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Anti-scaphandre N°21 (2013), Michel Gouéry
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Ayna Mirror (2022), Studio Biskt

Photo Alexandra Colmares. Courtesy La peau de l'ours

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Untitled (c.1990), Enric Mestre
Courtesy Modern Shapes Gallery



ACTIVIST CERAMICS

It's a groundbreaking event. ceramic brussels, the only international fair dedicated exclusively to contemporary ceramics, is taking place from 25 to 28 January 2024, at Tour & Taxis. A "militant" fair, according to the wishes of its two co-directors, Gilles Parmentier and Jean-Marc Dimanche.

Shifting perceptions. Long underappreciated by the contemporary art world, ceramics are increasingly attracting both artists and collectors, making their way into the most prestigious galleries. Yet, no significant fair had ever been dedicated to it. With this realisation, the Franco-Belgian duo of Jean-Marc Dimanche and Gilles Parmentier [see p.18] decided to address this gap by creating a fair 100% dedicated to the medium, to be held at Tour & Taxis, a venue well-known to art enthusiasts for hosting BRAFA, Art Brussels, and more recently, Art on Paper.

"I have always worked on exhibitions and biennials, but I never really imagined that I would do a fair one day," admits Jean-Marc Dimanche. This crafts expert, who led the design agency V.I.T.R.I.O.L. for twenty years before co-founding Maison Parisienne with Florence Guillier-Bernard, also serves as an advisor to H.R.H. the Hereditary Grand Duchess of Luxembourg. As the general commissioner of the De Mains De Maîtres biennial, he also headed ELEVENSTEENS, a private Brussels space dedicated to art and material. He continues: "When I met Gilles at ceramic brussels [Gilles Parmentier is the director of this international drawing salon in Brussels, editor's note], he asked me what kind of fair I would like to do and offered me to give him three choices. Without hesitation, I replied: Ceramics, ceramics, ceramics."

Return to grace

For the past decade, contemporary ceramics have been increasingly in the spotlight. Art criticism is effusive, schools are reopening their long-neglected ceramics departments, and the market and institutions are taking notice [see p.52]. Last year,

"The Flames: The Age of Ceramics" at the Museum of Modern Art in Paris presented 350 pieces from different eras, challenging the entrenched hierarchy of art forms where some are deemed more noble than others. It's an old debate, but a deeply rooted reality. It's easy to forget that the giants of modern art all embraced ceramics for its plastic qualities, allowing them to hybridise mediums, challenge academicism, and break down genre barriers [see p.60].

Flemish artist Johan Creten, the guest of honour at this first edition [see p.46], admits to having spent much of his life defending the idea that ceramics should be recognised on the same level as the key mediums of contemporary art such as painting and sculpture, especially at a time when conceptual art was dominant. "Isn't the very ontology of contemporary art, the art of now and here, to 'dethrone' canons and blur boundaries?" wonders Stéphanie Pécourt, director of the Centre Wallonie-Bruxelles [see box p.10]. She adds, "Long considered by some as a practice qualified as 'crafts' or even 'purely utilitarian or ornamental and

decorative' — as if this immediately implied a hierarchy — ceramics seem to have been enjoying, for some years now, a strong resurgence of interest from both collectors and those whose opinions are considered legitimate and prescriptive in contemporary art."

"Organising a fair dedicated to ceramics in Brussels makes perfect sense," asserts Thomas Ghaye from La peau de l'Ours gallery, which is exhibiting at ceramic brussels [see p.66]. "Belgium has a strong history with this medium. It has long been a pivotal centre of ceramic production in Europe, and Belgians have a particular fondness for this medium. And we have an excellent art school, La Cambre, with an exceptional ceramics section that has produced talented young artists in recent years. I did not experience this era as a gallery owner, but for a very long time, ceramics were relegated to the status of a minor medium and craft, and were the poor relation in art schools. But something is happening today in the market, in fairs, and in schools." This viewpoint is echoed by Delphine Guillaud from the Parisian gallery backlash: "More and more collectors are taking an interest in this discipline and are acquiring pieces. It's a bit less intimidating than it was a few years ago, and this medium has finally found its deserved place."

Co-constructing

To launch the fair, the two co-directors consulted the entire ecosystem of contemporary ceramics in advance, surrounding themselves with the advice of an advisory board composed of personalities from the field. This includes, of course, Johan Creten, but also Christine Germain-

3 questions to... Stéphanie Pécourt

Stéphanie Pécourt is the director of the Centre Wallonie-Bruxelles.

How are current artists utilising ceramics?

Like other tools and mediums, such as textiles or digital media, ceramics seem to be one of the instruments to be invested in by many artists, allowing for the virtualisation of new creations. Among the personalities whose works we have programmed at the Centre Wallonie-Bruxelles, few concentrate their potential and desires exclusively on this medium of expression. Many of them have a very "desacralised" relationship with the medium and draw from techniques that serve their aspirations.

How do younger generations of artists engage in breaking down barriers between mediums in art? What role does ceramics play in this new interpretation of works?

Undoubtedly, ceramics allow for a revisiting of the question of artistic gesture, its temporality, and fundamentally pose the question of the status of the artist and the work, especially in its dimension of perfection. The growing interest in modest, fallible, less demiurgic practices — the consideration of non-human performativities, including that of the material itself — contributes to the revaluation of practices like ceramics.

Do some collectors collect "only" ceramics?

In the collections I've had the opportunity to discover and explore, there are some that, while not focusing exclusively on ceramic acquisitions, indeed distinguish themselves by a broad tropism "reserved for".

Donnat, director of the Museum of Hunting and Nature; Magdalena Gerber, from the centre for experimentation and realisation in contemporary ceramics at HEAD in Geneva; Geertje Jacobs, director of the EKWC, a famous Dutch residency, and Ludovic Recchia, director of Keramis. All are representatives of renowned institutions in the field with whom the two co-organisers have carefully selected and concocted the programming.

As a result, about sixty top international galleries have responded. A rarity for a first edition in the highly competitive world of art markets. "The bet was bold, as we set up the event in a year, but our duo works very well

thanks to our complementarity," comments Gilles Parmentier regarding the conception of the event with Jean-Marc Dimanche. "In a year, we had time to get to know each other and to work together. Our respective experiences allow us to multiply our impact in Brussels, Luxembourg, Paris, and Europe. The result will be felt in this first edition, because it is the fruit of $1 + 1 = 3$."

Visitors can expect a diverse panorama covering all fields of ceramic creation — and not just ultra-contemporary artistic creation. At backlash, a solo show is dedicated to Mongolian artist Odonchimeg Davaadorj "who has been working with ceramics for years and translates

"The question of the artistic gesture, and the excellence of it, seems to be one of the questions that re-legitimise this underappreciated medium. The outrage, the distortion, the erasure of ceramic itself in its dimension as a 'beautiful' artefact has also, I think, contributed to repositioning the medium. — Stéphanie Pécourt



Les oiseaux bleus (2022), Maximilien Pellet

Photo Jean-Christophe Lett. Courtesy Double V Gallery



Gnou (2013), Ule Ewelt

Photo Jeremy Logeay. Courtesy Galerie Grès





Big Mind Circles (2020), Guy van Leemput

Courtesy Galerie Constellations

The material of earth has its own complexity. It is the combination of the four elements: earth, water, air, fire. I was struck by the very poetic approach of Lee Ufan during his residency at the Manufacture de Sèvres to the making of a ceramic. According to him, fire was a co-creator. Its action, sometimes unpredictable, provided unexpected results conducive to the creative process. — *Catherine Dobler*

3 questions to... Catherine Dobler

Catherine Dobler is the Founder of the L'Accolade Foundation.

What made you want to participate in the ceramic brussels art prize?

I wanted to participate in the prize for several reasons. I have a certain intimacy with the work of modelling, having taken classes for several years at the Ateliers du Carrousel with Pascale Morice, a sculptor and Bourdelle Prize laureate. The exercise is both physical and delicate. The second reason is the discovery in Los Angeles of an extremely vibrant scene dedicated to ceramics, playing very freely with forms and colours, real sculptures. The third is meeting Jean-Marc Dimanche, thanks to Stéphanie Pécourt, who took an early interest in textile and ceramic artistic creations, when these practices were still largely denigrated or underestimated. Finally, the fact that the guest of honour for this event is Johan Creten, whose studio I had the chance to visit in Montreuil, was an additional reason to participate in this prize [see p.46].

Have you already organised residencies or exhibitions dedicated to ceramics?

With our trilogy focusing on the living coming to an end, we will start a new season of residencies in 2024 titled "Tremblements de la Terre", with artists using earth as a means of artistic expression [...]. We, Christopher Yggdre, the artistic director of the foundation, and I, are excited to discover the laureates of Ceramic Art Brussels and to invite one of them for a two-month residency. For us, it is a source to feed and enrich our research, and it is a joy to have access to these files, and then to discover them "in real life" in Brussels.

Why do more and more young artists take an interest in ceramics in their practice?

I believe that an increasingly close relationship between artists and craftsmen is becoming generalised in France. I observe this in art school programmes. It is also a demand from students who want to learn these gestures and skills. Art is a form of unstructured and unlimited work that expresses emotions, feelings, and a vision, while craftsmanship refers to an activity that involves creation from one's own hands, manual dexterity. In an era as uncertain as ours with digital and virtual taking up so much space in our lives and under our fingers, with technologies that think for us and suggest through advertising windows what we have just desired, I believe that more and more young people feel the need to reconnect with reality through their hands, their bodies, their sensations, through know-how. Because in the gesture there is, and we often forget this, a form of concentration, close to meditation that unconsciously and naturally connects it to the entire human community and that of the living.

through this technique all the Mongolian heritage of her childhood", explains Delphine Guillaud. "Shaman spirits and steppe landscapes form her artistic universe." The Transit gallery, a pioneer in presenting ceramics, notably having defended Johan Creten's work early on, exhibits works by Thomas Huber, Nikita Kadan, Jenny Watson, and Kocheisen & Hullman, as well as recent works by Michael Sailstorfer. Meanwhile, Patrick & Ondine Mestdagh gallery presents "From The Delville Collection", a selection of Japanese ceramics from collector Didier Delville, including the astonishing porcelain ribbons of unreal lightness created by Kino Satoshi. "Japan has long been a centre of excellence in ceramics, but in the 20th century, many of its famous traditions began to evolve towards the most innovative and creative culture," explains the collector [see p.66]. Masters of the medium work clay in unconventional and surprising ways, a balance between tradition and innovation, a unique strength that rarely finds an equivalent in the West.

