies taken from the field of craftsmanship (Vieira 2019; Vieira and Pfutzenreuter 2020). Nowadays, when technology tends to reinforce physical distances, there is a greater desire for tangible, bodily, and manually produced experiences, evidencing the existence of embodied knowledge. This is a knowledge acquired through action, a knowledge in which the body knows how to act, not requiring to be verbalized or represented mentally. The knowledge seems, then, to be imprinted in the body and not in the mind. The notion of embodied cognition is based on the embodied cognition movement in the field of science, which consists of an embodied view

of the mind that challenges the traditional cognitivism perspective.<sup>03</sup> There are several studies related to this movement (see, for example, Clark 2008; Varela, Thompson and Rosch 1991). This is a notion that derives from the phenomenology of French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty and represents a philosophical shift from dualism and ocularcentrism toward paradigms that integrate mind and body. Instead of the Cartesian eye of the external viewer, Merleau-Ponty’s sense of vision is an embodied vision. Quoting the author, ‘The gaze involves, gropes, worships the visible things’ (1999, 173); that is, sight would also be capable of groping the visible world. It is not just a matter of attributing a tactile dimension to sight, but rather of considering a haptic function that refers to the body’s relationship with the world. Mental experience is not only mental, but also bodily, for there is no separation between mind and body. Mind and body are one reality. For Merleau-Ponty, thought and perception are intrinsically linked, and consciousness, body, and world are parts of a single system. By applying Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological considerations to handmade practices, such as pottery, one can begin to understand the role the body plays in the moment of artistic creation. Through our bodily awareness, we can appreciate the affective quality of clay and the impulse to touch with our eyes and see with our hands. It is through this aesthetic empathy that we are able to perceive the sensation of touch in our own bodies. Touch is absorbed into the clay, leaving a record of the artist’s presence on its surface. By recognizing these prints as the mark of their creator, the viewer becomes aware of his or her own hands and body. By examining ceramics through a phenomenological lens, we are challenged to consider the role of our bodies in perceiving the world. It is about developing a ‘knowledge in the hands’ (Merleau-Ponty 1999, 44), that is, a knowledge that is not clearly explicit, articulated, conscious, and mentally representative. It is rather a knowledge of the body or through the body; a knowledge that lives in the body and in the hands - an embodied knowledge. It is similar in concept to the procedural knowledge (as opposed to declarative knowledge) of cognitive science, which can be better presented by performance than by verbal explanation. However, in contrast to Merleau-Ponty’s ideas, in mainstream cognitive science the mind-body dualism (and the reduction of the mind to the brain) still prevails, and the embodied nature of this knowledge seems ignored.

Here are some important concepts to understand the nature of embodied knowledge and, therefore, to perceive the nature of artistic manual work as a process of construction and translation of knowledge. They are: procedural knowledge, tacit knowledge, practical knowledge, lived knowledge, ‘body schema’ and enactive knowledge. Although these notions are related to each other, they reveal different nuances of the articulation between making and knowing.

Procedural knowledge

According to the American Psychological Association’s glossary of psychology, ‘procedural memory’ refers to ‘the memory of the way things are made; the way in which perceptual skills, cognitive and motor skills are acquired, maintained and used’.<sup>04</sup> In other words, it is about memory for the skills involved in specific tasks. In contrast to declarative knowledge, which can be consciously articulated, procedural knowledge expresses itself in the form of action or performance. Embodied knowledge encompasses the procedural knowledge implied in certain actions.

03

Traditional cognitivism is explained on the basis of the standard model of information processing which respects the ‘Feel-Think-Act’ cycle (Pfeifer and Scheier 1999). According to this model, first the mind must represent the situation based on perception (‘feel’), then evaluate the behavior that best suits that situation (‘think’) and subsequently move the body towards the defined goal (‘act’). There are three clearly divided cognitive and behavioral stages. According to this model,

the mind controls the body for a particular behavior based on a deliberate plan of actions in advance. On the other hand, the mind is a separate dimension of the world and only operates from representations. The mind is therefore separate from the body and knowledge is represented in a propositional way.

04

Glossary of Concepts in Psychology of ‘American Psychological Association’, <http://www.apa.org/research/action/glossary.aspx?tab=16>. Accessed at: 15/12/2017.

Still in the field of psychology, Gilbert Ryle (1949), in a critique of Cartesian dualism between mind and body, redefined the concept of mind by differentiating the 'knowing that' from the 'knowing how' and focusing on the latter, which is associated with the notion of procedural knowledge. While both are part of human behavior, 'knowing that' refers to the knowledge of the mind and 'knowing how' to the practical application of that mental knowledge. While 'knowing that' is based on knowledge of information, 'knowing how' is based on knowledge of practice and is expressed through actions that demonstrate skill. According to Ryle, there is no separation between theory and practice, because the functions of mind and body work simultaneously, using both types of knowledge. Thus, it could be said that Ryle proposes a *vision of the embodied mind* through the proposal of 'knowing how'.

*Tacit knowledge*

To understand embodied knowledge also presupposes talking about tacit knowledge (Polanyi 1966), which consists of knowledge that cannot be explained or verbalized. Polanyi (1966) seeks to highlight the practical and tacit condition of knowledge, stating that 'we can know more than we can tell' (1966, 4), where the term 'tacit' is derived from the Latin *tacere*, which means silence. This is a knowledge linked to bodily perceptions, mainly the haptic, as it results from action and bodily experience.

In this sense, tacit knowledge is a knowledge marked by a strong individual and personal dimension, which means that it is created from the self. Peter Dormer (1994) called this non-universal knowledge 'local knowledge', referring to the subject that developed and experienced it. While general knowledge refers, for example, to knowledge about color theory and which colors result from mixing, local knowledge refers to how the artist arranges them on the surface of the canvas during his or her creative process.

*Practical knowledge*

The notions of procedural knowledge and tacit knowledge are related to the practical or experiential dimension of knowledge. Practical knowledge sees making as its central activity. It is a knowledge that comes from the experience of making. It could be said that tactile skills can be taught to others through 'practical communication', which is similar to tactile communication, rather than only through verbal and visual interlocution. Facing the difficulty of describing tacit knowledge and the processes inherent to it, the concept of *visual narrative* is proposed, a kind of visual method based on observation. It is in this sense that Richard Sennett (2008) follows the principle of 'show, rather than tell' instruction.

*Lived knowledge*

Embodied knowledge is a lived knowledge, distinct from scientific knowledge, which is explicit and articulated. All human actions have their own know-how that is embodied and, once embodied, the subject uses it without deliberating on the procedures or theorizing the action itself. There is a previous correspondence between the body and the situation, which impels the body to move by itself and 'decide' the appropriate action for the situation without conscious control. In short, the body knows how to act.<sup>05</sup>

05 Do not, however, confuse correspondence with reflex. The body generally moves outside of consciousness, but it does so in accordance with the intention of action.

*'Body schema'*

Embodied knowledge is characterized by the pre-reflexive correspondence between the body and the situation or the world. Considering this correspondence, Merleau-Ponty presents the concept of 'body schema' ('le schéma corporel'), which allows perception of the body in relation to the context of action, coordinating the parts of the body in the action and using this awareness as a regulator of the action. By consciously controlling the movement, the subject raises awareness of the body. The purpose of the body schema is to coordinate the parts of the body and organize the action.

*Enactive knowledge*

Enactive knowledge is not simply a multisensorial mediated knowledge, but a knowledge stored in the form of motor responses and acquired by the act of making. For Varela, Thompson and Rosch (2003), enactive knowledge is an 'in-action' or 'emergent' knowledge, that is, cognition would be related to the agent's action in the world. Enactivism suggests that a person learns in action and accumulates knowledge through their embodied experiences with their environment; thus, the body is an integral part of all knowledge (Varela, Thompson and Rosch 2003; Noë 2004, 2009).

The philosopher and enactivist neuroscientist Alva Noë (2004) develops the idea of 'knowing-in-action' or knowledge-in-action, fundamental to hand practice. We learn to make sense of the world through interacting with it and manipulating it. In hand practice, we might say that knowledge is constructed through actions of acting with and through a material.

The concepts presented here, from various scientific fields, underline the importance of the relationship between making and knowing, contributing to the understanding of the concept of embodied knowledge. In the following section, this relationship is deepened with an emphasis on *knowing through making*.

**Knowing through making**

In the traditional scientific perspective, making is usually understood as a consequence of thinking. However, there are some thought currents that question this linearity, often associated with a subordination of practice to theory and of professional action to formal knowledge produced outside the contexts of the subject's performance.

One of the most influential thinkers defending the role of practice in the construction of professional knowledge was Donald Schön, an educator and philosopher who developed the theory that learning takes place through making, focusing on how 'professionals think in action' as 'reflective practitioners' (Schön 1987). Among the concepts he proposed, the notions of 'knowing-in-action' and 'reflection-in-action' are of interest here, due to their importance in understanding how practice intervenes in the construction of knowledge. The author proposes an epistemology of practice as an alternative to a vision of subordination of professional action to pre-established formal knowledge, valuing tacit knowledge oriented by and for practice. Knowledge-in-action, directly related to know-how and which emerges spontaneously during action, as well as reflection-in-action, carried out during action and which supports this knowledge, are thus presented as important tools in the configuration of practice-based professional learning, through which one learns from experience and not only on the basis of formal learning or knowledge transfer: 'When one reflects-in-action, one becomes a researcher in the context of practice. It does not depend on the categories or the established theory and technique, but builds a new theory of its unique case' (Ibid., 68). The author also refers to reflection-on-action, carried out after the action and which allows judging



the adequacy of the knowledge-in-action: 'We reflect on the action, thinking about what we do in order to discover how our knowledge-in-action may have contributed to an unexpected result' (Ibid., 26).

The advocacy of a practice epistemology is reflected, for example, in the field of practice-led or practice-oriented research, in which praxis plays an essential role: making is understood as the guiding force behind thinking. Thus, making can come before thinking. Practice-led research is a form of academic research that incorporates the element of practice into the methodology or outcome of the research. The main focus of such research is to promote knowledge about practice. The methodology of this form of research provides the practitioner or artist, who is also a researcher, the opportunity to study and reflect on their own work, while also allowing them to find new solutions for their production. Artistic practice with a focus on manual craft production is an activity that lends itself to a methodology of practice-driven research, as it is a practice whose knowledge is not necessarily articulated in advance.

Anthropologist Tim Ingold (2013) launches this discussion between thinking and making, claiming that in the artist's creative process, knowing or thinking is promoted by making. Ingold defines this process of 'thinking through making' in a critique of 'hylomorphism' (from the Greek *hyle* – matter, and *morphe* – form), a philosophical doctrine of Aristotelian origin according to which all being (*ousia*) or body is constituted by the principles of raw material and form.<sup>06</sup>

Aristotle compares the relationship between soul and body to the relationship between matter and form, stating that, in the same way that matter is the potential of form, it is also the soul that informs the body and gives it character. The author reinforces this position by relying on the philosopher Gilbert Simondon, namely on the example of the construction of the brick that served as the foundation for his theory of individuation (Simondon 2005).<sup>07</sup> In this process, the transformation of the material that gives rise to a form is understood as a change, as, for example, the matter of bronze that, subjected to a molding process, is transmuted into a statue – the loss of one form in favor of a new one.

In other words, according to the hylomorphic model, the making is the projection of the form onto the material, it is the form imposed on the material. It is the materialization of a thought about the form that is at the basis of the creation of an artifact, thus giving rise to the traditional process of 'making through thinking' that Ingold (2013) critiques: '[...] theory comes before its application or execution in practice: theory leads and practice pursues'.<sup>08</sup> The author counters this idea with

06 Aristóteles. 2010. *Obras Completas de Aristóteles - Sobre a Alma*. Lisboa: Biblioteca de Autores Clássicos.

07 Although, at first sight, the brick is considered the result of confining the clay material to the mold, Simondon (2005) tries to show that it is a more complex process insofar as it implies the conjugation of two active elements that individually already contain an identity with their own structure and energy. If, on the one hand, the mold is made of hard wood (usually beechwood), on the other hand, the clay cannot be used in its raw state, but must first be ground, sieved and then kneaded. Thus, when the brick is produced, the form is not united to the material, but rather there is a meeting or unification between the 'two halves of the transformation chain' (which are the making of the wooden mold and the prior preparation of the clay) to the point where both are compatible. The clay leads to the mold, just as the mold leads to the clay. In other words, the brick object is not the result of the imposition of form on matter, but of the counterposition of equal

and opposite forces intrinsic to the mold and the clay. According to Simondon's concept of individuation, things are to be understood as a process of morphogenesis in which form is always emergent rather than given in advance. With this appeal to transmutation and impermanence, the author takes a critical stance towards the hylomorphic model, that is, the dualism between form and matter, or the failure to understand the object as a field of internal struggles and exchanges between form and matter. In opposition to states of stability, the author understands that things and the subject are permanently in 'metastable' states, that is, in modes of tension and contradiction whose energy, when channeled, provokes a change giving rise to what he calls the process of individuation.

08 Transcription of the lecture 'Ingold – Thinking through Making' Institute for Northern Culture, published in 31/01/2013 in the Institute for Northern Culture's YouTube Channel. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ygne72-4zyo>. Accessed in: 23/08/2017.

the notion of ‘thinking through making’, stating that matter also has its own voice, which therefore imposes itself on the form, underlining the importance of strength and the imposition of materials in the process of making. In this sense, creativity, according to Ingold’s ‘thinking through making’ premise, is not found *a priori* as in the hylomorphic model, but ‘forward’:

That is, instead of starting from the object and thinking about what was the new idea that gave origin to the object (to understand the object behind it to arrive at the idea that gave rise to it), the subject should read the creativity ‘forward’ or ‘onwards’ and this means joining up the movements and awareness of materials as they feel the way forward. (Ibid.)

Thus, ‘thinking through making’ is a process that emphasizes making insofar as it is from making that the creative processes are generated. In this sense, it can be said that it is a model that is more in line with the work developed by the craftsman through the understanding of formal craft processes as promoters of knowledge.