Four objectives

"We are pursuing four objectives," summarises Gilles Parmentier. "First, to showcase the diversity of artistic approaches to ceramics through the selection of international galleries and the participation of leading global institutions and players;

EVENT

second, to offer a unique forum for high-level exchanges and encourage interactions and collaborations; third, to contribute to content production by publishing an annual magazine dedicated to ceramics; and fourth, to launch the ceramic brussels Art Prize, a European call for projects with an international jury, and several awards to be given during the fair.”

For its first edition, the ceramic brussels art prize thus rewards several European artists in the field to “highlight the vitality and diversity of contemporary ceramic practice, to support contemporary creation, and to stimulate new exchanges between artists, institutions, galleries, and the fair’s audience.” The winners will be showcased in a group exhibition curated by Jean-Marc Dimanche during the fair and featured in a publication. Several prizes will also be awarded to artists at the opening, including a solo exhibition to be held at the second edition of ceramic brussels in 2025, as well as an international residency hosted by the LAccolade foundation [see box p.15]. “Meeting Jean-Marc Dimanche is one of the reasons I wanted to get involved in this prize,” shares Catherine Dobler, founder of LAccolade, a foundation based in France and Los Angeles that hosts artist residencies. “Early on, he defended textile and ceramic creation, at a time when these practices were still largely denigrated or underestimated in Europe. How many times was he asked why he was passionate about ‘women’s work’, about sewing and pottery!” A dense programme of meetings, talks, conferences, and other visits completes the four days of the event “to stimulate exchanges and engage in debate”, according to the wish of the two co-directors. Now that ceramics have found their voice, they are not about to let go of the microphone.

ceramic brussels 2024

From 25 to 28 January
Shed 1 and 2. Tour & Taxis
www.ceramic.brussels





Knots knots knots (detail, 2023), Pernille Pontoppidan Pedersen

Photo Jacob Friis Holm Nielsen. Courtesy Maria Lund Gallery

UNTITLED

Untitled (2022), Maxwell Mustardo

© Puls





THE CERAMIC DUO

ceramic brussels was born from a meeting that turned into a collaboration: that of Gilles Parmentier and Jean-Marc Dimanche, “a duo that combines their strengths and skills in the service of ceramics and its ecosystem”. Joint interview.

When they met two years ago, their shared intuition turned into certainty: that ceramics were “at a turning point in their recognition and history”. Yet, no significant international event had ever been dedicated to it. Gilles Parmentier, director of Art on Paper, knows the Brussels cultural ecosystem inside out. As for Jean-Marc Dimanche, a curator, specialist in European art crafts, and advisor for the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, he is a keen connoisseur of this medium, long underappreciated. From their enthusiastic discussions, the idea of a project bringing together all the players in contemporary ceramics for an event at Tours & Taxis was born.

How did the initiative for a ceramics-focused fair come about?

Gilles Parmentier (G. P.): This reflection stemmed from an intuition and a vision that gradually took shape two years ago when we observed the increasingly prominent presence of ceramics in galleries, fairs, and international events. From this intuition emerged the idea that an event, specifically a fair, dedicated exclusively to the medium of ceramics would be relevant to showcase the variety, dynamics, and diversity of contemporary creation in this field. This intuition materialised when we decided to partner with Jean-Marc. We then consulted artists and all the players in the ceramics ecosystem on the relevance of this project to launch the first European fair dedicated to the medium. And to build it with them. Unanimously, they supported and encouraged us, as creating such an event seemed both a necessity and an obvious step.

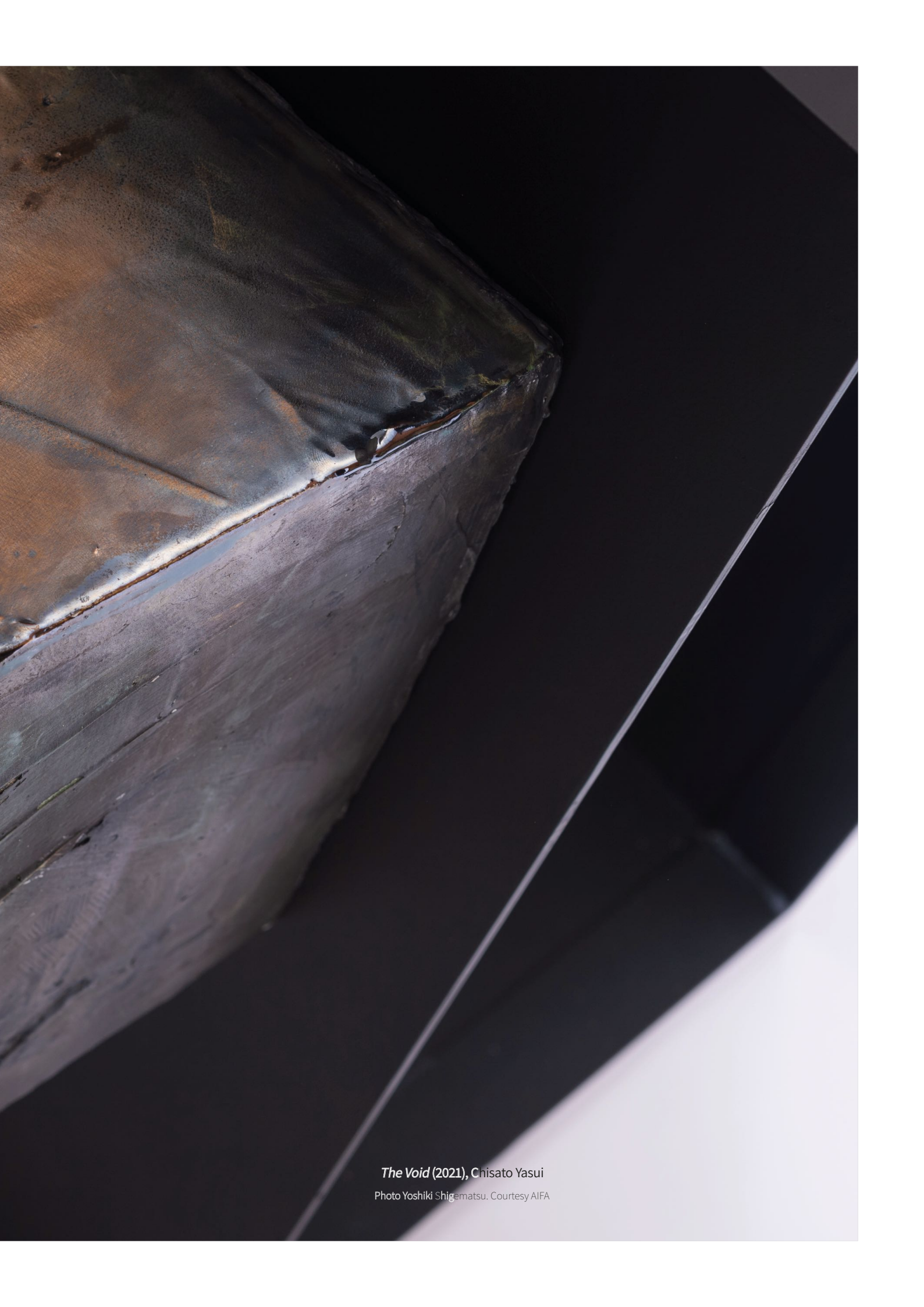
Jean-Marc Dimanche (J.-M. D.): It’s about two intersecting intuitions. I have been working on the ceramic topic for a long time and often asked myself,

“Why isn’t there a real operation dedicated to contemporary ceramics?” But I never imagined setting up a commercial event like a fair. ... I had met Gilles at ELEVENSTEENS and during Art on Paper, and his proposal acted as a trigger. And when we surveyed the galleries, this same observation about the lack of ceramic-dedicated events turned out to be even more significant than we imagined.

How do you explain this absence?

J.-M. D.: I think ceramics is a complex field. In Europe, particularly in Belgium and France, we have a history centered around pottery, the craft of ceramic pottery. However, the shift of ceramics to the contemporary art market is a relatively recent phenomenon, thanks notably to Johan Creten, who is our guest of honour [see p.46]. Suddenly, some artists began to use ceramics, defending the idea that it was a material as interesting as any other. This claim shifted the paradigm. But today, there are still two families that we will indeed bring together at the fair: those from the pottery workshop tradition and those who consider ceramics as a contemporary medium in its own right. In Europe, there is





The Void (2021), Chisato Yasui

Photo Yoshiki Shigematsu. Courtesy AIFA

“The idea of a fair dedicated to ceramics already brought elements of an answer. Establishing a fair in Brussels seemed obvious. The project became a rallying cry for all these diversities of currents, practices, and perspectives. — *Gilles Parmentier*

already a somewhat scattered galaxy of ceramic fairs and markets, like C14 or Saint-Sulpice, set up with and for artists without necessarily involving galleries. Backed by personalities like Johan Creten or Anne Wenzel, contemporary art galleries have been showing ceramics as a full-fledged sculptural medium for the past ten or fifteen years, akin to stone or bronze, without thinking of the pottery universe. Today, these works are growing in the contemporary art market, whether at Almine Rech, Perrotin, or Transit [see p.66]. But at fairs, they generally only show a few pieces.

Is it a trend?