But what kind of knowledge is generated in the process of ‘thinking through making’? Most conventional science sets up an encounter, whether in a laboratory context or in the field, between the ideas in the head (hypotheses generated on the basis of theory) and the facts in the field. Ideas emerge, ideas are transformed into hypotheses, tested against facts, ideas are revised to support the discoveries of experimentation, in a continuous process of conjecture and refutation. This procedure of science means placing the knower and his knowledge outside the world he seeks to know. As Ingold argues,

The ‘making through thinking’ in the mode of scientific experimentation and the drawing of the principles created for it, is a way of knowing from the outsider; puts the knower out of the world that he seeks to know. However, ‘thinking through making’ puts this relationship in reverse. It’s a way, I would say, of knowing from the inside. Here, knowledge is not created through an encounter between minds already furnished with concepts and a material world already inhabited by objects; rather, it is a knowledge that grows from the evidence of our practical and observational commitments to materials, to beings, and to the things that surrounds us. (Ingold 2012)

This knowledge that comes from the inside is, according to Ingold, the knowledge that is practiced by artists and craftsmen, and it is becoming increasingly necessary to practice it in the current techno-scientific context. By placing knowledge outside the self ‘we leave no room for growth’; on the other hand, it is the knowledge that comes from inside that allows us to better perceive the world and to respond to it. Ingold calls this relationship between the subject and the world ‘correspondence,’ that is, a relationship between two instances that go parallel and not in a relationship of intersection where there is interaction.<sup>09</sup> The production of objects implies, therefore, a correspondence between the manual action of the producer and

09 Note that, according to the author, there is a clear distinction between correspondence and interaction. In graphic terms, in correspondence the instances walk parallel and together, and in interaction they cross each other. Interaction resembles a network made up of knots, in which the idea of beginning and end through forward and backward movements is very perceptible. On the contrary, in correspondence the instances have no beginning and no end and follow without backward movements. Thus, the ‘essence of thinking as correspondence is more in terms of attentionality than

intentionality’ (Ibid.). Whereas in the interaction schema behavior is motivated by intentionality, in correspondence the instances follow together and attend to each other, that is, they extend towards something. Like the French word ‘attendre’ which means to wait, the attentionality referred to by Ingold means to bring the other’s movement into a correspondence with one’s own movement. The interaction model fits into a logic of ‘joining up’, whereas the correspondence model follows a logic of ‘joining with’, in which there is a co-participation between the various elements in a side-by-side position.

the natural flow of the material, or what the author calls the ‘becoming’ of the material; that is, the potentiality of the material’s existence, its becoming. In this sense, the study of making is essential in the process of artistic creation, because from it ideas are materialized and become linguistic signs.

Final considerations

Based on the previous points, we may conclude the understanding of making and thinking from the appropriation of the expression ‘thinking hand’ by Juhani Pallasmaa (2005), which simultaneously contemplates the role of the hand as technical instrumentalization and as translation of ideas and personal expression. Despite the historical legacy of the rupture between the hand and the head, the two are inseparable.

Knowing through hands will, therefore, be a form of knowledge intrinsically linked to hand making, and indispensable to the understanding of contemporary artistic practice. In the case of ceramics, hand-making is, then, much more than a making - it is a thinking by the hands through making. This conception contradicts narratives of making that privilege a technician and instrumental view of hand-making, highlighting the centrality of making as a process of knowledge and opening the way to a critical understanding of manual making in contemporary art.

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# Talk Series Craft thinking in the arts

*6th of Dec,*  
**2022,**  
**15:00**  
**—16:30**

**Ceramix:  
from  
Auguste Rodin to  
Thomas Schütte**

***Lucia Pesapane***  
***(Paris)***

Campus  
Gestaltung

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NOVA FCSH

INSTITUTO DE HISTÓRIA DA ARTE

In cooperation with the Institute of Art History at Universidade  
Nova/Lisbon



This Talk is part of a series of Workshops and Talks in relation to the Research project *Craft Thinking in the arts: Exploring the relationships between artistic practice and ceramic craft in the 20th century and contemporary art* under the direction of Professor Sarah Weisman at the Trier University of Applied Sciences in cooperation with Giulia Lamoni/ Art History Institute at NOVA University, Lisbon.

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To register for the Talk Series, please send an email to:  
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At ClayLab, Trier University of Applied Sciences /  
Irminenfreihof 8, 54290 Trier/ Room Q36







Niki de Saint Phalle and  
Venera Finocchiaro, 1983  
© Niki de Saint Phalle/  
Giulio Pietromarchi, 2023

LP Lucia Pesapane  
VF Venera Finocchiaro

## The Tarot Garden by Niki de Saint Phalle

Lucia Pesapane in dialogue with Venera Finocchiaro

Often considered a minor material for decorative use, ceramic has undergone a renaissance in recent years in the work of visual artists who often use no other technique. Ceramic has become a major material in the twenty-first century and has stimulated a new direction in sculpture. It is now unabashedly colorful, figurative and hybrid, and having broken completely with the conventions of modern art.

During the 1980's some artists used ceramic to build architectures, houses, chapels: the architectural and geometrical *Mastaba* (1986) by Jean-Pierre Raynaud and its curved colorful pendant, the *Tarot Garden* (1978-1998) by Niki de Saint Phalle in Tuscany, as well as their ancestor, Gaudí's *Parc Güell* (1901), are some examples.

Between 1978 and 1998 French-American artist Niki de Saint Phalle was engaged in the most ambitious artistic adventure of her career: near Capalbio in Tuscany she created a large park with 22 monumental sculptures representing the major arcana of tarot divination by which she interpreted and sought to understand the meaning of her existence. The *trencadis* (a type of mosaic made from tile shards and broken glazed chinaware cemented together) of Gaudí had a lasting influence on the *Tarot Garden*. The *Tarot Garden* was a titanic undertaking, the crowning work of a lifetime, and she carried it out with a fierce independence, even self-financing its construction.

The following interview has been realized with the person in charge of the ceramics for the *Tarot Garden*, who assisted Niki de Saint Phalle for almost 10 years.

- LP **Venera Finocchiaro, you are a ceramic artist and you have followed the construction works of the *Tarot Garden* by the artist Niki de Saint Phalle for ten years, and in particular the part regarding the covering of the sculptures with ceramics. How did you arrive in Capalbio?**
- VF After studying at the Academy of Fine Arts in Rome, I opened my own ceramic workshop in 1979. At the same time, I was teaching at the Municipal School of 'Ornamental Arts' in the Municipality of Rome. In 1983, I met Ricardo Menon, the assistant of Niki de Saint Phalle who, at that moment, was looking for a ceramist to cover the monumental sculptures that she was building in Capalbio for her *Tarot Garden*.
- LP **Niki had already built several 'habitable' and 'penetrable' sculptures (in 1973 the 'Golem', a monster-slide with three tongues for a playground in Jerusalem, the 'Dragon' in Knokke le Zutte between 1972 and 1974 for the children of a collector), but the latter were painted. Why did she decide to switch to ceramic covering? Was it just an artistic choice?**
- VF Niki knew that ceramics would allow her to preserve the sculptures better than painting. The Maremma climate and humidity would otherwise have rapidly compromised the external surface of the works.



**LP At what stage were the works when you arrived at the Garden?**

VF When I arrived at the Garden the sculptures of the main cards had not yet been completed. Their structure was a welded iron grid covered with a special mesh designed to support and retain the cement which, when sprayed, would form the sculptural envelope. The structure of the *Popess* was finished, the snake that flanks it had been covered with ceramic, a white earthenware that required two firings, the first with biscuit (at 1100°C) and the second for the glazes. The Italian artistic tradition has always been majolica, but we quickly realized that glazed terracotta did not work for outdoors. The support was porous and by absorbing water the glaze broke with frost. So we opted for porcelain stoneware which, being compact, is waterproof and lends itself to single-fired pieces. At that point, however, we asked ourselves which colors to use to decorate the porcelain stoneware. Many of the colors we initially tried disappeared with the high temperatures that we had to use, so I searched directly at the headquarters of the manufacturers of ceramic glazes and colors, in Montelupo Fiorentino, Monselice, Sassuolo and Fiorano, but they didn't sell small quantities. In the end, I opted for a white base enamel which I dyed with pigments of different colors to obtain the effects desired by the artist. Those same pigments were also used to paint, for example, the Venuses of the *Empress*.

**LP What equipment did you need?**

VF We had four ovens, two gas and two electric. The largest was gas-fired and had a removable trolley. In the same workshop there was a second gas-fired one, much smaller, that I mostly used for hand-painted single-fired pieces. The electric ovens had been purchased before my arrival, but they were too small and the firing was very expensive, so they were used for tryouts. We also had a suction booth to ensure the operator's safety from the dust from the spraying of the glazes, a spray gun connected to the compressor, masks to avoid breathing the dust, a cleaner with a rotating sponge to remove the glaze from the parts that touch the oven (so that they don't stick). This machine worked for tiles or regular pieces. The curved pieces (and there are so many curved ones in the garden because Niki hated right angles) we cleaned by hand.

**LP What was the work with ceramics about?**

VF It depended on the pieces to be made: for example, the ceramic pieces painted with the shapes of the Naná, the Venus of Botticelli, the Diana of Ephesus and the primitive Venuses that adorn the left side of the *Empress* were painted by hand and single-fired. Obviously, the relief had been carried out, in the preliminary phase, together with Niki. The procedure is as follows: Niki would draw the shape on a slab of plastic clay and we realized the bas-relief, then I made the plaster cast obtaining the negative. By pressing the stoneware slabs into the negative, the positive was obtained which, cut according to the place it was to occupy, was laid on the wall, left to dry, numbered and taken to the kiln. Here it was glazed in white (with high temperature glaze), painted with a mixture of pigments and finally fired at 1160°C in a single firing. Other parts, such as some of the *Emperor's* columns, are in semi-refractory material (clay with chamotte in the mix). For the floor of the terrace of the *Empress* and *Emperor* we couldn't use glaze because it would wear out when walked on, so we opted for a colored mix of porcelain stoneware. We had a wonderful kneading machine that allowed us to color the mix and degas the stoneware obtaining the colors that Niki had chosen. Using the *neriage* technique we mixed stoneware of different colors obtaining extraordinary decorative effects: depending on how the clays were superimposed and worked, the resulting decorations were different.

Niki de Saint Phalle, *Tarot Garden*, 1978-1998 (the *Empress*),  
© Lucia Pesapane





**LP How did you manage the ceramic firing part?**

VF Firing in the large oven lasted about 16 hours and I watched over it all the time. There was no timer that regulated the pressure of the burners according to a pre-established schedule, so the kiln had to be operated manually, taking into account time and temperature, lighting the kiln burners and regulating the gas pressure.

**LP In which spaces did you work?**

VF Niki rarely came to the oven. It was not necessary because we modeled everything that was needed in the Sphinx. Arthritis had left her hands fragile: she started and I continued and vice versa, depending on the model she chose to make. It was an immense job. Niki she loved a challenge. For example she had decided that the *Empress* should have an embroidered pink dress and therefore we created many decorations inside each mold, cutting them out as if they were *dentelle*.

**LP Why did Niki decide, at a certain point, to use glass as well?**

VF As a form of homage to traditional Italian techniques and especially to Murrina. However, I didn't know if it would have resisted outdoors if applied directly to the ceramic glaze and I therefore proposed using the glass fusing process (still little used at the time) by fusing it on other glass.

**LP What is the current state of conservation of the Garden?**

VF The part covered in ceramic is well preserved: 'work for eternity' was the motto. The restoration and preventive conservation work is carried out especially for the part of the mirrors.

JAN 24<sup>th</sup> 2023, 15–16h



Karina Marusińska, W OBRONIE WŁASNEJ ŚCIGAC SENS CODZIENNOŚCI  
(CHASING THE SENSE OF THE EVERYDAY TO PROTECT ONESELF), 2022, Installation  
Exhibition 'mother earth' BWA Design, Wrocław, Poland, Photo: Karina Marusińska

# LECTURE: BASIA SLIWINSKA (RESEARCHER, LISBON) CERAMIC'S MATTER MATTERS: CONTEMPORARY WOMEN ARTISTS

in cooperation with the Institute of Art History  
at Universidade Nova/Lisbon

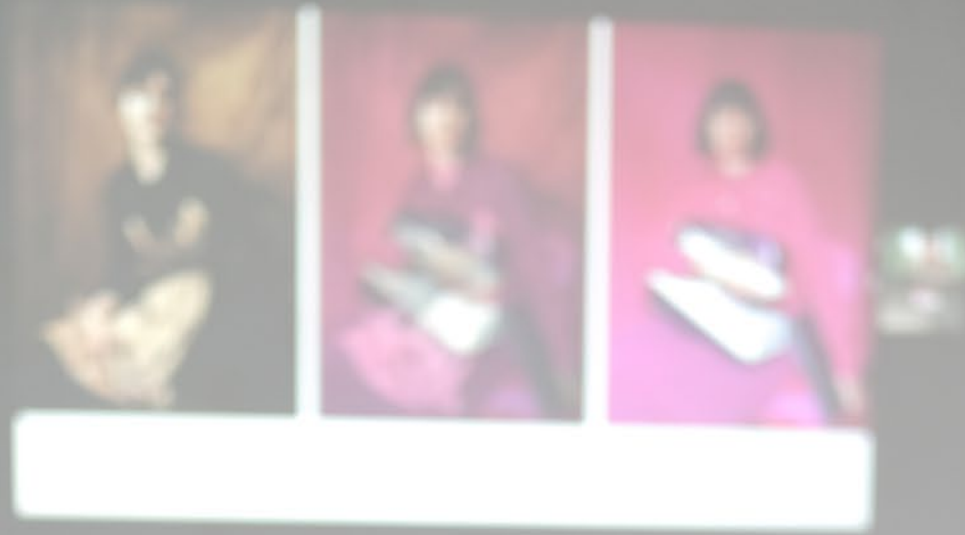
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Karina Marusińska, *Sekrety*, 2021,  
Photograph by Grzegorz Stadnik

**Craft Matter Matters. Karina Marusińska and matter-scapes.**

Basia Sliwinska in dialogue with Karina Marusińska

Two teenage girls make shallow holes in a garden somewhere in Wrocław, Poland. Their hands covered in soil prepare a graveyard for a handful of daisies, pansies and diverse leaves they picked moments earlier. They bicker a little, trying to agree on the composition they create out of the dead bodies of plants. With care and attention, they design an intricate arrangement of flowers set against a background of dark humid soil, framing the emerging picture as though hugging it. Pleased with the final result, the girls cover the shallow grave with a lid made from a piece of glass they found at a nearby building site. The glass screen protects their design, at the same time revealing it to the selected few. It is a threshold between that which is private and the public, a border that can be crossed only if one trusts another to share the secret location of the treasure hidden underground. On brief reflection, the girls toss soil on top of the coffin sealed with glass, holding the bodies of plants. May they rest in peace, hidden from view, a secretive grave to be discovered by someone sometime. Or not. With care.

My neighbor and I often met in my Mother's garden in 1990s in Wrocław to co-create secretive collages for future discovery. Only recently my Mother found one of them when clearing the garden in preparation for spring.

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In 2021 Karina Marusińska, an interdisciplinary artist from Poland, invited others to join a game she crafted for the *GlassGo!* Project initiated by The SIC! BWA Wrocław Gallery in Poland.<sup>01</sup> 'Dig up my work from the ground', she encourages (Marusińska 2021a). Pairs of hands blindly dig. Fingers caress the soil, delicately going deeper and deeper, uncertain of what to expect and what there is to be found. The intimacy of the moist soil is intimidating. The body-to-body search continues. A scratch. Fingers sense a smooth cold surface. A treasure has been found. Treasure? The object the hands discover and unearth is a piece of glass, slightly bent, as though molded from a human body. It is stained. Hues of pinks, reds and beige are reminiscent of human flesh. Is it a flake of skin, injured and covered in blood? Is it a bruise?

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01 The SIC! BWA Wrocław in Poland is the only public art gallery dedicated to artistic, studio and utility glass, one of four BWA Wrocław Galleries of Contemporary Art. In 2021 SIC! BWA curated

the *GlassGo!* Project, which has already presented two editions. It focuses on the role of ceramics and glass in urban spaces and their potential to activate social issues.