G. P.: It's not a trend, but a groundswell that's been building for about a decade. Several phenomena explain it. Artists, as well as enthusiasts, have access to a diversity of techniques, practices, and workshops like never before, enabling more and more people to work with clay. Additionally, art schools are inundated with requests for enrolment in ceramic workshops. This is quite unprecedented. It's mostly the culmination of artists' work, offering an increasingly significant and high-quality production, increasingly observed by galleries and institutions. A fair dedicated to showcasing the medium was missing from this apparatus.

J.-M. D.: The visibility of ceramics in the contemporary art market, thanks to pioneers like Johan Creten and others, is causing a shift in art schools. Ceramicist Caroline Andrin, for example, told us that when she arrived

at La Cambre about fifteen years ago, only three or four students were interested in the field. Today, she turns people away from the ceramic section. The same is heard at the Beaux-Arts in Paris, HEAR in Strasbourg, or HEAD in Switzerland. The ceramic workshops were the Cinderella of the Beaux-Arts. They were seen as a somewhat poor practice of contemporary art and relegated to the level of crafts. The trend is reversing now. Young students are increasingly eager to work with materials and ask themselves, “Why not ceramics?” Everyone I meet, like Elsa Guillaume, shares this excitement. It was rare twenty years ago.

Is this desire related to more philosophical or political concerns, such as ecological and environmental awareness?

J.-M. D.: There might even be a dual phenomenon. Firstly, the desire to reconnect with “making”. If we look at fairs two decades ago, digital and video were omnipresent. Even painting was considered outdated because it was still too material. Then, there's the environmental awareness of the younger generation who seek to use noble materials, not in the sense of luxury, but nature, to create pieces that won't further pollute our planet.

What is the role of the advisory board in organising and selecting for the fair?

G. P.: It soon seemed important to us to be supported and accompanied by resource persons to develop the vision of the fair and advise us in our strategic choices. This committee is very

broadly and internationally composed to benefit from a maximum range of views and orientations. The members assisted us in selecting galleries and defining the overall positioning of the fair, as well as contributing to the strategy of the organisation and its international reputation.

J.-M. D.: These specialists come not only from different countries, but they also represent the various types of actors in the ceramic ecosystem. With curator Ludovic Recchia, who heads Keramis, and Christine Germain-Donnat, director of the Museum of Hunting and Nature, we are more in the museum institution. Artist Magdalena Gerber, who teaches at HEAD in Geneva, is in transmission. Geertje Jacobs, the director of EKWC, brings a perspective on training and the career of artists. So, these are viewpoints that cover both technique, exhibition, museums, etc.

How did you determine the location and date of this first edition?

G. P.: The international calendar of contemporary art fairs is very busy. It's almost impossible to find a week or even a few free days among significant events. We decided to organise the fair in January at Tour & Taxis, which offers reference spaces known for hosting BRAFA or Art Brussels. The light is pleasant there, and the circulation is comfortable for visitors. The location of this first edition at Tour & Taxis is a strong testament to the event's ambition. Moreover, our dates coincide with the VIP opening of BRAFA. This period allows Brussels

“A whole young generation of artists seeks to move away from the conceptual and digital to reconnect with material, using environmentally acceptable materials. Ceramics allow this. — *Jean-Marc Dimanche*



Untitled (2023), Éric Colonel and Thomas Spit

Photo Marie Gillard. Courtesy Alice Gallery





Gilles Parmentier and Jean-Marc Dimanche

Courtesy ceramic brussels

INTERVIEW

to shine internationally with high-quality artistic and cultural propositions. By fitting into this schedule, we offer our visitors the opportunity to benefit from this dynamic.

What will be the highlights of your cultural programming?

G. P.: For this first edition, we have made maximum efforts to establish the quality and diversity of the galleries. We constructed the call for young European artists through the ceramic brussels art prize. The jury selected ten winners, and an exhibition curated by Jean-Marc will be unveiled for free to the public at the opening of the fair. In parallel, ceramic brussels initiated dialogue with Johan Creten to organise a solo show that is not a retrospective but a look at his career. In the entrance, we will present an installation in collaboration with MAD Brussels, the Brussels region's house of design and fashion supporting young creators. We will also organise meetings and guided tours outside the fair, as well as a programme of talks. However, we have chosen to concentrate our forces at Tour & Taxis to constitute this missing link in the ecosystem of ceramics and contemporary art. For future editions, however, we will likely develop more activities outside the fair in partnership with cultural institutions.

In the long term, would the idea be to create a European platform dedicated to ceramics?

J.-M. D.: That could be a future ambition, almost a utopia... We are putting all our efforts and ambitions into this first edition, and we will study with the actors the relevance of other events. Let's not forget that we are starting this adventure with about sixty galleries around a single medium, which is already quite exceptional! This is the first time that a fair will dare to bring together all of ceramics, from its traditional forms to artistic research, to assert that it is a medium that has its rightful place in contemporary art.





Ancestors (2023), Natalie de Morney

Courtesy Berman Contemporary



Full



CERAMICS IN ART SCHOOLS: A NEW MOMENTUM

Long sidelined, ceramic is regaining its prestige in the art world, driven by a fresh enthusiasm from schools and teachers passionate about the medium.

From the 1980s, ceramics, often labeled as craftwork and deemed outdated, gradually fell out of favour in the artistic sphere. In France, at the National School of Fine Arts, it was practically ostracised. This was also the case at La Cambre in Belgium, and at HEAD (Geneva School of Art and Design) in Switzerland. The teaching of the medium attracted little interest and struggled to establish itself in the contemporary field. And in the 2000s, questions arose about the very existence of ceramic programmes in art schools.

A new approach

In 1999, ministers responsible for higher education from 29 European countries signed the Bologna Declaration, aiming to harmonise education systems and foster student mobility, particularly by structuring higher education into two cycles. Art education was greatly affected, and the future of ceramic departments, then deserted, was questioned. A new momentum for these programmes began with the arrival of new professors.

Caroline Andrin, head of the ceramic department at La Cambre, began teaching in 2006. She recalls: “Around 2000, there were significant discussions in many art schools about the future of ceramics. When I arrived at La Cambre, there were few students, and there was talk of closing the workshop, which was the last place in French-speaking Belgium where one could study the medium.” To rejuvenate the discipline, Caroline Andrin assembled a team and devised a new educational programme: a specialised bachelor’s and master’s degree focusing on techniques and skills. “And it’s also

about training students by always asking them to position themselves in relation to their practical work,” comments the professor.

At the same time in Geneva’s HEAD, ceramics faced a similar situation. “Ten or fifteen years ago, HEAD offered a bachelor’s degree in ceramics, which was modified due to the restructuring from the Bologna process,” says Magdalena Gerber, professor and head of CERCCO, the centre for experimentation and realisation in contemporary ceramics at the school. Established after the end of HEAD’s degree programme in ceramics, CERCCO allows for a different approach to ceramics, serving students as a place for sharing and exchange.

As a centre of expertise, CERCCO now rather offers basic courses in moulding, modelling, and enamel composition where students are free to attend according to their desires and the needs of their artistic projects. “They link this learning with their artistic practice: if a painter does ceramics, they will have different concerns than a student in sculpture

“Caroline Andrin and I studied at ESAA under Japanese artist Setsuko Nagasawa. Her teaching was based on experimentation, focusing on what the material gave us and developing a project around the phenomena presented by the materials. I really liked that. The teaching curriculum in German-speaking Switzerland, which I had gone through before, is guided by a completely different thought: you have a goal, and you realise what you have in mind. — *Magdalena Gerber*

or architecture,” explains Magdalena Gerber. But the centre is also a residency that welcomes artists to foster exchange and encourage creation: “Recently, the school even won a ceramic prize related to architecture,” the professor notes.

Encouraging exchanges

Beyond their courses and creation programmes, both schools, La Cambre and HEAD, organise workshops and conferences with external participants as Magdalena Gerber and Caroline Andrin are committed to fostering exchanges and transmission in ceramics. “Upon arriving at La Cambre and seeing the limited internal means to create a programme and invest in ceramics, I thought we had to seek external forces to energise the medium,” explains Caroline Andrin. Gradually, connections formed between departments of different European schools through the action of a few teachers dedicated to perpetuating the study of ceramics.

The ECART network (European Ceramic Art and Research Team) was thus established in 2009, initially bringing together five European art schools: HEAD and La Cambre, as well as Villa Arson in Nice, ENSA in Limoges, and Pavillon Bosio in Monaco. Aimed at promoting collaboration and mobility of students and teachers, the network has been launching biennial programmes on given

themes. The most recent, conducted between 2021 and 2023 and titled “Resonating Ceramics”, focused on sound and ritual. It led to seminars and conferences in Brussels, a study trip to Paris, two workshops at EKWC — an international artists’ residency and centre of excellence for ceramics in the Netherlands —, two exhibitions in Geneva and Nice, and a 200-page book documenting the project, its research, and the artistic works it inspired.

In Europe, this network has been feeding ceramics and contributing to its revival. It allows students, whether specialised in ceramics or not, to explore the medium and combine their various practices. But it’s also the interdisciplinarity that nourishes contemporary ceramics. “What matters most to me is having a diversity of approaches, doing as much wheel-throwing as installation, or even performance, in connection with ceramics,” explains Caroline Andrin. A perspective she shares with Magdalena Gerber, with whom she collaborates on ECART projects.

Transdisciplinary practices

The fruitful exchanges spurred by these collective initiatives highlight the importance of enlightened transmission, in tune with the times. Magdalena Gerber comments: “The logic of interdisciplinarity interests me because it corresponds to the world in which we live.” Expanding

the academic field, this breakdown of techniques and mediums enables students to employ as many tools as necessary for their artistic expression. Such an impulse appears evident in the work of young artists such as Antoine Moulinard, who presents a ceramic character installation with sewn clothing for the ceramic brussels art prize, François Bauer from the design field, who combines drawing and three-dimensional creations, or Inup Park, whose work is closer to sculpture [see p.34].

However, having an interdisciplinary practice is not necessary to renew the medium. Other ceramists propose contemporary creations that reinterpret and play with the traditions of artisanal ceramics. They rethink utilitarian forms, experiment with glazes and textures, and through their work, sometimes also address social, political, or ecological issues, as seen in Jonas Moënné, a La Cambre ceramic department graduate in 2018, deeply committed to climate and nature conservation [see p.34]. Through their pieces, ceramics open up and question our relationship with the world.

The transdisciplinary logic, as a creative soil, can also sometimes be experienced through the boundaries related to technical aspects. Magdalena Gerber, exceedingly positive about the possibilities offered by the intersection of disciplines and



Magdalena Gerber

Courtesy HEAD

FOCUS

mediums, comments: “It was great when students had extensive knowledge. Like a conductor with a range of instruments at their disposal, technical abilities can drive a project and allow for envisioning things one wouldn’t necessarily think possible.” She however tempers: “When you have an idea in mind and wish to realise it technically, solutions are always found. And that’s where innovation happens.”

Today in Europe, there are two dedicated ceramic art school programmes. La Cambre has built a solid reputation, attracting both Belgian and foreign students. With 19 students spread over five years of study, the ceramic workshop is now flourishing and continues to receive increasing interest. ENSA in Limoges offers a ceramic workshop with a specialisation in porcelain. Elsewhere, while the medium is approached more from a craft perspective like at the Maison de la céramique in Dieulefit, or from a transdisciplinary view, as at HEAD, it continues to engage young artists thanks to the teachers and the transmission of their passion for the medium.

Today, ceramic is increasingly contributing to contemporary art history narratives thanks to events like ceramic brussels that make visible the practice of a wide range of artists. Coming from school training and residencies, a new generation is embracing the medium. They demonstrate, through their work, the effects of a formation that has managed to renew itself to open up creative possibilities. “Twenty years ago, it was said that ceramics were finished in art schools. But I am delighted to see the evolution of the medium, the enthusiasm it generates today, and I continue to be impressed by this new generation. Ceramics have a bright future,” rejoices Caroline Andrin.





ANTOINETTE

Antoine Moulinard
© Antoine Moulinard



CELEBRATING CERAMIC

For its inaugural edition, ceramic brussels unveils the practices of emerging creators. Through the ceramic brussels art prize, it awards ten winners whose practices are rejuvenating contemporary ceramics and opening the medium to other, sometimes unexpected, fields. Portraits.

Damien Fragnon. Eco-reparation

“My dream was to see the Puy-de-Dôme erupt”, recounts Damien Fragnon. From his childhood spent in Clermont-Ferrand, he retains memories of the volcanoes that shaped his approach to ceramics. Introduced to the techniques of the medium at the fine arts school of Annecy in the Alps, he continued his education in Lyons until 2018, then went on a residency in Thailand. Since 2021, he has occupied a studio in Sète. “My relationship with ceramics is built around work on enamel and eco-reparation. I go out and find different elements in nature to create my own enamels. Sometimes I make them from ash, Damask roses, or I collect dried seaweed that I burn,” the artist shares. Used to nourish the plants in his studio, these enamels are also applied to ceramics that he places in water to feed sea anemones or urchins. He explains: “The essence of my work focuses on rock, my creations mimic their appearance. The goal, ultimately, is for them to become almost real rocks themselves.” Through his practice, ceramics become nourishing, and allows to imagine the creation of new ecosystems.

installation, a kind of dollhouse he populates with these magical beings to question their situation: “The idea is to change the way we look at them by putting the viewer in the place of these characters who did not choose their condition.” Using these creatures analogically, the artist translates an experience, that of “growing up queer in a heteronormative world”. He also reappropriates the codes of the decorative and constructs around them a world made up of ceramic furniture that narrates other legends: the sofa echoes the myth of the giant; the fireplace, the yeti, and the table legs refer to dwarfs and gnomes. But Antoine Moulinard does not limit himself to ceramics. A graduate of La Cambre and having attended the fashion section of the Duperré School in Paris, he opens his medium to other practices, notably interested in costumes, sewn by hand, with which he adorns his characters... with the idea of one day constructing an entire space, like that of Facteur Cheval, “but in my own way”, declares the artist.

Antoine Moulinard. Dollhouse

A fairy, a witch, a devil, a vampire, and a werewolf... perpetual villains of fairy tales. Antoine Moulinard’s project, *L’effet du logis* (*The effect of home*), is an



Les filles de Tara (2018-2023), Jonas Moënné

Courtesy Jonas Moënné

3 questions to... François Bauer

François Bauer is one of the winners of the ceramic brussels art prize.

How did you come to ceramics?

It started as a love at first sight. I began with studies in graphic design in Chaumont, then I went to HEAR, the art school in Strasbourg, where I deepened my curriculum in object design. I was really interested in this theoretical aspect and started a thesis project before realising I was on the wrong path. That's when I turned to ceramics. I studied at the European Institute of Ceramic Arts in Guebwiller, from which I graduated in 2017. It's the return to the earth, to making with my hands, that appealed to me; I decided that this is what I would dedicate my life to.

Drawing plays an important part in your practice...

I have been immersed in graphic arts since my childhood, and that's what I was taught in my design studies. When I want to make something, I draw it first. My ceramics are like a change of scale from my drawing. I then redraw on the object to make it reappear, as if to highlight the form. There is a form of humour for me in drawing a carafe on paper and then transforming it into a three-dimensional carafe that bears the same drawing, but that can really be used. There is something offbeat that I really like. It's a bit like giving body to a decor, to signs. And I like the idea that some of my pieces can be things that people have the possibility to use.

What type of objects interest you?

The field is so vast, but I would say that for now, I am interested in objects from ceramics. That's what feeds my production. The best formula I've found to describe my pieces is "drawn objects"; I think I treat my pieces more like drawings or paintings than sculptures. Another more recent part of my work deals with more abstract sculptures. And coming from the world of design, the question of use has always seemed important to me. I don't just make utilitarian objects, but I like people to have a choice.

Inup Park. **Body tension**

Coming from Korea, Inup Park studied ceramics at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam before returning to his native country. He eventually came back to the Netherlands a few years later and did two residencies at the EKW, the international centre dedicated to ceramic artist residencies. Not comfortable talking about himself, the artist works on expressing his emotions through a kind of "body

performance", as he describes it, using ceramics as a material vector of his psyche. He thus produces pieces that he physically appropriates: a long ceramic sculpture that he wraps around himself, a block with two holes for his legs, a kind of seat that looks uncomfortable yet is molded to fit his back... "My practice is about tension," he explains. Inup Park offers a new perspective on the medium to shape sculptures that translate intimate interrogations.

Elsa Guillaume. **Underwater worlds**

Elsa Guillaume combines drawing and ceramics in her work, fuelled by the sea and travel. A graduate of the fine arts school of Paris in 2013, she embarked in 2016 aboard the schooner Tara to study coral reefs between Easter Island and Polynesia. After residencies at the National Maritime Museum or the Royal Rope Factory of Rochefort in 2021, she set off for a new marine journey on the schooner Perseverance, from Iceland to Greenland. Through these experiences, she imagines objects at the border of the imaginary and aquatic life created from her notes, observations, and memories, engaging in a reflection on our relationship with the exploitation of resources and of marine space as a whole.

Jonas Moëgne. **Poetry of the insignificant**

Jonas Moëgne offers a practice inscribed in the challenges of our time. He first undertook training in ceramics at Villa Arson in Nice, then went to La Cambre in Brussels, where he graduated with a master's in 2018. From the northern Alps where he grew up, he retains a relationship with earth and time, constitutive of an acute awareness of the world, invoked in his works by the recovery of end-of-life materials and narratives that interweave historical elements and intimate stories. "My work is twofold. It questions scrap, the natural material transformed by humans and then discarded. It's a

In the world of pottery, when a couple works together, generally the man focuses on the wheel while the woman decorates. It was very important to me not to reproduce this pattern and that we be equal in what each brings.

— Nitsa Meletopoulos



Sillon (2023), Audrey Ballacchino

Photo Pascale Cholette. Courtesy Audrey Ballacchino



Erotic Symbiosis (2021), Ming-Miao Ko
Courtesy Ming-Miao Ko





Hooray (2022), Inup Park

Photo Majda Kovic. Courtesy Inup Park

real reappropriation of waste that I do. And I try to re-enchant them, to bring a certain poetry,” the artist explains. For the ceramic brussels art prize, he proposes the project *Les filles de Tara (Daughters of Tara)*, for which he recovers tiny clay pots created by mason wasps that oddly remind of the coil, a primary pot form found in all the oldest human civilisations. “I want to tell this story, the beauty of this exchange between human and animal, between nature and culture,” says Jonas Moëne. “My gesture is that of the storyteller, the passer, to highlight stories that are often considered insignificant.”

range of kitschy and playful objects that offer a palette of colours, textures, and ultra-contemporary shapes.

Ming-Miao Ko. **Sensual porcelain**

Ming-Miao Ko presents her project *Handle with care* for the ceramic brussels art prize. Her porcelain pieces reference the body and intimate parts by “objectifying” them, highlighting a subject-object relationship through the presentation and representation of the human body. By linking different body

easily understandable setup. This way of exhibiting imposes a sense of circulation, and allows people to gather around the table. It invites sharing, maintaining a popular dimension,” she comments. The naturalistic objects play with their representation through reinterpretations laid bare by the use of colour and enamel. Collaboration, too, is an integral part of her creative process. She thus works with set designer Olivier Brichet, who assists her in the spatial arrangement of her compositions, and with photographer Pascale Cholette, their artistic exchange highlighted in her installation for the ceramic brussels art prize.

“There is historically a whole aspect of ceramics that does not choose between representational, sculptural, utilitarian and that has always existed, especially among the earliest civilisations. I find it important that these different aspects of ceramics live together.