Karina Marusińska, *Sekrety*, 2021, Photograph by Alicja Kielan and Grzegorz Stadnik

*Sekrety* (Secrets, 2021), Marusińska's socially engaged art project, refers to a popular children's game (predominantly in the second half of the twentieth century when television was not common in Poland) called 'secrets' or 'skyscapes'. It involved burying small objects, such as flowers, beads or notes, and arranging them into collages. The shallow holes covered with glass screens were dug in hidden places, which made them more difficult to discover. An approximate location of the secret was revealed to selected others in an expression of trust. To view the collage, it was often necessary to clean the glass surface, sometimes with one's own saliva.

However, the artist's secrets do not resemble the beautiful arrangements of colorful flowers and beads I remember from my childhood. The glass objects she buried in themselves hold secretive affects and stories. The existence of those stained uncanny 'skins' awaits discovery. The project is an attempt at revealing secrets buried in the soil. The artist trusts those digging enough to share with them the vulnerable embodiments cast in glass. Marusińska (2021a) explains, 'In my "Secrets" a piece of broken glass articulates violence - it is a witness bearing traces of skin injuries integrated within it. At the same time, it is an oppressive element in itself, for example, because of its sharp edges. It could be used as a tool of attack or self-defense.'

The pieces of glass she buried in soil for others to be discovered, layer by layer, articulate, through their stained surfaces, a horrific secret. Marusińska exposes injuries and affects concerned with domestic violence, still considered a social taboo in Poland. Her work reveals visual markers of violence, often hidden by victims out of shame or fear. The artist wonders if, perhaps, survivors might hope, paradoxically, that someone at some point will discover traces of the violence inflicted upon their bodies and end their suffering. She confronts those digging with a horrific reality. Marusińska (2021a) admits, 'I want the "dirt under the nails" to stay with them [participants] for longer and to make them reflect. Just like in life, not all games are fun.'

Marusińska permanently colored the glass; these metaphorical stains cannot be washed off. Shades of reds, pinks and beige connote flesh, signifying a range of toxic cultural taboos concerned with female bodily fluids and markers socialized into shaming, stigmatizing, embarrassing and oppressing women's bodies. Jenni Sorkin (2000: 79) writes, 'Stain becomes, then, both an enactment and vestige of degradation, violence and coercion.' And earlier (Ibid. 77-78), 'Stains mark the wearer: To be stained is to be dirty, messy, poor, and/or careless. It infers a variety of judgments... Stains are a record of what has been near, on, or is of the body'. Staining signifies an inappropriate standard of behavior, not aligning with the social norms firmly established by heteropatriarchy. Marusińska's deliberate use of the figure of the stain forces those discovering the secrets she hid in soil to face the reality of domestic violence, normalized and silenced in Poland and beyond. The stains on broken pieces of glass visibilize not only suffering but also conditioning of women into disorderly objects to be disciplined if not docile. Stains stigmatize vulnerable bodies, often female bodies. Sorkin (Ibid: 80, emphasis in original) further explains, '*Stigma functions as both a form of reproach and silencing... Stigma protects the male perpetrator*: In cultures socially and sexually oppressive toward women, the stigma is a natural extension of male tyranny, re-enforcing women's errant status'. And this is what Marusińska's secrets painfully reveal. The stains appearing on pieces of glass are a visual metaphor of a perpetrator's attack on women's bodies. These physical markings visibilize not only an individual injury but also a collective harm inflicted upon women, time and again. Marusińska's politics of witnessing, performed with glass, is enacted with care.

Marusińska (2023): *The project was a direct response to the actions of the Polish government in 2020 threatening to withdraw from the treaty known as the Istanbul Convention preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. This was particularly concerning to me as in my childhood I experienced family violence.*

*The curators of GlassGo! learnt that domestic violence and alcohol abuse significantly affects residents of Kościuszkowska district in Wrocław, in the vicinity of the SiC! BWA gallery. It was important to me to contextualise the project within this specific locality and its inhabitants. I felt responsible for the local community, wanting to break the secrecy around domestic violence but at the same time not stigmatise the local community. I spent significant time on one of the courtyards and in the project I used glass from the broken bottles I found to subtly reference substance abuse.*

*One of the girls participating in the game told me that the glass pieces reminded her of the sky. Perhaps she thought of the moment when the sun sets, and its rays touch the clouds painting them in shades reminiscent of bruises. It was soothing for me to learn that the child did not associate my work with bruises.*



**Craft (*Matter Matters*)**

Millner and Moore (2022: 6) write about contemporary artistic practices attending to matter and revalorizing craft as activist and politically driven. Craft practice offers a compelling platform from which to explore and negotiate complex gendered hierarchies in modern art histories and practices. Drawing upon a long history of the relationship between women's traditional handcraft, survival strategies and remembrance, feminist crafting refutes the gendered and hierarchical binaries of Western discourse opposing art and craft, masculine and feminine or public and private. Sorkin (2016: 1) emphasizes that the social turn in contemporary art foregrounds pedagogical practices of women ceramists, and the non-hierarchical and participatory experiences which resulted from modern craft, and not modern art. She argues that the role of craft, marginalized and peripheral within the history of art (sometimes literally, as ceramic studios are often relegated to the basement within university art departments), in preceding activist principles remains unacknowledged. It was women artists in particular who spearheaded radical pedagogical initiatives through their engagement with craft. Paradoxically, craft's invisibility within academia and art history has been fertile ground for innovative theories and practices challenging art historical canons and building communities of support. The fragility, performativity and intimacy of craft creative processes and their relationship to everyday cycles of life have encouraged social engagement and camaraderie.

Sorkin (2016: 13) described clay as a 'live form' and writes, 'Ceramics is one of the unacknowledged models of the object-action in which the live presence of the pedagogical process was the gesture of its maker.' Hand-based and intimately engaging materiality, craft teaches us to pay attention. Marusińska is sensitive to the vulnerabilities and precarities around her. Working with glass and ceramics is an act of feminist resistance against gender politics in arts dictating which practices are valued and which remain marginalized. She demonstrates, as in the case of *Secrets*, that as artistic media they hold affects with a transformative potential. She is thoughtful and empathetic to the materials she works with and stories she tells for social justice. During the Covid-19 pandemic, reflecting on the global transformation and searching for new ways to describe the world that seemed no longer stable and known, the artist wrote a text on what she calls a 'new craft' (Marusińska 2021b) in which she differentiates between craft produced for capitalist gain and craft as a form of resistance and political activity. Marusińska foregrounds the processual orientation of craft practices, requiring time, commitment, attentiveness and patience, against the predominantly mainstream culture of instant gratification and neoliberal individuation. She argues craft enables agency and cross-generational relationships via matter. It is a practice in tenderness and care. Her own interdisciplinary approach engages materiality as a tool and a strategy to tell stories, but also to negotiate the notion of agency.

One of her projects executed *with* ceramics, entitled *Gesty. Ślady* (Gestures. Traces 2021-2023), uses matter to generate connections between bodies: human to human, human to objects and objects to human. First, collaboratively with Karolina Gardzilewicz and Jakub Biewald, she co-created several dozen ceramic modules in the form of cylinders. Participants were invited to respond to her call to: 'express yourself with a gesture. Leave your trace behind'. Confronted with a soft clay mold, they were encouraged to use gestures to interact with matter and create their original stamp on the body of clay objects, which were later covered in iridescent glaze and fired in a kiln. The project reveals the potential of craft to build intimate connections and solidarity through touch and imprinting oneself on the body of another. Marusińska reflects on the importance of simple gestures, physical and fleeting, such as a smile or a hug, leaving a mark on a body, whether of an object touched, a person's flesh or their emotions and affects.

The more gestures we share, the more traces we leave behind, she says (Marusińska 2021b). Gestures of touch involve mutual exchange, foundational to traditions of care fostering tenderness. Diverse ceramic techniques afford intimacy. Within the project *Gesty. Ślady* the artist's and participants' bodies touch the matter, or perhaps caress it. Catherine Dormor draws upon Luce Irigaray's (2000) notion of caress as a 'relational gesture-word' and argues it offers 'intimate spaces of difference' emerging out of (inter)relational tactile encounters (Dormor 2020: 100). While writing about textiles, Dormor's understanding of caress as a site of becoming is also relevant to the practice of ceramics. Contrary to touch and although both gestures inspire relationships, a caress does not rely on possessing the other. Irigaray writes about a loving look, a recognition beyond domination, which articulates a proximity beyond what is visible. A caress acknowledges difference, not dominating, it opens the space for the two to remain two. Each of Marusińska's ceramic projects is initiated with actions of hands and the intimacy of encounter with matter, the tools and techniques, and bodily rhythms. Her work facilitates in-between relationships that open one body – human, non-human or other-than-human – to another, articulating symbiotic connections realized via imprints on each other's flesh.

Karina Marusińska, *Gesty. Ślady*, 2021-2023, Photograph by Grzegorz Stadnik



Connections that emerge are like a web woven *with* agencies, stories and affects. The artist's initial gesture to issue a call for participation turned into a trace followed by others, like an unfolding thread that connects and binds into alliances. Marusińska extended her touch into a collaborative exercise in togetherness and inter- and intra-relational encounters. The intra-material gestures were translated into objects the artist arranged into a pole, installed diagonally in the space of Gallery Krupa in Wrocław, to signify the continuity and interconnectedness between human and non-human bodies interacting in the making of the project. The final work imagines alliances and solidarities enacted through matter and activated via human gestures. After the exhibition the clay returns to its homeland, the soil. Ceramic works will be gifted to local communities to use them as plant pots. The ethos of sharing is key for the artist, who takes responsibility for the circulation of matter she brings to life. Marusińska (2021b) says craft teaches us respect for matter, including one's body. She encourages us to trust our hands, set them free to create and guide us towards more livable futures.

### **(Craft) Matter (Matters)**

It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories. (Haraway 2016: 12)

Haraway thinks *with* matter, space, images, bodies and thoughts to make new knots in webs of relations. The new patterns of thinking, writing and making she creates generate new interpretative possibilities, also of artworks. Haraway's approach to thinking *with* frames this dialogic exchange between Marusińska's practicing and thinking *with* matter, her thinking *with* me, and me writing *with* her.

In 2022 the artist worked on a project entitled *W obronie własnej ścigać sens codzienności* (Chasing the sense of the everyday to protect oneself), installed at the *Mother Earth* exhibition at Dizajn BWA Wrocław (2022). It was initiated with a call she issued on social media, 'I want to talk about the aspect of motherhood that concerns everyday life - bustle, a series of prosaic, monotonous activities, often repeated in a loop' (Marusińska 2022). Women engage in daily activities that are necessary and yet their effects remain invisible to others. One such activity is removing sand from a child's shoes. She refers to Jolanta Brach-Czaina (1999: 65), a Polish feminist philosopher, who writes, 'my existence is directly threatened, because everyday life is wasted on activities that seem inevitable, and yet they turn out to be unimportant.' Brach-Czaina explores materialities of daily existence, the meaning that something or someone *is*. She is interested in the ordinary and the everydayness, which encompass domestic actions that are repetitive and necessary, such as washing dishes, cleaning, peeling or eating potatoes. The importance of this everydayness sustaining our world is forgotten, similarly to the invisibility of the labor and care, both physical and mental, which women perform to maintain households. Brach-Czaina coined the term 'krzątactwo' (bustling around) to define the rushing around to maintain everyday life. The ordinary activities, most often unacknowledged and unnoticed, are what Brach-Czaina pays close attention to and attributes them meaning. She notices the constant, repetitive, habitual actions, performed usually by women, to support everyday life. Among them she includes not only duties to take care of others and our surroundings, but also of ourselves. Bustling around, marking our existence in the world, may help us claim agency if we notice the matter around us and community of bodies - human, non-human, and other-than-human - we co-exist with, and with whom we co-create our everydayness.

Karina Marusińska, *W obronie własnej ścigać sens codzienności*, 2022, Photograph by Grzegorz Stadnik





Karina Marusińska, *W obronie własnej ścigać sens codzienności*, 2022, Photograph by Grzegorz Stadnik

Basia Sliwinska Karina Marusińska

Marusińska (2022): 'Yes, there is less and less of me. You too? I disappear. Every day. Piece by piece. You too?'

Brach-Czaina (1999: 65, 66): 'The rescue would be to reveal the meaning of the action I am participating in. If it makes any sense. In any case, one cannot accept the role of an unconscious labourer of existential activities. And in self-defence, you have to chase the meaning of the everyday.'

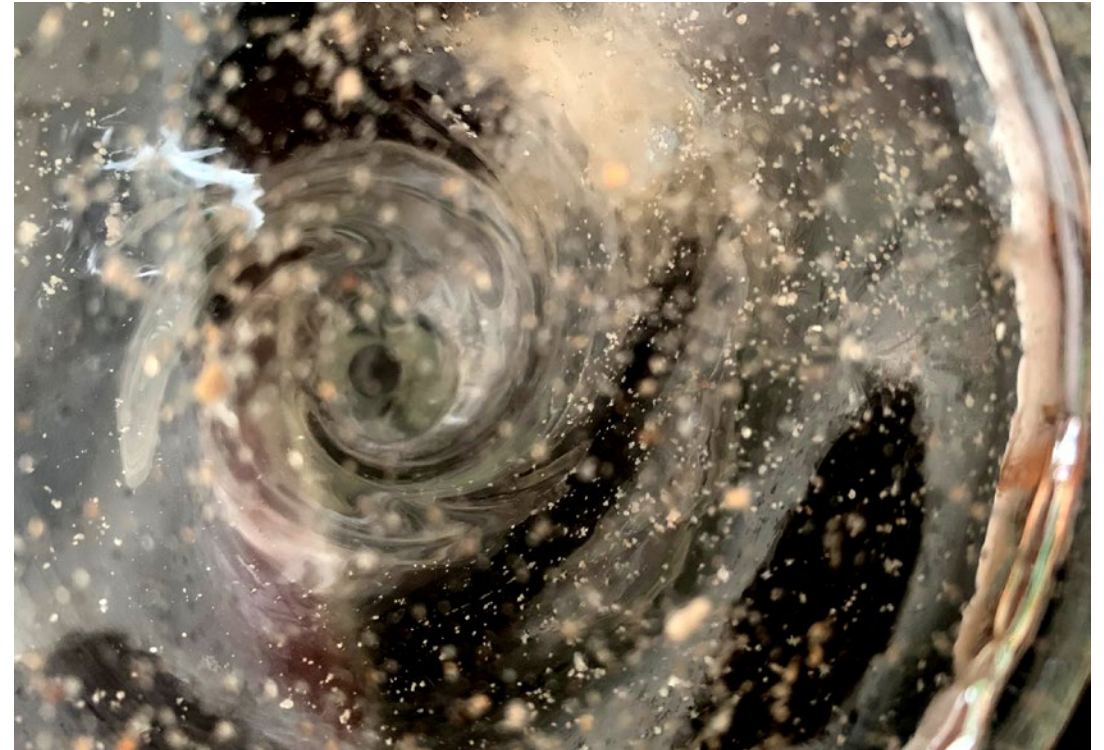
Marusińska (2022): 'I am addressing mothers, fathers, carers. If this experience is familiar to you, donate the sand from your child's shoes to the 'mother earth' exhibition. Together we will try to make sense of each of these grains. In self-defence.'