— *François Bauer*

Duo Vertigo. **Eccentric duo**

“Vertigo is about love,” says Nitsa Meletopoulos. Behind the duo Vertigo, Nitsa and Victor Alançon combine and deploy themselves to create four-handed objects, zany and joyful, utilitarian and funny. “We have a very strong bond with craftsmanship, with everyday life. And the desire to make things with which we live,” she clarifies. The two artists met during their studies at the Maison de la céramique de Dieulefit and have since shared a studio in Chapaize where they initially produced separately. It was in 2020, during a residency at Moly Sabata, that the duo formed from a desire to share that guides their creative process, from the idea of a piece to its realisation, from the modelling of its form to the application of the glaze. Working mainly at high temperatures with stoneware and porcelain, the duo makes their own enamels to control the shades and texture. And like their Vertigo fountain presented at the ceramic brussels art prize, they escape traditional pottery forms to propose a

parts, the artist blurs their images, mixing male and female *genitalo* — organs, ears, nipples — with elements from nature or manufactured ones — handles, bulbs, eggs, shells... — to echo questions of gender, sexuality, and reproduction. The artist from Taiwan delivers a work centred on the question of fluidity, awakened by materiality and corporeality, and offers a new meaning to the attributes carried by her pieces through metaphors, symbols, and surprising associations.

Audrey Ballacchino. **Table arts**

The question of heritage is at the heart of Audrey Ballacchino’s practice. Using multiple references, from her Sicilian roots to religious myths and art history, the artist creates installations around ceramic pieces arranged on tables, offering compositions reminiscent of a painting. “For presentation reasons, I wanted to avoid showing my pieces on a pedestal. I want to tell stories by placing objects at hand height in an

Joke Raes. **Meanderings**

Joke Raes comes from visual arts. She first studied at Sint-Lucas in Ghent and then worked in residence at HISK in Brussels. It was at the EKWC in the Netherlands that she approached ceramics, particularly porcelain. Awakened to the practice of the medium through another residency in Japan, she began to compose works that mix drawing, sculpture, and ceramics. “One of the most important aspects of my work focuses on identity and the mask,” the artist recounts. “My pieces lead to a reflection on oneself, on the perception one has of oneself, of what stands inside of us.” Presented at ceramic brussels, her pieces address these questions poetically and echo both botanical compositions and Rorschach masks, confronting the meanders of the imagination with a magnified floral nature. And in her works, the surface disappears behind an entanglement of shapes and swirls, “a sort of wild garden of the imagination” as the artist describes.



SlumberS poem (detail, 2020), Joke Raes

Courtesy Joke Raes



PORTRAIT

The Secret Seahorse
(2019-2021), Johan Creten
© Almine Rech



“MY SCULPTURES ARE TIME BOMBS”

He has played — and continues to play — a key role in the recognition of the medium. As the guest of honour at the first edition of ceramic brussels, Belgian sculptor Johan Creten has boldly and humorously built a unique body of work tinged with poetic philosophy.

As soon as one delves into the work of Johan Creten, the term “pioneer” recurs. True, although a bit limiting. When listening to his words, the notion of “taboo” emerges instead. The taboo of a denigrated material, the taboo of political and sexual subjects in art, the taboo of a snobbish and obtuse contemporary market. In his refusal to be confined to a “ghetto”, Johan Creten claims complete freedom of expression embodied by the uniqueness of his approach.

It was at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Ghent that he stumbled upon ceramics almost by chance. Born in 1963 in Sint-Truiden, Belgium, he studied painting there in the 1980s. “For the anecdote, there were a lot of painters all over the school, except for one class with two old ladies,” he recalls. “It was the ceramics workshop that offered evening classes. Once a week, the great ceramist and sculptor Carmen Dionyse would come. Following that meeting, I touched clay and realised it was something that spoke to me directly, a material I was comfortable with. But I also understood that in the contemporary art world of the time, almost no one used ceramics. It was very compartmentalised, and I felt there was a place for me.”

At that time, conceptual art dominated, rejecting the materiality of the work, leaving no room for clay, gesture, and “doing”. “Clay is a poor material, touched by the hands of the poor — the farmer, the garbage collector, the potter,” he lists. “It is far from conceptual art, where one thinks, criticises, which meant that for a long time, the art world considered ceramics to be reserved for people who did not think, period. The only discussions were about whether I fired with wood

or gas, or what glazes I used. These questions did not interest me at all. Beyond the disdain for the material, a second, ancient taboo is that of fire, of transformation. You take a piece of clay that resists time, which symbolically equates to playing God.” When he continued his studies at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, clay became a sort of militant gesture against the new minimalist academism.

In Paris, the Meyer Gallery, which had just opened its new space in Saint-Germain-des-Prés and did not hesitate to mix tribal art and twentieth-century art, was the first to represent him. It organised two exhibitions around his work: “Johan Creten: Paintings and Sculptures” in 1987 and “Kunstkamer. Installation and performance” in 1988. In turn, New York gallery owner Robert Miller dedicated an exhibition to him in 1988 with “Odore di Femmina” — another taboo, that of the feminine scent. “Robert Miller had Joan Mitchell, Robert Mapplethorpe, Lucian Freud, all taboo artists: women, homosexuals, or too singular to be linked to a movement. In my work, I combined all these elements,” he remembers. In Belgium, the Transit

“My works play with beauty. Often, people do not immediately realise that they speak of sexuality, death, extremism... My sculptures are time bombs, because they are conceptually more complex than they appear. Beyond the first decorative perception one has of them, they speak of the rot of the world, of cultural change, of societal problems. But as a Belgian, I do it with a dose of humour... — *Johan Creten*

Gallery took an interest in his work from 1990. The Villa Arson opened its doors to him. And Claudine Papillon took him to FIAC in 2001 [see p.66]. Yet, the circles of contemporary art remained deaf. “In Belgium as elsewhere, ceramics had its own environment. But using clay to talk about societal or political issues was quite unimaginable. It was decorative art. However, I reject ghettos of any kind. For thirty or forty years, I fought for my clay works to be placed alongside a Cy Twombly or a Richard Serra and for the discussion around these works to be at the same level and perspective as those on contemporary art in general.”

Blacklisted

This stance resulted in Johan Creten being on the “blacklist” for many years. From then on, Creten became a nomadic artist. “I travelled from one place to another using the clays and glazes I found on site. From porcelain at the Manufacture de Sèvres to terracotta in Mexico, etc.” Forty years of wandering from Rome to Miami, from Wisconsin to The Hague. “I received much more support from private collectors, museums, and major galleries abroad,” recalls the artist, who is now represented by Perrotin, Almine Rech, Transit, and Pilevneli.

Over the past two decades, some of the most prestigious residencies have opened their doors to him: The Manufacture Nationale de Sèvres, the Villa Medici... His allegorical sculptures in ceramic, but also in bronze, assert themselves in a baroque and colourful whirlwind. Shifts in scale, mastery of intertwined techniques, symbolic and organic figures make up a surprising bestiary populated by

phantasmagorical creatures. Colour. The ultimate taboo of “serious art” that dreamed of itself in black & white. “It’s a form of freedom that makes my life complex,” admits Johan Creten. “Each exhibition must tell a different story. If I had only continued my *Odore di Femmina*, everything was done. But I have always claimed the fact of being able to create at the same time an abstract work, a figurative work, a political work, a seductive work, and jump from one to the other with my own desire. But neither the market nor the milieu accept it, except for some exceptional collectors I have been lucky enough to meet. The public often wants to see the same works, which is both a blessing and a curse for the artist forced to remake the same work ad infinitum.”

In France, he is now part of the largest national collections: the Centre Pompidou, the Museum of Modern Art in Paris, the Museum of Hunting

and Nature, the Arts Décos, the Manufacture de Sèvres, the National Centre for Plastic Arts (CNAP), and a host of FRACs... The same is true in Belgium, where his works are present in the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Ostend and in the collections of the Ministry of the Flemish Community of Belgium and the province of Flemish Brabant. Today, the artist has settled with Jean-Michel Othoniel in a vast studio named La Solfatara in Montreuil near Paris. Catherine Dobler, founder of L’Accolade, who will host one of the winners of the ceramic brussels art prize [see p.34] in residence, was struck by her visit to this unique studio: “I have in mind his Bestiarium and particularly his bat. Baroque, tender, funny, or dissonant, his work is invigorating.” During ceramic brussels, an exhibition will revisit the complexity of his sculptural work. Not a retrospective, but a poetic evocation of his work. With the artist’s sole motto: “No ghetto!”

Johan Creten, collector

Johan Creten’s passion for sculpture and ceramics is also embodied in his own collection. First, the historical bronzes. This “study collection” was born from Johan Creten’s fascination with small bronzes. They were souvenirs that the artist brought back from his travels. From there, Johan Creten deepened his research on bronzes, first on Renaissance bronzes, then on Baroque bronzes, particularly Venetian bronzes. “They attract with their raw and rustic side, their violent and accidental casting, and their patina that recalls that of paintings,” he writes.

He also collects ancient Japanese ceramics. “Refusing the whiteness and regularity of porcelain, Johan Creten likes ceramics in which man confronts the forces of nature,” analyses Christine Shimizu, honorary general conservator of heritage and former director of the Cernuschi Museum. “Coil building, wood firing, and the random effects of surfaces are all elements in which the potter expresses both his submission to the elements and their domination. The Japanese stoneware brutalised by flames conceals its beauty beyond its appearance and reveals it at the end of a clever journey.”



Johan Creten

© Claire Dorn



The Dead Fly (2019-2021), Johan Creten

© Almine Rech



MARTEL



Dragon noir (2008), Zao Wou-Ki

Courtesy Millon

CERAMICS BREAK THE MOULD

Once a niche sector and specialty reserved for an enlightened circle, ceramics, long overlooked by the art market, are now establishing themselves as a robust sector with undeniable strengths.