The artist collected sand and used its matter to create a mini zen garden, which could be considered a counter-monument to the invisibility of women's bustling. Visitors were invited to immerse their hands in the sand, sense its layers slipping in between their fingers, or draw smooth lines on the surface. The *matter* of the sand *mattered* to think other matters *with*, to rephrase Haraway. Marusińska's installation invited the visitors to co-imagine *with* her the stories the sand generates. Each grain comes with a story and its affects.

Marusińska (2022): 'The earth is a nuisance to me. Like an uninvited guest, it enters my private space and forces me to take care of it. It keeps me moving. Removing sand from my child's shoes is an act of care for the child, for the house, and also for myself, because having a sense of control over the domestic chaos enables me to think well of myself. This labour, apart from its obvious aim to maintain order, actually results from an internal need. It sets a rhythm, becomes a kind of ritual, allows to maintain peace of mind. It is a lesson in humility.'

Thinking about her experience with sand interfering, uninvited, with her everydayness, she started exploring sand as a building material. She created an hourglass to accompany the garden and the sand she collected became a component of its glass. Marusińska (2022) explains, the 'form of a "stopped vortex" refers to cycle, movement and repetition. *Hourglass* emphasizes time, passing, but also duration. Stabilising the organic matter allows you to control the chaos, keep in check the substance that spills out of your hands every day.' Imprisoning granular mineral particles the artist gave significance to invisible domestic labor, unacknowledged and unpaid, performed by herself, and other carers.

In the introduction to *Materiality* (2015: 12), Petra Lange-Berndt writes, 'For some, to engage with materials still seems the antithesis of intellectuality.' She continues, 'those who have been listening to them, who are not intimidated by materials, have not predominantly been academics but artists, designers, architects, conservators or technicians.' Attentive noticing is key to craft practices, in which materiality and tactility are central. Marusińska's intimate engagement with sand, caressing its grains, careful handling and transforming it into glass objects facilitates not only material interactions but also an exploration of agency of things. Ceramics, glass, metals and textiles are inextricably linked to elements of nature: earth, air, fire, water and wind. In the preface to *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* Jane Bennett (2010), discusses the agency of things and what she calls vital materiality. She suggests materiality is not inert stuff awaiting activation, but rather an active and equal participant in moments of encounter. Bennett (2010: 2) 'gives voice to a thing-power' and investigates active powers of nonsubjects and material formations. She calls it, 'a culture of things irreducible to the culture of



objects.’ (Ibid: 5) In Marusińska’s projects things exercise agency enacting Bennett’s ‘vital materiality’. They are ‘actants’, which, as Bennett (Ibid: 9) explains, can be human, nonhuman, or a combination of both. Craft materials, ranging from plants and trees to soil, wool and skins, can never fully be mastered. Stacy Alaimo (2008: 244) argues craft materials are, ‘variously, material-semiotic, inter-corporal, performative, agential, even literate.’ Marusińska is attentive in her interactions with matter and open to engage in affective encounters emerging with thinking-through-making. Feminist new materialist discourse frames her approach. She is interested in interdependencies between *all* bodies, human, non-human and other-than-human. The matter of stories matters to her. Her call to donate sand nuanced women carer’s embodied experiences of presence through bustling. The project *W obronie własnej ścigać sens codzienności* exposes being present in the world, in a physical, affective and material sense, and asks the world to speak to violent silencings of women’s role in maintaining and caring for the everyday life.

Marusińska (2023): *In response to my call published on social media, a number of people shared their stories and thoughts. Here are some of them.*

*‘What a beautiful idea. I admire it – it is an important manifesto concerning the daily bustling around, threading the same paths. In old cathedrals we see touching traces carved in stone floors. Our existences will be marked, at best, by a worn-out floor in the sink area.’*

*‘Removing the sand can be substituted with other activities – yesterday I arranged all Marianka’s clothes in her wardrobe, and today every single piece of clothing was pulled out by her, unfolded and over the past three hours there had grown a mountain of clothes waiting to be folded again. I think I will meditate to not go insane.’*

*‘Thank you for this project. Yes, there is also less and less of me. I also remove sand from shoes and engage in a million other activities that no one will ever notice or appreciate. I would also like to attribute meaning to them. Yes, small important things that constitute parenting.’*

*The invitation, at the beginning of 2022, to participate in the exhibition Mother Earth coincided with an urgent humanitarian crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border. Initially, I wanted to focus on finding practical and low-cost solutions enabling access to clean drinking water. I imagined designing ceramic filters with an open license for others to use. I intended for the project to have a global reach and I wanted to collaborate with scientists and the Association for Multicultural Society Integration NOMADA. ‘Currently, I am unable to think about the experience of motherhood in isolation from the humanitarian crisis and situation of many families at the Polish-Belarusian border. It is part of me, my story, but also my daughter’s story and most likely of stories of future generations’, I wrote to the curator of the exhibition. However, my ambitions were confronted with reality. Mundane issues, such as my daughter’s and my continuous illnesses, associated logistical difficulties, and a lack of energy, changed the optics. They redirected my focus to the microworld, which at that time consumed most of my life. I had to redefine the foci of the project, which would be adequate to the physical and mental resources I had. It was an important lesson to me. As a result, I created two works negotiating my experience of motherhood.*

**(Craft Matter) Matters**

Marusińska (2021b): *I created Tablerror in 2019 for the 18<sup>th</sup> Media Art Biennale Wro 2019 ‘Czynnik Ludzki’ (Human Aspect). I arranged a party table with dinnerware obtained from Fine Art Porcelain Kristoff in Wałbrzych, Poland.<sup>02</sup> I purposefully chose objects that were flawed; I selected dinnerware which did not meet industry standards due to various defects. The gesture of moving these defective objects, considered waste, from the production line to the table, was intended to enable participants to experience the material world that escaped human control. Even in highly mechanised porcelain factories human manual labour is still present. Tablerror tests if we are ready to redefine current beauty standards.*

*Another of my projects, Hard made, demonstrates how technology attempts to imitate craft, mimicking its imperfections resulting from manual labor. In 2010, during an International Ceramics and Sculpture Open Air at the Ceramic Handicraft Cooperative in Bolesławiec, Poland,<sup>03</sup> I created Hard made. Traditionally produced pottery is marked at the bottom with a ‘handmade’ stamp. In my projects the stamps densely populate the visible surfaces of the dinnerware, subverting the message. I subtly intervened in the meaning of the phrase, substituting the word ‘hand’ with ‘hard’. It is quite common nowadays to come across attempts at outsmarting the system and the customers to maximise profit. The factory in Bolesławiec increases the mechanisation of production for greater efficiency and imitates the imperfections resulting from manual labor. Although methods of production are far from traditional, stoneware objects retain the status of being handmade, which helps keep their prices high. So, it seems it is no longer as ‘hard’ as we may have thought.*

*Tablerror and Hard made demonstrate, from two distinct perspectives, the same phenomenon of concealing the truth about objects. The first project is an attempt at concealing the fact that the industry, relying on manual labor, produces objects with flaws and imperfections, which, in craft practices, reveal the uniqueness of craft. Nonetheless, in the industry this is unwelcome and, as a result, hidden. In the second project the same feature is manufactured upon objects to increase their market value. It is yet another attempt at deceiving the customer. This phenomenon raises questions concerning the ethics of production, interwoven with politics.*

Janis Jefferies (2011: 231) wrote, ‘To craft is to care.’ Marusińska’s glass and ceramics practice is a reparative labor of care. She creates what I once proposed to call matter-scapes<sup>04</sup>; her artworks are displayed alongside material traces of lives of others and the stories she uncovered. Her works are a testimony to material existences and lives of *all* bodies and their *matter*. With each subsequent project the artist grows the matter-scape, noticing materialities associated with and marking women’s everydayness. Perhaps her projects commemorate vulnerable and peripheral bodies to give them agency and claim their visibility.

02	Fine Art Porcelain Kristoff is one of the main producers of porcelain in Poland and one of the oldest existing porcelain factories in the Silesian region. It was established in 1831.	was established in 1950, however pottery has been produced in Bolesławiec since the 16th Century.
03	The Artistic Handicraft Cooperative ‘Ceramika Artystyczna’ cultivates the legacy of Julius Paul und Sohn’ (1893 – 1945) in Bolesławiec. The factory	
04	See: Sliwinska, Basia. 2019. ‘Cathy Wilkes’ care-full matter-scapes: female affects of care, feminist materiality and vibrant things’, <i>Journal of Visual Art Practice</i> , 18:4, 285-304, DOI: 10.1080/14702029.2019.1690328	



Karina Marusińska, *Tablerror*,  
2019, Photograph by Alicja Kielan

Marusińska's practice unfolds through attentive noticing anew. She is sensitive to that which has been hidden from sight and willing to disturb his-stories of the past and the present, giving voice to those who have been excluded from public discourse, such as women, plants or soil, their sensibilities and intimacies. Her collaborative ethos focused on making kins, overarched by feminist solidarity, imagines a world with/in which we co-exist responsibly, facilitating stories to emerge with care, which, as Joan Tronto (1993) proposes, is concerned with being in the world and matter-based reciprocity.

María Puig de la Bellacasa addresses mattering in the context of care. In *Matters of Care* (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017: 5) she proposes care is, 'a collective work of maintenance, with ethical and affective implications', and 'a vital politics in interdependent worlds.' She argues that care expands beyond human only matters and asks us to consider material consequences of thinking about and with others. Her notion of 'thinking care' (Puig de la Bellacasa 2012: 197) is 'an ethical obligation and a practical labor.' Care is at the core of 'transformative feminist politics and alternative forms of organizing', and caring involves 'material engagement in labors to sustain interdependent worlds, labors that are often associated with exploitation and domination.' (Ibid.) Marusińska's work can be thought alongside Puig de la Bellacasa's proposal for a feminist inspired version of caring, which is grounded 'in vital ethico-affective everyday practical doings that engage with the inescapable troubles of interdependent existences.' (Ibid.: 199) Her work *with* the medium of glass or ceramics demonstrates that caring is a relationality. She thinks and makes *with* to foster collective encounters with/in interdependent worlds. Her choice of craft practices engages with the sensorial universe via touch, intensifying proximities between bodies and matter. Puig de la Bellacasa (2017: 19) explains, 'Touch is also the sensorial metaphor that better exposes qualms around the materiality of thinking and its consequential effects: we think, therefore we touch.' Marusińska's practice of touch is an exercise in carefulness about other ways of learning and knowing. She works through the reversibility of touch, understanding that her projects will be touched by others who in turn will be touched by what they touch. Reciprocity is at the heart of thinking with care, as argued by Puig de la Bellacasa, who further proposes, 'Care is a force distributed across a multiplicity of agencies and materials and supports our worlds as a thick mesh of relational obligation.' (Ibid.: 20) Through touch Marusińska cares. *With*. And *towards*.

Marusińska (2023): *In my artist statement I wrote, 'When I get lost, I dig a hole in the ground with my hands and reach for the roots.'* (Marusińska 2021c) *This is of course a metaphor, which conceals many issues: it embodies a gesture of touch with soil-earth-clay-ceramics; manual labour; a hole. I grew up in Bełchatów, where the largest open-pit coal mine in Poland is destroying the environment. I feel an inner need to continuously revisit where I am from, who I am, what I am doing and how my practice affects my surroundings. I feel the need to be responsible. I also feel a strange attraction to 'girliness', getting dirty and scraping my knees. My three-year-old daughter reawakens this dormant part of my self.*

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JAN 24<sup>th</sup> 2023, 16–17h

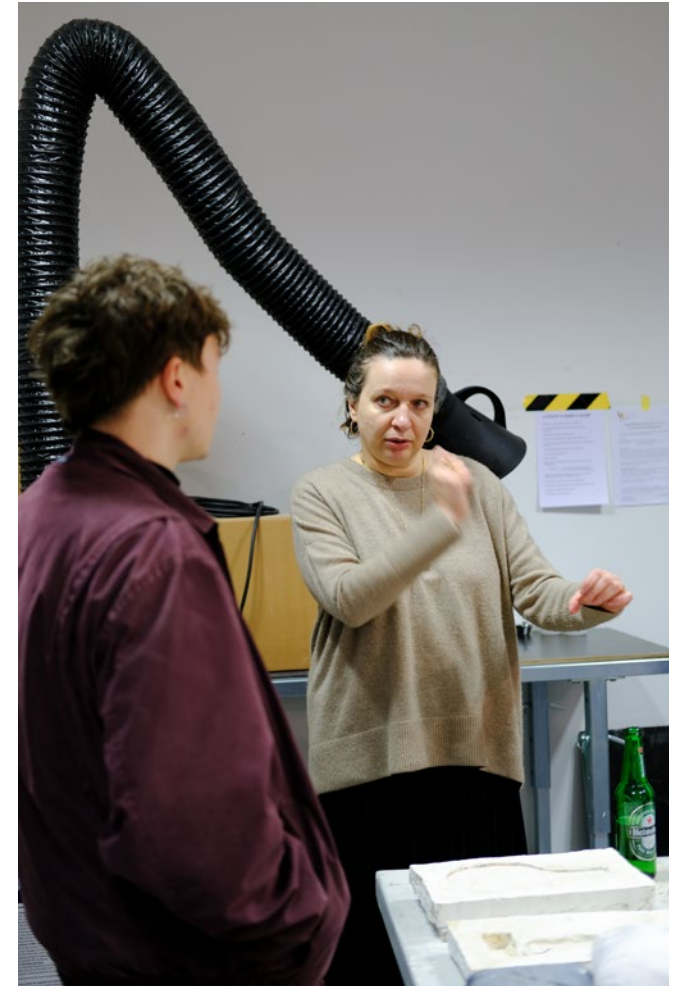
# LECTURE: GIULIA LAMONI

(CURATOR, LISBON)  
IMAGINED











Lucia Pizzani, *Culebra*, 2019  
Stoneware, 30 × 26 × 12 cm  
Photo by Eva Herzog. Courtesy  
of Cecilia Brunson Projects

## Through Mineral Skins On some ceramic sculptures by Lucia Pizzani Giulia Lamoni

'Dixit et, ut serpens, in longam tenditur alvum  
durataeque cuti squamas increscere sentit  
nigraque caeruleis variari corpora guttis [...]'<sup>01</sup>  
Ovid, *The Metamorphoses*, IV, 575

### Changing one's skin

The word 'culebra', in Spanish, designates a crawling reptile, with an elongated body covered in scales, without limbs, which changes its skin periodically. If, in a figurative sense, being a snake can mean being perfidious, evil, in Brazilian Portuguese it can refer, in its masculine form, to a person with considerable knowledge about a specific subject.

Created in 2019, *Culebra* is a stoneware sculpture by the Venezuelan artist Lucia Pizzani (b. 1975), which materializes a thick mineral skin, white and rough, marked by folds. Although this piece resembles the scaly skin of a reptile, its surface was printed by the artist with ears of corn. Indeed, *Culebra* is part of a set of works by Pizzani inspired by the myth of Xipe Totec, the Mesoamerican god of vegetation and regeneration, whose body was represented dressed in the skin of human sacrificial victims and '[...] using a mask similar to the dry corn husk that contained the live seeds' (Kroger and Granziera 2016, 21). In pre-Columbian Mexico, Xipe-Totec was celebrated at an important festival in early spring, in which human victims were flayed and their skin was worn by a priest (Ibid.).

If the skinning of the victims in the rituals associated with Xipe-Totec symbolically corresponded to the peeling of the corn cob (Ibid.), in Pizzani's sculpture this peeling process resonates with the way in which the snake cyclically changes its skin. It is not surprising, in this sense, that this series – which explores different media – includes manipulated photographs of snake skins and collages that combine photographs of Aztec temple sculptures, depicting snakes, and amate paper – a paper created by the pre-Columbian Mesoamerican peoples.

The shedding of the skin – a violent regeneration of organic life – is described by the artist, in a recent interview, in terms of necessity: 'The skin has always been very latent [in my work], but in recent years, as the Venezuelan crisis deepened, I personally felt the need to grow a 'second skin' to protect myself from the pain that, in addition, is seen in many situations worldwide. Sometimes it seems that we are going backwards... That state of violence and permanent war

01 'As he was speaking, his body did indeed begin to stretch into the long belly of a snake; his skin hardened, and turned black in colour, and he felt

scales forming on it, while blue-green spots appeared, to brighten its sombre hue.' Translation by Mary M. Innes (Ovid 1975, 109).

of the Aztecs, which included bloody rituals like that of Xipe Totec, nowadays seems to be lived in many places, although these conflicts may seem invisible or to affect only a part of the population.<sup>02</sup> (González 2019).

In addition to summoning multiple layers of meaning – from myth to bodily experience, migration and political violence in Venezuela and beyond – Lucia Pizzani's ceramic sculptures explore a material and symbolic connection with earth. *Culebra* is, after all, a sculpture made of clay and other minerals, shaped manually and transformed through a high-temperature firing process. In other works in this series, such as *Coraza*, (Cuirass), the use of terracotta, with its orange color and porous texture, directly refers to the raw characteristics of unworked earth. In this sense, although it was an artistic residency at the Marso Foundation in Mexico City that led the artist, in 2019, to become interested in the myth of Xipe Totec and its symbolic ramifications, her exploration of the epidermal and organic possibilities of ceramic sculpture has punctuated her work since at least 2009, and is still on-going.

### Some meandering genealogical lines

Throughout the 20th century, numerous artists working in a variety of geographical and cultural locations have used clay as a material for experimentation within the scope of their sculptural practice or their incursions into the field of decorative arts. Recent exhibitions and publications in Europe – among others *Ceramix. Art et Céramique de Rodin à Schutte*, held at the Maison Rouge in Paris and at the Manufacture de Sèvres in 2015 – have explored the histories of the encounters between the fine arts and ceramics from the end of the 19th century to the present. The reasons that led, and still lead, artists to use this material, and the technical procedures and experimental approaches associated with it, are extremely heterogeneous and often connected with the historical, cultural and political contexts of production.

However, the creation of ceramic pieces has some characteristics of its own, which are worth mentioning. The first is the fluidity and elasticity of the raw material. As Glenn Adamson notes, 'because of its plastic structure, clay can be fashioned into thin walls of surprising elasticity and strength' (Adamson 2007, 45). The second feature is linked to the transformation process to which the raw clay pieces are subjected – their firing in specific ovens where the high temperature turns the ductile material into a hard and resistant object.

For Pizzani, interested in processes of transformation from a biological, symbolic, psychological and political perspective, the methods of producing pieces in stoneware, terracotta or earthenware translate into material processes laden with multiple meanings. Furthermore, the possibility of molding 'thin walls', evoked by Adamson – flexible shells transformed by fire into somehow 'resistant' barriers –, resonates with the artist's focus on the specific characteristics and functioning of the human and non-human epidermis.

From a more formal perspective, meanwhile, it is perhaps possible to envision Pizzani's practice as participating in a non-linear, almost serpentine, genealogy of ceramic sculpture that deconstructs the vessel while also exploring the spatial relationships that this traditional structure produces – a complex genealogy that this text can only briefly and incompletely touch on. As noted by Jo Luria, 'a vessel [...] openly declares itself to be more void than form, a shell around nothing, a surround of emptiness.' (Luria 2000, 42). Indeed, the fundamental relationship between the interior and the exterior space of the vessel corresponds to a tension between exhibition and concealment, while also disclosing the spatial and symbolic ambiguity of a mineral skin that simultaneously interrupts and connects.

02 My translation.

The fold, which is a recurring feature in Lucia Pizzani's ceramic work – as seen, for instance, in *Culebra* – can be read as a figure of concealment that problematizes interior/exterior connections and their reversibility. In this sense, the artist's use of the fold, and the very gesture of folding, may also relate to other, different – although contiguous – figures, which, with their organic resonances, punctuate the history of contemporary ceramic sculpture. A contradictory effect of attraction and distancing (Luria 2000, 26), is activated, for instance, by holes or orifices in the work of the U.S. artist Ken Price (1935-2012). Here, biomorphic painterly ceramic pieces from the 1960s – such as *Red Egg* from 1968 –, sometimes feature openings that allow the viewer to glimpse a mysterious interior cavity. Interior matter sticks out – like exposed, entrail-like, protrusions – in pieces such as *Green Egg* from 1962. In later ceramic sculptures by the artist, such as *Phobia* from 1995 and *Arctic* from 1998, however, the round holes that open in the surface are more directly reminiscent of orifices, in the anatomical sense of this term. In all these pieces, vividly colored surfaces and organic shapes seduce and call for proximity, while holes and cavities tend to create a disturbing feeling. This contrast resonates with the use of paint on fired clay, which impregnates the surfaces, producing a significant tension between the painterly and the sculptural.

Also in the 1960s, the problematization of the relationship between interior and exterior space in biomorphic ceramic sculpture is explored by U.S. artist Hannah Wilke (1940-1993) in her early pieces. Indeed, the connection between inside and outside space is at times materialized by an opening or orifice in the artist's small and unpretentious sculptures – especially in early terracotta works such as *Untitled (Five Androgynous and Vaginal Forms)* (1960-61). More often, however, it is the figure of the fold that interests Wilke. Indeed, through a folding process, the artist created ceramic sculptures, molded by hand and sometimes painted, which took on abstract forms with clear sexual resonances. Although Wilke's best known sculptural pieces of this period have been compared to images of vulvas, art historian Rachel Middleman underlines how some of these ceramic works from the 1960s fed, through their use of abstraction, a meaningful sexual ambiguity (Middleman 2013, 36-37). 'Wilke's early ceramic sculptures hinted both physically and metaphorically to an unseen interior,' observes Middleman, 'incorporating dichotomies of inside and outside, public and private, fine art and craft, male and female.' (Middleman 2013, 39).

### In-between-forms

In the wake of these artists – and in embracing, more particularly, Wilke's feminist, post minimalist legacy –, the intertwining of ceramic work and biomorphic abstraction, at times strongly sexualized, is fed, in Lucia Pizzani's practice, by an evident tension between form and metamorphosis, and the stimulation of the viewers' sensory engagement. Of her ceramic sculptures, Wilke wrote: 'My folded clay pieces are like little pieces of nature, a new species. They exist the way sea shells exist....' (Wilke 1998, 13). Added to their sexual ambivalence, these ceramic pieces by Wilke stimulate an imaginary blurring of the boundaries between the human and the non-human, which finds interesting echoes in Pizzani's work. It is relevant to mention that the artist's background in biology may contribute to the way in which her work summons the natural world while decentering anthropocentric and nature-culture binary approaches to it.

In fact, as in a process of continuous transformation, Pizzani's small-scale ceramic sculptures blur the human, animal, vegetal and mineral in unexpected ways, playing with ambiguity and doubt. In the series *Siliceous*, from 2010-2011, for instance, the pieces in vitrified stoneware seem to allude simultaneously to orchids and organs of the human body. Part of a broader work entitled *Orchis*, pre-

sented in 2011 at the Fernando Zubillaga gallery in Caracas, these pieces draw on the etymological meaning of the word orchid – as explained by Maria Laura Garcia: ‘The word orchid comes from orchis; Greek for testicle, due to the shape of some of the plant’s bulbs.’ (Garcia 2011). And she adds: ‘The research project for *Orchis* has the Victorian Era as a starting point; back then orchids were prohibited for women due to their exposed sensuality.’ (Garcia 2011). These sculptures seem, in this sense, to embody a floating sensuality, which belongs both to flowers and to sexual organs, – male, female, and those that the binary distinction female/male cannot define.

A comparable indeterminacy is activated in the *Capullo* (Cocoon) series from 2012-2014. The bluish or reddish creatures, molded in sandstone and glazed, look like larvae, sea animals and small rocks at the same time. Presented at the Oficina #1 gallery in Caracas in 2013, in the context of the solo exhibition *Mariposario*, these sculptures stage a becoming, an in-between-forms, characteristic of transformative processes – in this case the metamorphosis of the larva into a ‘mariposa’ (butterfly). ‘By freezing the moment of transformation from caterpillar to butterfly indefinitely,’ notes Lorena Muñoz-Alonso, ‘right before hatching, the insects [are] forever suspended in a state of becoming.’ (Muñoz-Alonso 2013). Furthermore, the tension between form and formlessness is reflected in the elasticity and malleability of the chosen material, and in its direct, material connection with the natural world.

The emphasis on the fluidity of transformative processes in Pizzani’s work – materialized through the figures of the larva and the cocoon, the snake that sheds its skin, but also the ductile earth that becomes rigid through its passage through fire – seems connected, as previously mentioned, to the creation of pieces that often attract and repel, seduce by inciting the viewer’s touch while at the same time provoking a feeling of strangeness. This trait is particularly salient in sculptures such as *Culebra*, which evoke a reptilian skin. Indeed, snakes are animals that play a disturbing role in the Western cultural imagery, by simultaneously arousing curiosity, attraction, fear and repulsion. Moreover, snakes have been, since antiquity, a significant figure of oneiric life in Western literature<sup>03</sup>.

The dream of Clytemnestra, narrated by Aeschylus in the *Oresteias* (Coephoras), is a famous example of this connection. Before being murdered by her son Orestes, the queen dreams, in fact, of giving birth and nursing a snake that bites her breast – a breast from which milk and blood will then flow. As indicated by Georges Devereux in his reading of the dream – in the book *Dreams in Greek Tragedy, An Ethno-Psycho-Analytical Study* of 1976 –, although the snake represents Orestes and also, through him, his father, King Agamemnon, the very Clytemnestra, being metaphorically transformed into a serpent mother, is identified as a snake (Devereux 1976, 181-218). The figure of the snake thus translates a set of negative qualities and distressing feelings, such as guilt. Indeed, in this Greek tragedy Clytemnestra is not only guilty of having murdered her husband, Agamemnon, but also of not having been a good mother to Orestes. Furthermore, the image of the snake is tied to the chthonic world of death that causes anxiety (Devereux 1976, 181-218). Clytemnestra awakens from this dream screaming from fear of the snake’s bite, but also from the omen of death that the dream image carries with it.

If, according to Freud, ‘Many of the beasts which are used as genital symbols in mythology and folklore play the same part in dreams’ (Freud 2010, 370), and snakes, in particular, constitute the ‘[...] most important symbols of the male organ’ (Freud 2010, 370), in Clytemnestra’s dream the image of the snake involves both the masculine and feminine spheres. This ambivalence is similar to the one explored by Lucia Pizzani in several ceramic works, including the series of sculptures entitled

Lucia Pizzani, *Cuaima D5*, 2016, Glazed clay, 73 × 18 × 4 cm, Photo by: Joseph Devitt. Courtesy House of Egorn



03 Here, it is important to point out that Pizzani assumes, in fact, a connection with surrealist poetics: ‘I tackle issues addressed by the Surrealists and body art of the seventies linking it to today from a

research-based practice. I seek stories, literary and artistic references in significant periods both in Europe and South America, mixing various aesthetics, cultures and historical characters.’ (Pizzani 2015, 2).



Lucia Pizzani, *Pieles 2*,  
2017, C-Print on acrylic and  
aluminum, 50 × 38 cm

Giulia Lamoni

*Cuaimas*, 2016. 'Cuaima' is the name of a venomous snake in Venezuela but it also comes to negatively designate, by extension, a very jealous woman. Some pieces in the series, made of glazed earthenware, white and black, and with an apparently scaly texture, are elongated like flayed snake skins, while also being reminiscent of phallic shapes. Other works, reptilian for their texture and the lucidity of the black enamel that covers them, materialize folds and cavities similar to vulvas.

### Skin against skin

This tension between form and transformation, and the blurring of the boundaries between human and non-human bodies, attraction and repulsion, male and female sexual traits, is intensified in the project *Limbica*, from 2017-18. Rosy terracotta pieces, glazed or not, and with an apparently rough or scaly texture, resemble body folds or female sexual organs, retaining, however, an apparent connection with the skin of reptiles. This organic relationship is staged in a set of photographs that accompany the sculptures and that physically juxtapose sculpture and human bodies – among them *Pieles 1 y 2* (Skins 1 and 2) (2017). In these works, the encounters between the human and the mineral, between the softness and vitality of the mortal body and the inanimate rigidity of terracotta, expands the feeling of disquiet generated by many of the artist's ceramic pieces, by playing with what Freud calls the *unheimlich* (uncanny or strange-familiar) (Freud 2003) in his 1919 eponymous essay – something that was familiar, but that repression has made hidden, unknown.

In parallel, as the very title of these works suggests – the limbic system is the brain region linked to emotional and sexual behaviors –, these pieces also relate to a sexual indeterminacy that makes them unsettling. Although their cavities are partially revealed, in an almost voyeuristic way, by the mirrored pedestals on which they are placed, their folds still hide parts of their surface (Fig. 4). Limbic can also refer, in this sense, to what is in limbo, in a zone of indecision, of non-definition, an 'in-between'. Furthermore, as suggested by Pizzani's use of the mirror in *Limbica*, haptic vision plays an important role here: touch is directly involved without body contact. In this sense, what the pieces in this series, as well as *Culebra*, seem to be performing is an imaginary and unsettling encounter between human and non-human skins – of which snakeskin is a symbolically charged example. It is no coincidence that, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the description of Cadmus's transformation into a snake dwells on the change of his skin: '[...] his skin hardened, and turned black in colour, and he felt scales forming on it, while blue-green spots appeared, to brighten its sombre hue.' (Ovid 1975, 109). Although the haptic vision evoked by Pizzani's ceramic pieces does not result in an encounter directly mediated by touch – in art galleries it is most often forbidden to touch the works –, the connection produced, in sensory terms, is no less real.