The tremor has turned into a groundswell. Marginal in the art market just a few years ago, sales results for contemporary ceramics have skyrocketed over the past decade. Long considered the poor relation of the plastic arts, ceramics are now offering pleasant surprises in auction rooms. “More and more collectors are interested in this medium and are collecting it,” confirms Delphine Guillaud from the backlash gallery in Paris. “It’s a little less intimidating than it was a few years ago and has finally found its deserved place.”

Driven by an ecosystem in full structuring, the ceramics sector is thriving. One of the latest specialised sales at Phillips even reached new heights. On 31 October in London, the auction house achieved £8.2 million for the sale “Lucie Rie and Hans Coper, Exceptional Ceramics: Selections from the Estate of Jane Coper and the Former Collection of Cyril Frankel”, exceeding the high estimate by 174% and setting a new world auction record for Lucie Rie with *Footed bowl* (1981) sold for £330,200 (approximately €379,994). The most expensive work in the sale, Hans Coper’s *Black cycladic arrow* (1976), fetched £647,700 (about €745,373), another record for the artist. “This historic result marks not only an unprecedented moment in the global market for British studio ceramics but also in the ceramics market in general,” celebrated Domenico Raimondo, head of design at Phillips in Europe after the sale. “These two extraordinary collections have revealed pieces that Lucie Rie and Hans Coper kept and cherished throughout their lives, offering an intimate glimpse into their aesthetic kinship and lives. The resounding confidence shown by collectors in twentieth-century ceramics is a testament to the rarity and exceptional quality of these works.”

This enthusiasm is tempered by Didier Delville, a specialist in contemporary Japanese ceramics [see p.66]: “I note that the medium is not yet recognised as Fine Arts in the public’s mind, but this is slowly changing with the work of international galleries. It is still difficult to talk about exclusive collectors of ceramics in Belgium, France, and probably Europe. The market is mainly in the United States, where since the post-war period, museums and institutions have built beautiful public or private collections, as well as in England. But European collections are still cautious, and enthusiasts indulge in a more Decorative Art context. It is often about craftsmanship in the best sense of the term — Art & Craft —, with the concern to create a visual impact in an interior.”

Acclaimed pioneers

Masters of modern art, who very early tamed ceramics for their plastic qualities allowing the hybridisation of mediums and the breaking of genres, are unsurprisingly fetching high prices for their “object-sculptures”, like Pablo Picasso, whose *Grey owl* from 1953 shattered all records by reaching \$2.4 million in November 2018 at



Ceramic — Yellow, Black, Orange (2005), Sterling Ruby
© Christie's Images





Cycladic arrow form (1970), Hans Coper

© Phillips

Christie's, becoming the most expensive ceramic work at auction. In Vallauris, not a year passes without the ceramics auctions of *Parcours céramiques* putting Picasso at the top of the sales. In May 2023, he achieved the best result with €224,770 for a *Tripod Vase* made with the Madoura workshop in 1951 during the 6th "Ceramics & Mediterranean" auction organised at the Hôtel Belles Rives in Cap d'Antibes. Fernand Léger with his famous mural ceramics, Paul Gauguin, Raoul Dufy, Édouard Vuillard, Georges Rouault, Salvador Dali, Marcel Duchamp... all tried their hand at one time or another. For Zao Wou-Ki and Pierre Soulages, their rare forays into ceramic production reflect a renewed interest in clay among artists of this generation.

A flagship work among contemporary creations at Sèvres, the famous Soulages vase, the only foray into ceramics by the great French painter, was created in 2000 for the Presidency of the French Republic to become the trophy of a Sumo Grand Prix in Japan, presented in Tokyo by President Jacques Chirac. "The emergence of a sumo vase created in the illustrious

Manufacture de Sèvres is a discreet reminder of the widening of artists' practices to numerous disciplines in the 1970s-1980s," writes Dominique Amoureux in his recent book dedicated to the master of *outrenoir*. After displaying the prototype of the vase in Japan, Spain, Great Britain, and Korea, and due to its public success, the Manufacture de Sèvres decided in 2008, in agreement with the artist, to produce ten copies of this work. This limited edition is now a rarity. *Number 1/10* was sold for €224,491 at Artcurial in May 2012.

Another fruitful collaboration: in 2006, Zao Wou-Ki created seven porcelain vases at the Bernardaud manufacture, followed by two original vases executed at the Manufacture de Sèvres in 2008. Zao Wou-Ki's delicate ceramic production perfectly exemplifies how the artist, by choosing to paint his vases with Chinese brushes, expressed his reappropriation of materials and traditional techniques in a spirit of continuous invention. In 2016, an artist's proof of one of these glazed porcelain vases created with Bernardaud, *Hommage à Li-Po* (2008), was sold for €12,880 at Piasa. More

recently, on 27 March 2023, at Millon, Zao Wou-Ki's *Black dragon vase* (2008), a numbered porcelain EA 4/4 from an edition made by Bernardaud and the Marlborough Gallery, was sold for €6,300, below its low estimate of €7,000.

A dynamic but still marginal market

Despite the high prices achieved by some artists of the 20th century, ceramics remain a relatively accessible medium, even for big names like Zao Wou-Ki, despite a rather limited supply on the market. To give it more visibility, some houses like Piasa regularly organise specialised sales, such as the one dedicated to the collection of Italian artist Bruno Gambone in February, where a series of three sculptures, estimated between €5,000 and €7,000, went for €24,700. "Beyond the purely decorative aspect, there is a real enthusiasm for modern and contemporary ceramic collections. It's an evolving market, global, with more and more supply and demand," commented Frédéric Chambre, General Director of Piasa, on this occasion.

In the realm of contemporary ceramics, some paradoxes emerge. In spring 2023, a report published by Artprice highlighted the robust health of the contemporary ceramics market at auction while noting that auction records had not been renewed for about a decade, "an eternity for the contemporary art market" [see box]. The number of lots auctioned is small, and the price ranges are very heterogeneous. Only about a hundred ceramics signed by contemporary artists are sold each year at auction. By comparison, the annual transaction volume of the tapestry sector is six times greater than that of ceramics! "It is now possible to acquire a major work by a Japanese artist at a price that is nowhere near the 'excesses' of contemporary art in general — justified or not," observes collector Didier Delville. Despite some uncertainties in the secondary market, one thing is certain: ceramics is a sector with a future.

A market overview

In April 2023, Artprice published a report titled *Ceramic creations on the Contemporary art auction market*. Focusing on artists born after 1945, the analysis scrutinised the results of ceramic sales over the past ten years. The report pointed to a "moderate" demand during this period but emphasised a contracted supply, with the annual number of lots sold being halved over ten years. Over this reference decade, only Juan Munoz and Ai Weiwei crossed the \$500,000 mark, with records dating back to 2011 for the former and 2014 for the latter. Another creator from the same generation, American Sterling Ruby, sold his last ceramic at auction ten years ago (\$31,000 for *Ceramic — Yellow, Black, Orange*). At the time, demand for his works was strong at auctions, all techniques combined, but it has since waned. British artist Grayson Perry is more frequently present in the auction room, but rarely with significant pieces. The ceramics he has recently sold are minor pieces worth between \$250 and \$1,500 only. "However, the apparent lack of energy in the auction market should not lead to the belief that current production is at a 'standstill'. On the contrary, several artists (often under 50) are rekindling the flame of ceramics today," the report noted. Works of American Roberto Lugo are traded between \$1,500 and \$5,000 in the United States; Ukrainian Zhana Kadyrova — represented by Continua gallery — is accessible for under \$10,000 at auctions; the creations of Japanese ceramist Takuro Kuwata are negotiated for less than \$1,500, and the stoneware of British Matthew Chambers is available for less than \$4,000 in auction rooms.



Hommage à Li-Po (2008), Zao Wou-Ki

Courtesy Piasa



MON COEUR



“CERAMICS, A CONTEMPORARY HISTORY”

ceramic brussels is the first fair in Europe exclusively dedicated to ceramics. It echoes the growing interest in artisanal practices, galvanised in recent years by institutions.

A decade ago, the exhibition of ceramic works was the domain of a few specialised art galleries. Thanks to the work of artists like Johan Creten [see box p.46], ceramics gradually rose out of its traditional frame to offer works that are fully integrated into the field of art. Through the efforts of museum institutions dedicated to contemporary practices, artists using this medium have gained increasing recognition and visibility.

Contemporary repositioning

In the 1980s, the contemporary art scene was focused on minimalism and conceptual art. In the realms of art, architecture, and design, the trend was towards stripped-down aesthetics, countering the crafty style of the ceramic practices of the time. Christine Germain-Donnat, former director of heritage and collections at the Manufacture de Sèvres, comments: “There was a sort of ‘pottery’ aspect that had imposed itself and belonged more to craftsmanship.” The style then resembled serial productions and revolved around traditional forms — bowls, vases, plates — which tended to reduce ceramics to its utilitarian dimension.

It was the artists who revived interest in ceramics by re-enlisting it in the realm of fine arts, with Johan Creten as the spearhead of the movement: “He was one of the great craftsmen of the medium’s revival,” comments Christine Germain-Donnat. “He repositioned ceramics in the field of sculpture, always wishing his works to be presented in contemporary art salons or exhibitions.” Like Bernard Dejonghe, born in 1942, who through his sculptures works both glass and clay, or Anne

Barres born in 1938, who composes large ceramic wall pieces, Johan Creten gave a new impetus encouraging his peers to use the medium in a contemporary context.

These artists produce objects that move beyond utility by offering sculptures, wall-hangable pieces, installations, and more. And such works progressively grabbed the attention of institutions and museum curators such as Christine Germain-Donnat. Having started with classical ancient ceramics and then faience of the 17th and 18th centuries, she quickly became interested in contemporary productions.