The locus of intimate recognition, of affective, sensorial and sexual closeness – the familiar skin against skin experienced since childhood – becomes, in these works, the stage of a strange, surprising encounter. In this sense, although the skin constitutes a protective barrier, it is relevant to remember that it is also a site of passage. As observed by the semiologist Jacques Fontanille, whose notion of 'body envelope' draws on the psychoanalytic concepts of 'contact barriers' (Freud) and, especially, of 'psychic envelopes' (Didier Anzieu) (Fontanille 2005, 149): 'A figure of the envelope, [...] implies (1) a separation between two domains, one external and one internal, (2) an asymmetry between the interior and the exterior, so that the status of the interior appears as specific in relation to that of all possible exteriors, and (3) an organization of exchanges between the exterior and the interior'<sup>04</sup> (Fontanille 2005, 146). Pizzani's ceramic pieces show that these seemingly familiar exchanges can prove to be fundamentally ambiguous and potentially threatening.

04 My translation.



Detail of Lucia Pizzani's exhibition *Límbica Solo Project*,  
Zona Maco Sur, Ciudad de México, 2018

In *The Skin-Ego* (1985), the psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu wrote: ‘what if thought were as much a matter of the skin as of the brain? And what if the Ego, now defined as the Skin-ego, had the structure of a wrapping?’ (Anzieu 2016, 10). It is interesting to note that this envelope or wrapping, with its folds, its boundaries, and the relationships it performs between inside and outside, is a form that is particularly akin to the sculptures molded by Pizzani. In this sense, these ceramic pieces could be read as maps of our intellectual, affective and sensual presence in the world. This is an ambiguous presence, in constant transformation, and whose reality cannot be straight-forwardly inscribed in the traditional dichotomies that inhabit Western thought. On the contrary, binary distinctions such as human and non-human, female and male, are here constantly exceeded, as the very functioning of the skin overflows these differences. ‘The skin is permeable and impermeable.’ wrote Anzieu, ‘It is superficial and profound. It is truthful and deceptive. It regenerates, yet is always drying out. It is elastic, yet a piece of skin cut out of the whole will shrink substantially. It provokes libidinal investments that are as often narcissistic as sexual. It is the seat of well-being and seduction. It provides us with pains as well as pleasures. It communicates messages from the outside world to the brain, including ‘in-tangible’ ones which its job is, precisely, to ‘feel’ without the Ego being aware of them. The skin is both strong and fragile.’ (Anzieu 2016, 19).

Transitionality, to conclude

If according to Anzieu, the skin plays an ‘intermediary’ or ‘transitional’ role (Anzieu 2016, 19), the epidermal shape of Lucia Pizzani’s ceramic pieces seems to critically explore the transitional potential of the work of art. Indeed, an artwork can play, at the same time, the role of surface of inscription, of contact and of separation. In this frame, Anzieu goes so far as to suggest a close relationship between the artwork and the skin-envelope. He wrote: ‘The painter’s canvas, the poet’s blank page, the composer’s sheets with regular lines, the stage or ground available to the dancer or the architect and, obviously, the film, the cinematographic screen, materialize, symbolize and revive that experience of the border between two bodies in symbiosis as surfaces of inscription, with its paradoxical character, which is found in the work of art, of being at the same time a surface of separation and of contacts’<sup>05</sup> (Anzieu 1981, 71 -72).

Finally, it is also important to stress that this is an incomplete and situated reading of Pizzani’s work, anchored in a Western cultural imagery. In this context, the set of references summoned by the artist, and in particular the triangulation between haptic vision, reptilian skin and sexuality, awakens sensory reactions and conceptual paths that could be radically different in other historical, political and cultural conjunctures. The encounter, produced by the artist in a piece like *Culebra*, between a contemporary artistic practice developed in a context of migration, and pre-Columbian aesthetic and symbolic matrices, revives this complexity and the contingency of the meanings attributed to the worlds that make us and that we make. There are lines of continuity and rupture that these works intertwine.

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05 My translation.

Craft thinking in the arts  
Artist Talk and Workshop  
17th of January, 2023  
Maja Escher (Lisbon)



Portrait: Mário Rainha Campos

*How to make it rain in 5 steps*  
Artist Talk 13:00–14:00  
Workshop 14:00–16:00

This Artist Talk is part of a series of Workshops and Lectures in relation to the Research project *Craft Thinking in the arts: Exploring the relationships between artistic practice and ceramic craft in the 20th century and contemporary art* under the direction of Professor Sarah Weisman at the Trier University of Applied Sciences in cooperation with Giulia Lamoní/ Art History Institute at NOVA University, Lisbon.

The Project is supported by the Campus of Design and Strategy fund of the Trier University of Applied Sciences and NOVA University, Lisbon.

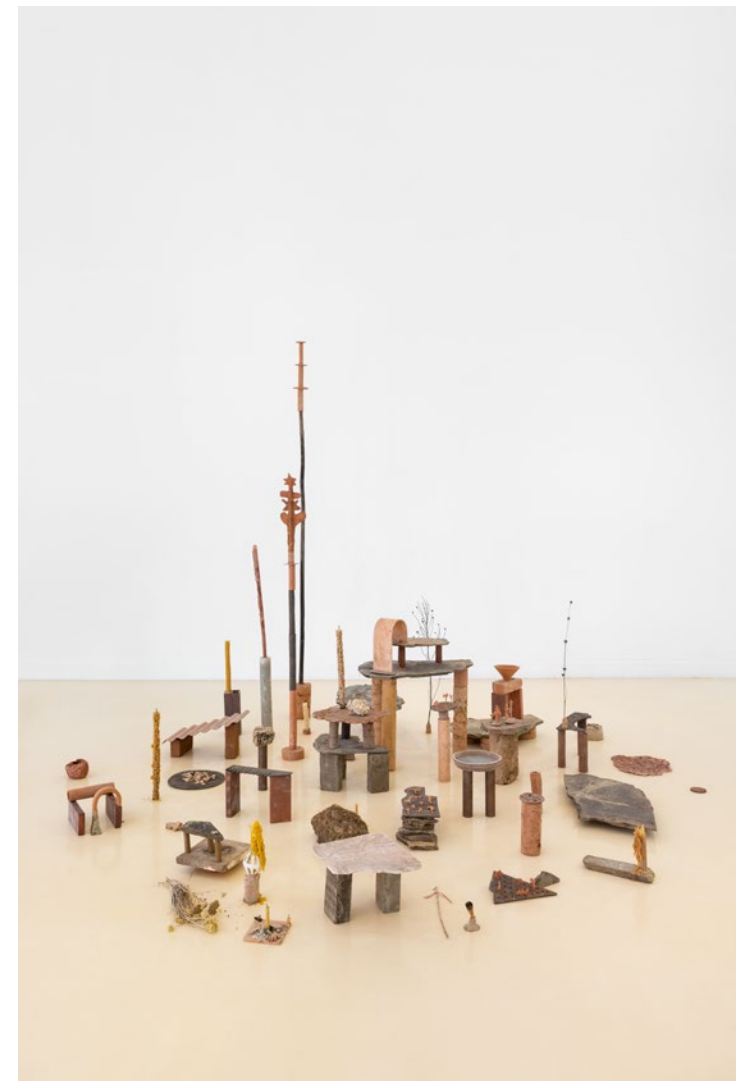
To register for the Talk Series, please send an email to:  
weismans@hochschule-trier.de

At ClayLab, Trier University of Applied Sciences /  
Irminenfreihof 8, 54290 Trier/ Room Q36

# Maja Escher (Lisbon)



Maja Escher, *Intentional community*, 2022.  
Drawing Room Lisbon © Bruno Lopes



Maja Escher, *barragem / três xistos a montante*, 2023, MATER, Pavilhão Branco, Slate stones from the Santa Clara dam, milky quartz, clay, adobe bricks, terracotta bricks, unfired bricks, beeswax, ceramic, cement, rock-rose, unbleached cotton fabric, © Bruno Lopes; Courtesy Galerias Municipais

Within this workshop the students are encouraged to investigate the boundaries of craft and arts by building a site-specific installation in the classroom using clay, compostable materials and objects available in the room. The idea is to respond and follow the hints of the materials and build a collective shelter structure defining a common poetic /function /purpose.



Maja Escher, *celebração das vagens*, 2022, Só pedimos que nos semeiem na Terra, Monitor Gallery Lisbon, ceramics, yuca leaves, beans, fava beans, peas, linen rope and red clay, © Bruno Lopes; Courtesy Galerias Municipais



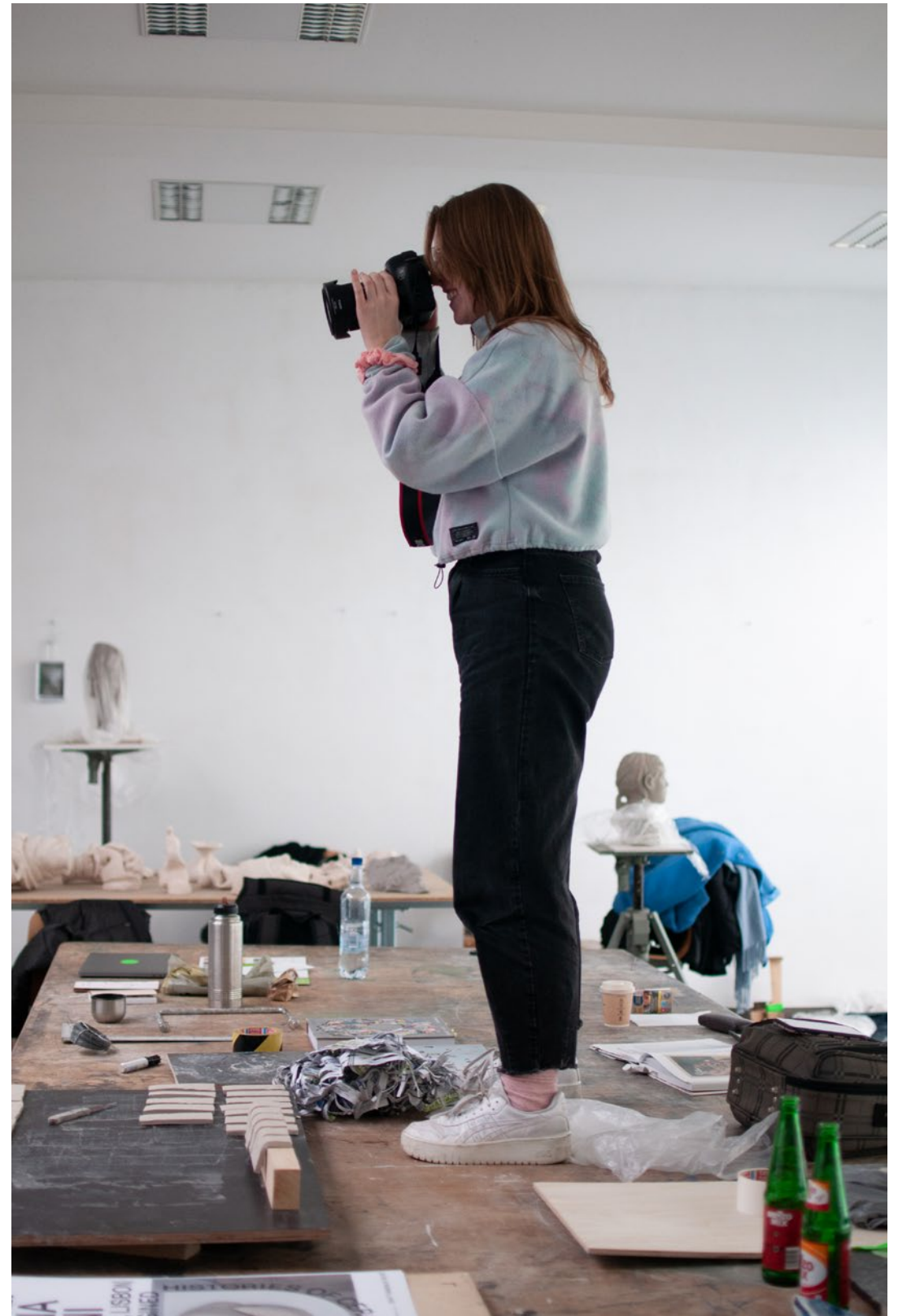














Hansi Staël with an earthenware wall plate depicting a Pastoral Scene painted in the manner of a stained glass window. Estúdio SECLA, Caldas da Rainha, Portugal, ca. 1954-55. Hansi Staël's estate.

## Hansi Staël: Finding artistic identity in between cultures

Rita Gomes Ferrão

As migrations in Europe have become an urgent matter, demanding new political and humanitarian measures confronting crisis situations, we will look into the history of a migrant woman, who like many other nomadic artists, either by vocation or by obligation, traveled in between cultures, reconfiguring cultural identities.

In the 20th century, central Europe underwent significant territorial, political and social changes, leading to new directions in industry and handicrafts. Born into the crumbling Habsburg Empire, a generation of Hungarian women made their mark on the expanding field of decorative, architectural and industrial ceramics. Named by Juliet Kinchin as a *lost generation* (Kinchin 2008, 5) for having almost disappeared from historical surveys and collections dealing with European ceramic art and design, these women's work has been gradually rediscovered in recent studies.

Contributing to the reconstruction of this generation's history, we recall Hansi Staël, contextualizing her among a vast group of artists and craftswomen, including Eva Zeisel (1906-2011), Margit Kovács (1902-1977), Lili Márkus (1900-1960) and Mária Ráhrmer (1911-1998), to mention just a few. When we compare the trajectory of these artists, it becomes evident that history has treated them differently, enhancing or obscuring experiences and the possibilities of continuity among them.

Hansi Staël (1913-1961), nowadays almost unknown, was a pioneer in the modernization of ceramic design in Portugal during the 1950s. Her short Portuguese career developed without much possibility of long-term recognition, due to her premature death in 1961.

Of Austro-Hungarian origin, Staël studied in Vienna and Budapest during the interwar period (Ferrão 2014, 16). As an immigrant in the 1940's and 1950's, her adaptability in transit between cultures was crucial. Into the Portuguese context she brought her artistic skills and imagery, historical and personal experiences, and capability of merging with the national reality by departing from common values.

As Hansi Staël's work consolidated in Portugal, Lili Márkus' career, who achieved great success in interwar Hungary, faded after having moved to England in 1939, revealing difficulties in adapting to a new cultural system (Kinchin 2008, 50).

Eva Zeisel had an extraordinary career, passing through Germany and the Soviet Union and ending with huge success in NYC after the War, where her work for industry was shown at MoMA in 1946 (Young 2003, 16). The regimentation of Margit Kovács' work after World War II, considered by the pro-Soviet authorities as being typically Hungarian and used as propaganda (Vadas 2008, 52), brought her wide public recognition. A museum devoted to it was established in 1973. Representing the cosmopolitan and independent women of the time, Mária Ráhrmer, with a workshop in the center of Budapest during the 1930s, participated in international exhibitions and won prizes, as did Márkus and Kovács. At the beginning of World War II, she opened a workshop in Paris, later continuing her work in Canada.

01 In 1937 the Hungarian Parliament voted to increase General Miklós Horthy powers. Although at the beginning of the World War II he was a supporter of Adolf Hitler's 'crusade against Bolshevism' he was imprisoned by the Germans in 1944 leading to his abdication. The following year General Horthy was

liberated by Allied troops and settled in Portugal, where he wrote a volume of memoirs called *Confidential Papers*, published in 1965.

02 Magyar Országos Iparművészeti Iskola: Királyi (MOKI) - Hungarian National School of decorative arts.

Since the end of the 19th century, women, both as manufacturers and consumers, began to play a fundamental role in building a Hungarian identity through arts and crafts. During the interwar dictatorship of Admiral Horthy (1868-1957)<sup>01</sup>, wives and mothers were expected to pass on cultural traditions and moral values to future generations. Although women's political and professional positions were not encouraged, the economic stability at the beginning of the 1930s made ceramics a cosmopolitan activity. Many women attended private workshops managed by recognized ceramists as a way to improve the education received in the National Hungarian School of Decorative Arts (MOKII)<sup>02</sup>. Women soon gained visibility as independent designers, taking full-time jobs in the most important companies responsible for supplying national and international markets. Although having been trained in the use of the potter's wheel, a common skill among Hungarian ceramists, women were generally relegated to modelling and, above all, to painting, a common practice throughout Europe, including in Portugal. While as immigrants, Hansi Staël, Lili Márcus, Eva Zeisel and Mária Ráhmer found it difficult to be recognized as artists in their host countries, it was much easier for them to present themselves as ceramists and designers. Their survival depended on them managing their own careers, through both studio and industrial ceramics. In Hungary, the National Association of Decorative Arts (MOIT)<sup>03</sup> controlled all activities related to the arts and crafts through the firm grip of state support, selecting works to be presented and published both inside the country and abroad. It was impossible to get on professionally outside their control. This was the environment in which Hansi Staël grew as a student. Later, in Portugal, she found similarities between MOIT and SNI (National Information Secretariat)<sup>04</sup>, which, although different institutions, were both at the service of their respective regime, using folk arts and crafts to build a national identity (Alves 2013).

Born Johanna Ilona Emilia Lénárd in Budapest in 1913, Hansi Stäel came from an assimilated Jewish family of German ancestry. At the beginning of World War I, the Lénárds settled in Osijek, on the border of Yugoslavia and Hungary, a year later moving to Bruneck, on the Dolomite front. The family moved several times before settling in Klosterneuburg, on the outskirts of Vienna following the signing of the Treaty of Trianon. Working as a tourist guide on cultural tours, Hansi Staël traveled across France and Italy, recording her impressions in drawings and watercolors.

From 1927 she studied at the Kunstgewerbeschule (School of Arts and Crafts) in Vienna under Professor Franz Cizek (1865-1946), a precursor of education through art, whose teaching methods would leave a mark on her ever after.

Hansi Staël, Child's watercolour drawing on paper, ca. 1920-23. Square dish, children's tableware P. 991, designed from a drawing by the artist's son, SECLA, Caldas da Rainha, Portugal, ca. 1952. Hand painted glazed earthenware. 14 x 14 x 3 cm, Hansi Staël's estate



Vienna was a cultural and social Mecca for Budapest's middle classes between the wars. Hungarian ceramics were strongly linked with the city, not only through István Gádor (1891-1984), who had belonged to Wiener Werkstätte at the beginning of the 1920s, but also through Wiener Wohnkultur under the leadership of Oskar Strnad (1879-1835) and Josef Frank (1885-1967), becoming more fashionable in Budapest as the economy grew. Josef Frank, like Hansi Staël, moved to Sweden during World War II and designed for Svenskt Tenn, thus becoming a major figure in Scandinavian design.

After finishing school, Staël worked on sets and costumes for Max Reinhardt's (1873-1943) theatre. She attended the Budapest Academy Summer Camp, in Miskolc, and the Budapest Academy of Fine Arts, where she studied Painting (Ferrão 2014, 16).

1938, the year of her marriage to the swede Didrik Staël von Holstein, was a disruptive year for Europe, as Austria's annexation by Nazi Germany led to a quick escalation into War. For Staël, the times of study came to an end and working life began. After a short stay in Hamburg, where her paintings were exhibited, she moved to Stockholm, remaining there during the War. She carried on her artistic work, doing illustration, textile design and creating small objects for Svenkt Tenn, as well as timidly experimenting with ceramics.

Hansi Staël first visited Lisbon in June 1946, settling in Marinha, close to the fishing village of Cascais, where she began working right away, capturing the customs of a country still unknown. Fascination proved to be a form of learning as she took notes on the fishermen's lives in the harbor. Convinced that ceramics were the most profitable activity for artists in Portugal, architect Leonardo Castro Freire (1917-1970) introduced Hansi Staël to Viúva Lamego factory<sup>05</sup>, where she began to work.

This happened during a period of major transformation in Portuguese ceramics led by Jorge Barradas (1894-1971), who had his own workshop inside the factory (Rodrigues 1984, 79). The reasons that led Barradas to become interested in ceramics were the same as for many other artists: the Portuguese art market was precarious, dominated by commissions from the government, through SNI, or restricted to the demands of a conservative bourgeoisie, unable to understand modern art. Many artists thus embraced the applied arts, designing furniture, tapestries and ceramics. Studio pottery fulfilled the market's requirements and sustained artists, selling more easily than modern painting and sculpture. For Staël, like Barradas, what had previously fulfilled a need for work became a field for artistic growth. After only six weeks at Viúva Lamego, Hansi Staël's first exhibition opened in the halls of SNI in Lisbon, including drawings and prints as well as plates and tableware, and achieving the desired success. She sold all the pieces, gaining visibility and favorable reviews which allowed her to get regular commissions, to move to Lisbon, and to begin to work with Sant'Anna's factory<sup>06</sup>.

- 03 Magyar Országos Iparművészeti Társulat (MOIT) – National Association of Decorative Arts.

to the State Secretary for Information and Tourism - Secretaria de Estado da Informação e Turismo - SEIT. SNI/SEIT was extinguished in 1974.
- 04 The National Secretariat for Information, Popular Culture and Tourism - Secretariado Nacional de Informação, Cultura Popular e Turismo - known by the short name of National Secretariat for Information - Secretariado Nacional de Informação - or SNI, was the public bureau responsible for public information, propaganda, media, tourism and cultural action during the Estado Novo regime in Portugal. It operated by promoting and instrumentalizing the visual arts, cinema, theatre, dance, literature, folklore, publishing, international exhibitions, etc. The organization was created in 1933, under the name Secretariat for National Propaganda - Secretariado de Propaganda Nacional - SPN, adopting the designation SNI in 1945. In 1968 it was transformed in-

05 The Viúva Lamego factory was founded in Lisbon in 1849. The main building, at Largo do Intendente, was constructed between 1849 and 1865 as the pottery workshop of António Costa Lamego. The façade, entirely tiled, was one of the first to use tiles for advertising, being entirely painted by the factory artistic director, Ferreira das Tabuletas. In the 1930s, the industrial facilities were moved to Palma de Baixo, and again in 1992, to Abrunheira, Sintra, where the factory works till the present day.
- 06 Sant'Anna factory was founded in 1741 as a small pottery workshop at the so called 'Sant'Anna lands' near Basílica da Estrela in Lisbon. In the beginning

After the War, the Portuguese art world remained polarized between artists working for the government-run SNI, and those opposing it: a heavily politicized Neorealism, an iconoclastic Surrealism, and a timidly rising Abstractionism. Later, Hansi Stäel approached Neorealism, depicting a personal view of the precarious life conditions of the peasantry. By the end of the 1940s, she was invited to teach in a new ceramic studio and workshop created by the sculptor João Fragoso (1913- 2000) and run by his wife Maria Luísa Fragoso (1907-1985), finding a space to develop her own work. ECA – Artistic Ceramic Studio played an important role in the education and dissemination of modern ceramics (Carvalho 2021, 77). While similar to the Hungarian workshops where students were mainly young women from the upper classes, here the students mainly sought a social and creative pastime. Although very few of these students pursued a career in ceramics, they formed a group interested in the discipline, thereby contributing to its development. In 1949, SNI organized the 1st National Decorative Arts Exhibition, where Hansi Stäel participated in her own and in ECA's name. The exhibition catalog encouraged the industry to collaborate with artists to improve the quality of their output (Ferro 1949, 3), and SECLA<sup>07</sup>, a ceramic factory in Caldas da Rainha, was the first to follow up on this proposal (Pinto and Henriques 1999, 11). Founded in 1946, the factory was expanding and in need of an innovative creative direction, aiming at international markets.

The following year, Hansi Stäel joined SECLA, first painting on plates and modeling figurines exhibited in the shop window of the modern Capristanos café, a trendy space frequented by the village youth. The exhibition shook the conservative local population, not used to modern art. Realizing the potential of Hansi Stäel's work, Alberto Pinto Ribeiro (1921-1989), SECLA's founder and managing partner, invited her to become artistic director of the factory (Ribeiro 1989, 55). They shared the same strategic vision on creative orientation, creating Estúdio SECLA, where various artists were invited to work. Hansi Stäel's cosmopolitanism and artistic education led her to introduce a truly modern design approach. She broke the rule of a woman's role being limited to painting, designing numerous new shapes and patterns, drawing, hand modeling, and working with a thrower. She already had vast experience in modeling, from working in ECA and having executed large-scale commissions such as the ceramic reliefs for the Aquário restaurant (Ferrão 2014, 25) in 1950. In Lisbon, she continued painting and printing, strengthening relationships within the artistic community, often working in the sculptor Joaquim Martins Correia's (1910-1999) studio. With Hein Semke (1899-1995), she exhibited at the National Fine Arts Society in 1951 in a show which included painting, watercolor and drawing by Stäel and ceramics by Semke (Semke 2016, 140-41). The German artist's raw expressionism had an influence on Stäel's ceramics, especially visible in the crude expression of her final work.

Eager for artistic challenges, she took a commission for designing stained-glass windows for a Church in Alter do Chão, concluded in 1954. This experiment reflected on her ceramic work, including several plates painted with solid designs and colors contoured by the typical thick outlines of stained glass.

06 the workshop manufactured simple red clay crockery. It was after the 1755 Lisbon earthquake, during the rebuilding of the city, that Sant'Anna started to produce tiles, increasing production as the demand grew. Sant'Anna painted tiles became part of the decoration of many buildings in Lisbon. The factory remained at Rua de Sant'Anna à Lapa, near its original birthplace until the beginning of the 20th century when the industrial facilities moved to Rua da Junqueira and later to the nearby Calçada

da Boa Hora where it still functions today, producing handmade pottery and tiles.

07 SECLA (Sociedade de Exportação e Cerâmica, Lda.) started in 1944 as Ceramic Factory Mestre Francisco Elias, in Caldas da Rainha, Portugal, it officially became SECLA by the end of 1946, and closed in 2008. It was founded by Joaquim Alberto Pinto Ribeiro with the goal of making decorative and table ware for exportation.



Hansi Stäel working on textile designing. Stockholm, ca. 1940-45, Hansi Stäel's estate

Hansi Stäel's designs for SECLA are eclectic, showing a confident assimilation of different cultures. She created countless decorative motifs and new shapes for mass production, following the pace of international trends, incorporating Portuguese motifs from Minho, Alentejo and especially from Nazaré, where she often travelled to draw *sur le motif*. In Estúdio SECLA, she also developed her own work, presenting it at international exhibitions and winning several prizes.

Stäel's final years were of intense labour. She was commissioned for a large panel for the exhibition *Thirty Years of Portuguese Culture 1926-1956*, organized by the SNI, and was a founder of Gravura (Society of Portuguese Engravers) (Santos, Sardo & Brites, 2013). She experimented with glass designing in Marinha Grande (Ferrão 2014, 29), and conceived a large tile panel for Sacavém's Factory store in Funchal. Her last commission for architecture was the modern tile patterns for Hotel Ritz in Lisbon, opened in 1959. This luxury hotel was completed after the death of its creator, Porfirio Pardal Monteiro (1897-1957), by a team of architects and decorators with the participation of numerous artists.

Due to the onset of Multiple Sclerosis, Hansi Stäel couldn't take much advantage of the better working conditions resulting from a major technical remodeling of SECLA in 1958. Her final ceramic works depict imagery from the past, recovering memories from her memoir: *'[...] horses came down to the river, accompanied by two half grown, tanned, black eyed boys, who took off their trousers and pants and waded out, each holding a horse, into the water. One got on the horse looking exactly like a Greek relief. It was an unforgettable sight and I have often recapture it, specially (sic) on pottery plates.'* (Ferrão 2014, 30)

Hansi Stael's work changed ceramic design in Portugal, with a depth not yet understood. It entered Portuguese homes, opening the doors for modernity and reshaping the mid-century collective memory.



Hansi Staël, Wall Plate depicting the scene described in the memoir: "(...) horses came down to the river,...)", Glazed earthenware wall plate painted with sgraffito, Estúdio SECLA, Caldas da Rainha, Portugal, ca. 1958-59. Ø 38 cm Hansi Staël's estate



Hansi Staël, Vase depicting Leda and the Swan. Estúdio SECLA, Caldas da Rainha, Portugal, ca. 1958-59. Wheel thrown, hand carved glazed earthenware. 37 x Ø 19 cm. Hansi Staël's estate.

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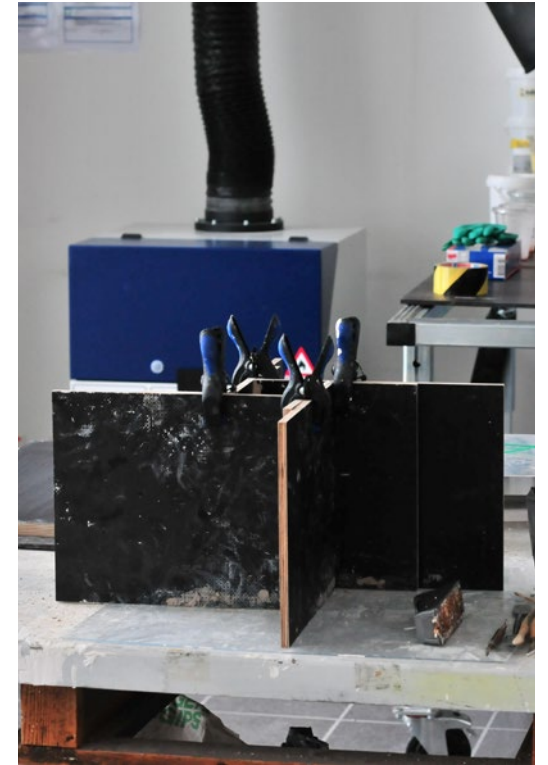
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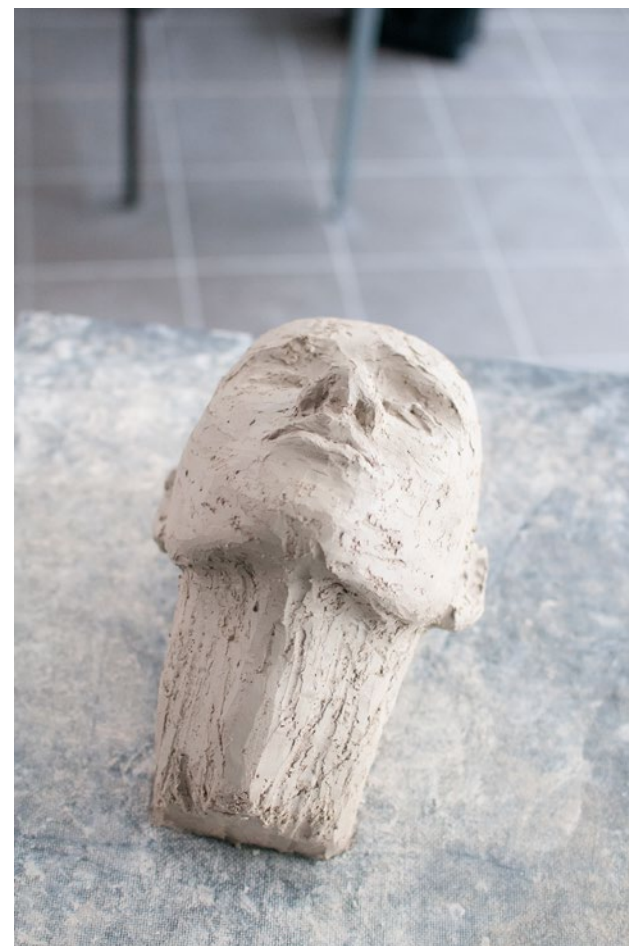














### Glazuraufbereitung mit Glazur-Tank-This für den Glazurauftrag mittels Pinsel

Die Glazur wird auf dem Pinsel aufgetragen und dann auf das Keramikstück aufgetragen. Die Glazur wird dann mit einem Pinsel aufgetragen.