Revitalising museum collections

It is through the action of curators sensitive to the medium that contemporary ceramics begin to appear in museums. Now at the helm of the Museum of Hunting and Nature in Paris, Christine Germain-Donnat was in the 2000s in charge of the Museum of Fine Arts and the Museum of Ceramics in Rouen. She recalls: “The goal was to revitalise the museum because it is dedicated to the ceramics of the *Grand Siècle*. So, I

3D ceramic printing

3D ceramic printers emerged about a decade ago. The technique is additive and involves producing parts layer by layer, applied one on top of the other to form the desired object. This is one of the digital tools used by the artist Michel Paysant. In his work, he blends art, science, and technology, treating nanotechnologies, neurosciences, and artisanal forms — like glass, weaving... and ceramics — as equals. These are fields he explores transversally in the research laboratory he set up at the École Nationale Supérieure d'Art et de Design de Limoges (ENSAD). "Ceramics are very, very ancient. But it's interesting to consider the position of digital tools in traditional techniques and to question the role of new technologies," he comments. For him, practices are not exclusive: these new technologies serve as a relay, allowing the production of more complex forms that could not be made traditionally. However, he notes the current absence of 3D ceramics in exhibitions and fairs. As artisanal techniques make a strong comeback, digital tools might, on the contrary, signify the disappearance of the artist's hand. "There might be a mistrust towards digital technology," Michel Paysant concedes. He, however, explains: "But even a 3D printer, which produces a piece designed on a computer, requires constant attention. We accompany the fabrication process and the sensitive approach, and the relationship with the material remains absolutely equivalent to traditional techniques."

collections by seeking to acquire pieces by contemporary artists.

Through the acquisition of contemporary works into museum collections and by organising exhibitions exclusively dedicated to ceramics, institutions also awaken public interest. This helps to introduce the practice and its techniques, its modes of production, its creative possibilities... Christine Germain-Donnat recalls her years at the Rouen ceramics museum: "I saw people take an interest in this material they did not know. It's fascinating to teach people the ins and outs of producing a ceramic work, the heating methods, for example, or to show that porcelain reacts and shrinks."

Exhibiting contemporary pieces in an old museum dispersed throughout the museum space draws attention. The public is immediately captivated by something they did not expect to see. And that's what interests me a lot.

— *Christine Germain-Donnat*

decided to introduce contemporary creation by exhibiting contemporary works." The curator acquired pieces by Carole Chebron or Dominique Angel, and organised an exhibition titled "Ceramic fiction" in 2006. This exhibition notably presented contemporary artists' works — including, for instance, Johan Creten's *La grande vague* — created at the Manufacture de Sèvres for an exhibition at the Louvre earlier in the year, from December 2005 to February 2006, titled "Counterpoint, From the object of art to sculpture, Contemporary Porcelains".

Between 2016 and 2019, Christine Germain-Donnat headed the museum of the Manufacture de Sèvres, a French international institution that combines the Sèvres porcelain factory — active since the 18th century —, and the national ceramics museum — founded in the 19th century. The factory had been interested in contemporary productions since the 19th century: the goal was to provide its craftsmen with examples of what was being done elsewhere and of the creativity of artists of their time. When she took office, the challenge was, once again, to revitalise the

This is also what the exhibition "The Flames: The Age of Ceramics" held at the Museum of Modern Art in Paris did from October 2021 to February 2022. Third part of a project focused on artisanal practices after "Decorum" in 2013 (dedicated to tapestry), and "Medusa" in 2017 (dedicated to jewellery), "The Flames" showcased objects from the Neolithic to the present day and included pieces by contemporary artists. And because it offered a new perspective on objects and techniques that had not been considered contemporary or part

At Sèvres, the collection is absolutely fabulous. It was interesting to show the most beautiful pieces since the collection contains about 50,000, and to enrich this collection. I wanted to open new paths; I bought a lot of contemporary art.

— *Christine Germain-Donnat*



Christine Germain-Donnat

Courtesy Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature

of the fine arts realm until then, the event had a major impact on the institutional recognition of ceramics.

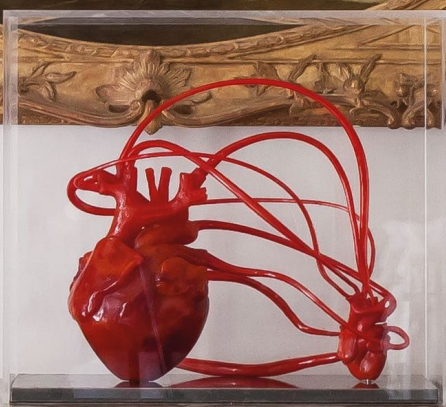
Current practices

Christine Germain-Donnat even notes a significant change. “I find that today, ceramics have become essential. I can no longer imagine a contemporary art fair without ceramics. Whereas video, on the other hand, has almost disappeared,” she notes. Along with tapestry, ceramics have indeed gradually established themselves in the contemporary sphere, in exhibitions, salons, and art fairs. Reflecting a growing attraction to practices from craftsmanship on the part of both the public and artists, this trend seems to have accelerated after Covid, with a need to return to the materiality of objects.

“The artists who practice ceramics today rarely call themselves ‘ceramists,’” notes the director of the Museum of Hunting and Nature. They are now rather “plastic artists”, the boundaries between sculpture, installation, and ceramics having been broken down. And this liberation showcases increasingly monumental works, “rather pieces as such and fewer installations than before or ceramic-video duos,” continues Christine Germain-Donnat. And to add: “Five or six years ago, I saw a lot more very fragile pieces, delicate things, imprints... Today, artists are proposing robust, grandiose, reassuring works in a sense. I would almost say ‘tangible’. There is both a technical search and often, a sense of scale.”

The works presented by galleries at ceramic brussels attest to the diversity of practices of a decompartmentalised contemporary ceramics, always more open to new forms and techniques. And today, one thing is certain, the medium is brimming with an infinity of creative possibilities still to be explored.





ARTISTS

Claudine Papillon
Courtesy Galerie Papillon

Galila Barzilai-Holender

DR



VOICES OF CERAMICS

They advocate for the recognition of the medium with fervour and determination. Galleries at ceramic brussels speak of their passion for ceramics and the artists who bring it to life.

Almost sixty galleries have responded to the call of the first edition of ceramic brussels, and their enthusiasm is tangible. Whether generalist or specialised, focused on emerging talents or well-known figures in contemporary art, the participating galleries are busy curating their selections. This is a first for all of them: accustomed to international contemporary art fairs, they now have the opportunity to exclusively present ceramics, a significant departure from their usual displays of paintings or sculptures. Testimonies from the starting blocks of the fair's preparation.

**Bert de Leenheer, Transit Gallery (Mechelen, Belgium):
“Thanks to ceramic brussels, we’ve realised the impact
of ceramics on artists”**

“In our 35 years as a gallery, ten artists have incorporated ceramic in their artwork. Primarily Johan Creten, for whom ceramics are the essence of his story, a choice from the beginning of his career. Then there’s Mehdi-Georges Lahlou, who has only recently but increasingly and surprisingly used ceramics. However, only a few solo exhibitions of Johan Creten were purely ceramic at our gallery. We haven’t organised exhibitions with ceramics as the starting point, but this gives us ideas. Thanks to ceramic brussels, we realised the impact of ceramics on our artists. So far, we don’t know any collectors who only choose ceramics, but we aim to show how varied and rich the medium can be in the work of any artist open to different techniques and materials. Our stand for ceramic brussels will be a historically designed space, presenting works by Thomas Huber, Nikita Kadan, Jenny Watson, and Kocheisen & Hullman, as well as recent works by Michael Sailstorfer. Belgian artists who use ceramics

complementarily include Christophe Terlinden, Bram Van Meervelden, and Herman Van Ingelgem.”

**Claudine Papillon, Papillon Gallery
(Paris): “I make no hierarchy
among techniques”**

“I don’t associate the use of a technique or material with a trend. Artists encounter mediums. Personally, I see no hierarchy among techniques. I can exhibit ceramics as easily as video. In 2001, I had a ceramics stand at FIAC featuring Elsa Sahal, Erik Dietman, Françoise Vergier, and Johan Creten. Back then, it was seen as a *passé* material, confused with pottery and a ‘collection of bowls’. It’s interesting to see how perceptions have changed among viewers and collectors. Some say ceramics are fragile, but I’ve seen bronzes fall and get damaged too! It’s all relative... Ceramics live well in an interior.”

“Elsa Sahal, who we’re showing in Brussels, expresses herself almost entirely through ceramic, with a pronounced taste for the material and modelling. We’ve been working together for over 25 years. I met her

as Erik Dietman's student at Beaux-Arts towards the end of his life (Claudine Papillon is the artist's widow, ed). Back then, I was setting up an exhibition called 'Works of All Hairs', and Elsa was mixing all sorts of things, including hairs, into her ceramics! Erik himself had two ceramic periods. The first in the 1980s, inspired by a souvenir and pottery shop in Italy, leading to a series named *M Potter's Nightmare* as he became a nightmare for the potter by destroying half his work! His second ceramic period came later, working with CIRVA in Marseille. The director of Beaux-Arts invited him as they had kilns and a ceramics studio but no teacher. Erik accepted, curious about new challenges. He created another series where the presence of clay loaves is felt. In a beautiful text, he talks about the mistreatment of this clay, how he threw and trampled it, but artists often struggle with material!"

Delphine Guillaud, backslash Gallery (Paris): "An exciting and promising medium for the future"

"Contemporary artists approach ceramic with unreserved and barrier-free application, which is refreshing. It's clear that anything is possible and no limits are imposed, despite the discipline's challenging and fragile nature. Of course, many precautions are involved, but the current generation freely pursues their ideas and projects. Far from trends, contemporary artists tackle biscuit, porcelain, or earthenware with the same zeal as stoneware or terracotta. It's promising for the future and exciting. There are increasingly more artist residencies dedicated to ceramic, which is great! The gallery represents several artists for whom this practice is central. We give it as much importance as 'traditional' mediums like painting or drawing.