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### 13 STEPS TO MAKE A GLAZE

DECIDE YOUR CHOICE WITH THE MIXTURE

PUT THE INGREDIENTS ONE BY ONE IN A BUCKET

CLOSE UP

MIX ONLY BY SHAKING THE BUCKET

OPEN THE BUCKET ONLY UNDER THE EXTRACTOR

PUT THE CALCULATED AMOUNT OF WATER IN A SECOND BUCKET

ADD MIXED POWDER SLOWLY TO THE WATER

LET SOME FOR 5 MINUTES

SHAKE UP TOP

PUT A LITTLE OF THE FIRST BUCKET AND POUR THE GLAZE THROUGH IT

USE A BRUSH OR RUBBER TO PUT THE GLAZE THROUGH THE SIEVE - NO HAND TOUCH

ONLY USE A BRUSH OR RUBBER TO PUT THE GLAZE THROUGH THE SIEVE - NO HAND TOUCH

ADD EXTRA GLAZE ACCORDING TO NECESSARY

TO CLEAN THE SIEVE USE HIGH PRESSURE WATER TAP

CLEAN ALL USED FACILITIES WELL

PUT BACK THE USED TOOLS

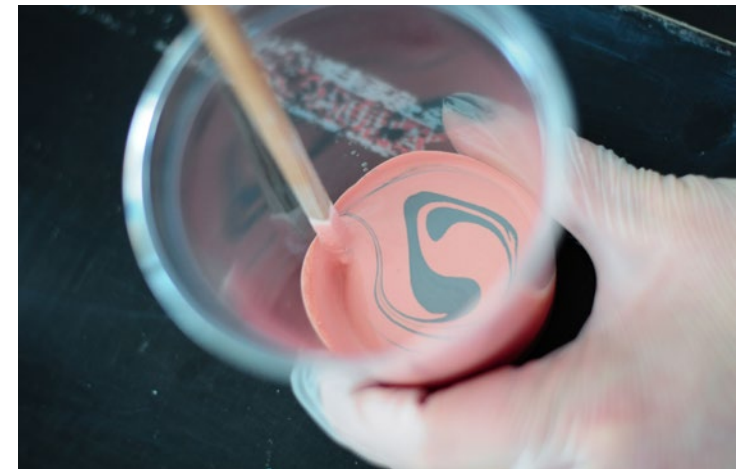
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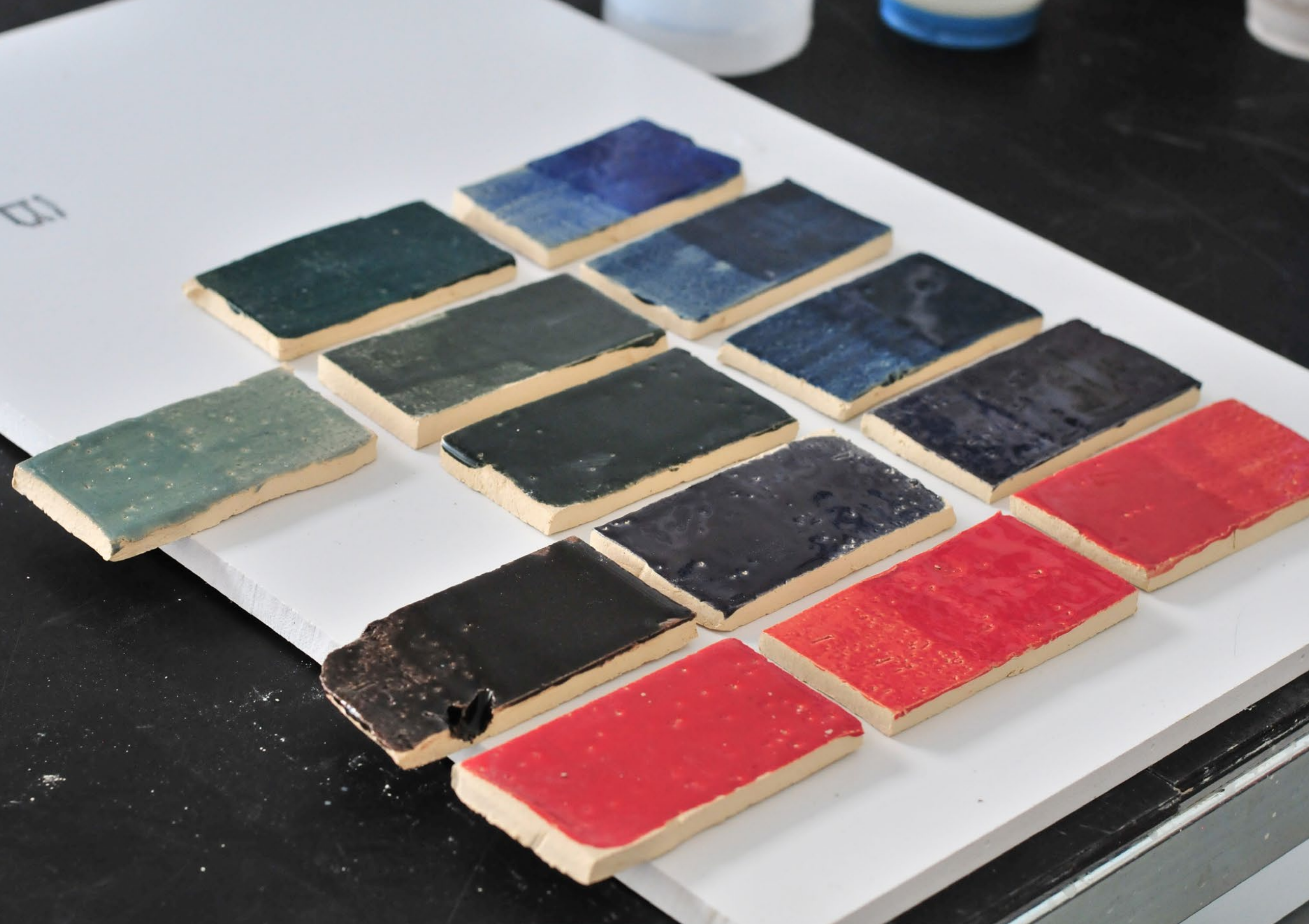
GLAZE/  
GLASUR  
CLAY/  
TON

PLASTER/  
GIPS



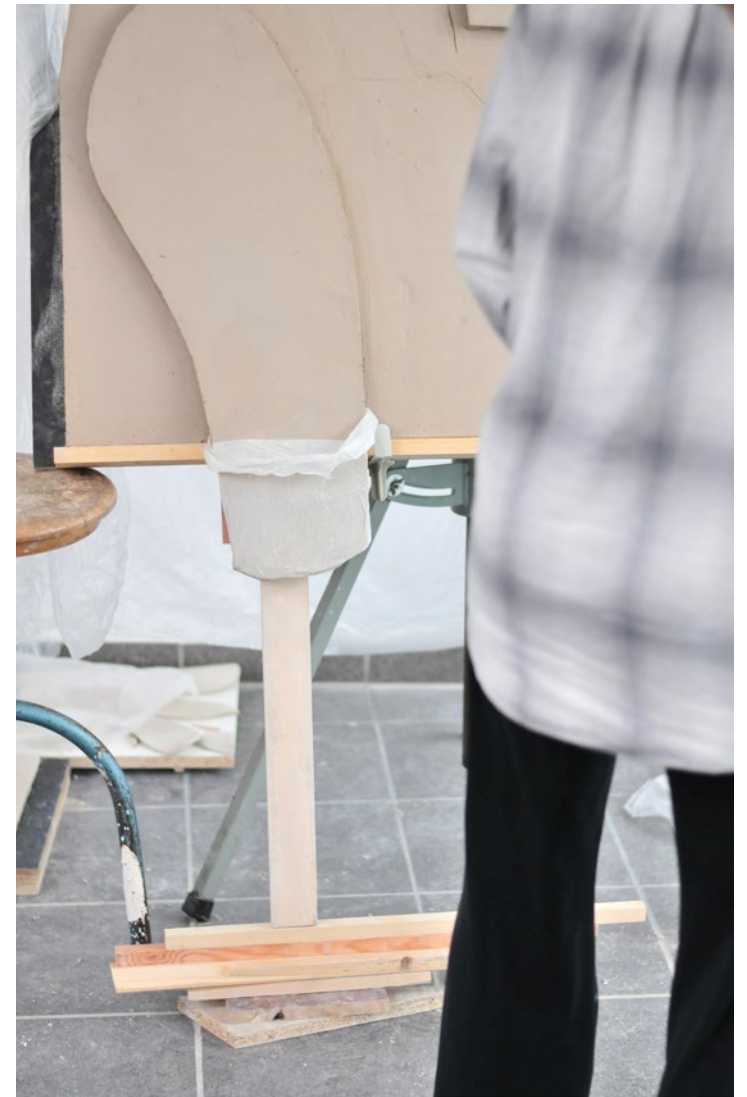


















## MAJA ESCHER

lives and works between Lisbon and Monte Novo da Horta dos Colmeeiros (Alentejo). Her artistic practice has a collective and hybrid dimension in which drawings, found objects, collaborative practices and fieldwork methods are part of the process to develop site specific installations and research-oriented projects. She holds a BA and MA in Multimedia Art at Faculdade de Belas Artes de Lisboa. She also studied pedagogy at the Waldorf Institute Witten Annen, Germany, and received an Individual Project Grant in Ceramics at Ar.co - Centro de Arte e Comunicação Visual in Lisbon. She regularly participates in artistic residency programs, namely at Worlding in London in 2021. Her residency “How to make it rain (in 5 steps)” was supported by Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian and Instituto Camões. Individual exhibitions include “Um Dia Choveu Terra” (Galeria Municipal de Arte de Almada, 2020) curated by Filipa Oliveira and “Quatro Ventos” (Galeria OTOCO, Lisbon 2019). Recent group exhibitions include, among others, “Mater” (Pavilhão Branco, Galerias Municipais de Lisboa, Lisbon, 2023), curated by João Rolaça, “Ex-Votos” (Brotéria, Lisbon, 2023), and “Só Pedimos Que Nos Semeiem Na Terra” (Monitor gallery, Lisbon, 2022), curated by Mattia Tosti. In 2022, she took part in Coimbra Biennial Anozero.

## RITA GOMES FERRÃO

is a PhD Candidate at the Art History Institute, Universidade NOVA de Lisboa (IHA-NOVA FCSH / IN2PAST) with a Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT) studentship at National Museum of Azulejo (MNAz) in Lisbon. As an artist, she participated in several national and international exhibitions since the beginning of the

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## MICHELLE GEIST

is a photographer and graphic designer based in Trier, Germany. She is deeply passionate about fashion and editorial photography, having developed a keen eye for capturing the beauty of both humans and art. She studied at the University of Applied Sciences in Trier, where she earned both a Bachelors and Masters degree in Communication Design. One year of her studies she spent at the Swinburne University in Melbourne, Australia where she focused even more on photography and gained some international experience. Alongside her creative pursuits, Michelle shares her expertise as a lecturer at the University of Trier, teaching experimental photography and practical diversity in visual design.

## YOKO INOUE

As a member of faculty at Bennington College, Yoko Inoue teaches ceramics and contemporary,

research-based art practices in Visual Arts that intersect with the curriculum of Center for Advancement of Public Action. Inoue considers an important social role of food and craft is its use in day-to-day grassroots discourse. As an interdisciplinary artist, Inoue explores cultural commoditization, assimilation and identity issues through installations, collaborative socially engaged projects and public intervention performance art. Often using traditional ceramic methods, Inoue's object making examines the economic factors, cultural values and socio-political implications behind products in the context of globalization. Inoue attempts to develop a fluid theoretical framework to consider cooking and ceramic processes as both intellectual and creative methodology to understand human geography — politics, land, labor, economy, and environmental and social justice. Inoue considers food and craft material as important matters that enhance our cultural principles, moral choices and social conscience.

## GIULIA LAMONI

is a researcher, teacher and independent curator. She is CEEC Principal Researcher at the Art History Institute, Universidade NOVA de Lisboa (IHA-NOVA FCSH / IN2PAST). Her texts have been published in numerous academic journals and art magazines, including Third Text and Manifesta Journal: Around Curatorial Practices, and in exhibition catalogues and books from Tate Modern, Centre Pompidou, Gulbenkian Foundation and Museu Berardo. She was curator or co-curator of several exhibitions, including “Earthkeeping/ Earthshaking: Art, Feminisms and Ecology” (Galeria Quadrum, Lisbon, 2020.) Her research focuses on the relations between contemporary art and feminisms,

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## LUCIA PESAPANE

specialized as curator at the Magasin in Grenoble in 2007. She began her career at the Institut d'art contemporain de Lyon in 2008. Between 2009 and 2011 she worked in the contemporary art department of the Centre Pompidou in Paris as assistant curator for the exhibition *elles @ centre-pompidou*, dedicated to the works of women artists in the collection of Musée National d'Art Moderne. In 2014 she was co-curator of the exhibition “Niki de Saint Phalle” at Grand Palais in Paris, which then travelled to the Guggenheim in Bilbao and the National Museum in Tokyo. In 2016 she curated the exhibition “Ceramix” in Paris and Maastricht, organized by Maison Rouge, Musée de la Céramique de Sèvres and Bonnetanten Museum. Since 2017 she has been Chief curator and Head of exhibitions at the Monnaie de Paris where she curated the shows “Women House” (2017), “Grayson Perry” (2018) and “Kiki Smith” (2019). In 2022 she was co-curator of the show “Pionnières, artistes dans le Paris des années 1920” at Musée du Luxembourg in Paris. Her work aims to promote and support women artists.

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Research Project:  
Craft Thinking in the Arts -  
Exploring the relations between  
artistic practice and ceramic  
craft in 20<sup>th</sup> century and contem-  
porary art  
2022-2023

This research Project was a  
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