Among the artists the gallery represents, three practice ceramics diligently. For instance, France Bizot creates numerous ceramic series, mastering the technique as masterfully as drawing. It's also common for a solo exhibition to primarily feature ceramics, as with French artist Florian Mermin or Mongolian artist Odonchimeg Davaadorj, whom we're dedicating our stand at ceramic brussels to. Florian Mermin's attraction to ceramics stems from the uncanny strangeness of ancient and contemporary tales, from Charles Perrault to Tim Burton, whose worlds come to life in three dimensions. And Odonchimeg Davaadorj has worked with ceramics for years, using the technique to convey the Mongolian heritage of her childhood. Shaman spirits and steppe landscapes form her artistic universe."

Thomas Ghaye, La peau de l'Ours Gallery (Ixelles): "Ceramics allow for the crossing of mediums"

"Ceramics have been present since our gallery's inception in 2007 and occupy a significant part of our programming, a part that has only grown over the years. I've developed a personal interest in this medium and the exploitation by artists I represent. It's the preferred medium of many of them. Why? Perhaps because ceramics allow them to explore what I call 'the den', the object-den, the sculptural-den. It's a common thread in the recent exhibitions I've done. We're often dealing with productions that play on the porosity of mediums, as ceramics are at the crossroads of forms, allowing the crossing of genres and touching on different styles, design, sculpture, furniture, decorative arts, installations. It's up to the viewer to decide whether they're looking at a sculpture or a stool. For example,

Studio Biscuit, currently exhibited at the gallery, is a duo that plays with these somewhat blurry boundaries. They work with extrusion and create their own CNC moulds to reinterpret urban furniture, railings, benches, streetlamps, which they deform into unique pieces, blurring the line between objects and sculptures. Ann Rikkers moulds her clay directly on the ground to take impressions of a place, then reassembles them as if welding metal pieces. It's a somewhat brutal construction, very different from single-piece ceramics. Safia Hijos' practice differs. She doesn't work on the object but rather on the history of ceramics and what it evokes. Plants and vines, sometimes several meters long, emerge from ceilings and walls. It's very powerful, and I want to show all these varieties of contemporary ceramic expressions at ceramic brussels."

Didier Delville, Delville's Oriental Art Collection (Brussels): "The art of Japanese ceramics is rooted in both history and innovation"

"Twenty years ago, I started a Japanese collection and in 2019, I set out to discover contemporary Japanese ceramists. Contemporary Japanese ceramics often fascinate due to the tension between venerating a deeply rooted traditional practice and the equally imperative desire to innovate. There are few art forms where the awe and burden of the past are so apparent, yet so evident in present opportunities. The result can be a reconciliation of past and present. The works I collect come from the most remarkable Japanese artists — and thus widely represented in museums. They offer a unique perspective of today's Japan. These works reflect the diversity of contemporary Japanese ceramics. Clearly, artists are not confined by specific techniques or traditional



Thomas Ghaye

© La Peau de l'Ours



A Sheep Called Bedotte (2021), Johan Creten

Courtesy Almine Rech Gallery





Didier Delville
© Karima Hajji. Courtesy Delville Oriental Art

shapes and formats. In this context, it's evident that the best among them devote their lives to this medium. It's hard to imagine otherwise. I'm drawn to the serenity and balance of Japanese art. The art of ceramics is rooted in history and is innovative. There's a sober and very deliberate use of line that seems simple, yet the technique is incredibly complex, noble, and heroic. It's a sort of paradox that simplicity can be incredibly rich. My choices strike a balance between the two. For me, living with Japanese Art, I see the work not necessarily as functional, but as an element of beauty in a space, like a blank canvas for the imagination. It's an aesthetic perspective, but also philosophical where I make the works converse. A new context for Japanese works is to be created. And I experiment with this aspect in 'The Delville Collection', an integral part of my life. With Japan, there's a recurring theme of the natural world, and when it touches on the expressionist abstraction of material, Art freely emerges, without barriers."

**Vincent Sator (Sator Gallery, Romainville):
‘ceramic brussels is the ultimate
proof of the medium’s recognition’**

"The increasing recognition of ceramics as such in the contemporary art world is evident. The ceramic brussels fair is the ultimate proof of this. Earth has long been considered a poor material and the medium was relegated to decorative arts. Moreover, the utilitarian aspect of the object made it less noble in the eyes of some. However, for about a decade, ceramics has been recognised as an art in its own right. The art market is sometimes a bit cynical. It's always looking for novelty, new forms, new

trends. In short, new veins to exploit, but not necessarily for the right reasons... Let's not forget that in Europe, the culture of pictorial heritage is powerful. If we draw a parallel with photography, it was recognised much earlier as a medium in its own right in the United States. The collectors I work with are more focused on a desire for the work than on questioning its long-term profitability. For them, the question of whether the work is ceramic or not is irrelevant."

"In any case, ceramic artists are better regarded today. Like photography and drawing, some dedicate themselves exclusively to it, others mix it with other practices. This is the case with Christian Gonzenbach, whom we are presenting at ceramic brussels. He primarily works with ceramics, but for more substantial installations, he can mix it with wood or metal."

3 questions to... Gwenvael Launay

Gwenvael Launay is the director of Almine Rech Gallery in Brussels.

How do contemporary artists exploit ceramics today?

Ceramic practices have evolved significantly over the course of history. Contemporary artists have developed various approaches, and some, like Johan Creten, have embraced it as a central element of their practice from the beginning of their careers. When Pablo Picasso started working with ceramic in 1947 in Vallauris, in addition to his very rich and varied work (paintings, sculptures, drawings, engravings...), he immersed himself in a different universe and helped to disseminate this practice and to work in a community. Today, contemporary artists still create ceramics in complement to, and without distinction from, their painting work, like Miquel Barceló or Jean-Baptiste Bernadet, for example.

What place does ceramics hold at Almine Rech?

We have several artists who work with ceramics and in 2018 in New York, we organised an exhibition exclusively dedicated to this medium: "By Fire, Ceramic Works". This exhibition brought together historical artists like Pablo Picasso, Lucio Fontana, Günther Förg, Wifredo Lam, Joan Miró, and contemporary artists like Claire Tabouret, Betty Woodman, Julian Schnabel, Ron Nagle.

Which artists will you present at ceramic brussels?

We are presenting ceramics by Johan Creten, with whom we have been working for more than ten years and who is the patron of this first edition of the fair [see p.46]. It is an honour for us to present his work, especially in this context, as Johan Creten is a Belgian artist who has been working with ceramics since the 1990s, a time when this medium was much less in vogue. His work has since been recognised on the international stage and exhibited in numerous museums. He currently has three sculptures on display in the permanent collections of the Musée d'Art moderne de Paris and a group of "Points of Observation" in the Dufy room of the same museum.





Hanabi (2019), Christian Gonzenbach
Courtesy Christian Gonzenbach, Sator Gallery

FRONT



SUSTAINABLE INNOVATIONS IN ARTWORK CLEANING AND RESTORATION

The cleaning of artworks is a fundamental pillar in the restoration process of a work of art. It involves the use of products that researchers from the GREENART project are working to transform to make them sustainable.

In the practices of art conservation and restoration, two branches stand out: preventive conservation and remedial conservation. The former targets elements external to the artwork, such as its containers, display cases, crates, or boxes, as well as the surrounding air, which can be treated against pollution for instance. Remedial conservation, on the other hand, involves direct contact with the object using materials applied to the artwork to clean, strengthen, or protect it. While strengthening and protective actions add materials to the object, cleaning involves removing layers from its surface. Dust, dirt, biopollution, or patinas from microorganisms are thus eliminated, as well as sometimes aged varnishes or adhesives that can harm the artwork and its appearance when they degrade.

Gels, emulsions, and foams are products used by restorers to carry out cleaning effectively. These are also the focus of efforts by researchers from the GREENART project, involved in the issue of artwork cleaning and restoration, coordinated by Prof. Piero Baglioni and his team at CSGI (Center for Colloid and Surface Science). Among them, David Chelazzi, expert in chemistry and doctor in cultural heritage conservation at the University of Florence and CSGI, explains: “We want to make them green, using green materials, green methodologies. They must become sustainable in all aspects, with non-toxic raw materials and energy-efficient production.” At the core of the entire project, the use of ecological materials involves considering all stages of production of the newly developed products.

Production stages

To successfully develop their products, researchers follow several steps. They must first select and

provide basic components: “This is when we select the best non-toxic and affordable materials,” comments David Chelazzi. Afterwards gels, nanoparticles, films, polymer dispersions are assembled and evaluated in the laboratory, and then with restorers to measure their effectiveness. Then, the team at CSGI, accompanied by Elena Semezin, a doctor in environmental sciences at the Ca’ Foscari University of Venice, and her team, ensures in a new examination the consideration of product requirements at all stages of its life, integrating them with the information produced by all GREENART partners.

Researchers have two paths for manufacturing their products. The first involves taking the best materials manufactured in recent decades and rewriting them using more environmentally friendly components. The second involves creating entirely new systems. “There are many materials available. Waste too, or natural and biological compounds that we can give a new life to,” the researcher reveals. “In reality, the most challenging

aspect is to rethink and recombine these materials, with certain chemical or physical manipulations, which is at the very core of our work.” In the development of these products, each step counts, and their formulation is decisive to achieve effective results.

Green and effective

The criterion of effectiveness is a major element for GREENART researchers, as their new products must surpass what is currently available on the market. This effectiveness depends on both the sensitivity of the surface of the objects to be treated and the versatility of the prepared materials. David Chelazzi explains: “When we use gels to clean artworks, we want to be sure that they can remove dirt or aged varnishes without altering the original pigments and different layers.” Traditional solvent blends can cause the paint to swell or dull the colours; thus, they may require a step-by-step check of dirt removal. On the contrary, the innovative gels developed by GREENART allow for selectivity in removing dirt between the gel and the paint: “It’s a safer and faster process because there is no need to constantly check what we are doing,” comments the researcher.

Traditional methods, in fact, use poorly confined organic solvents, which contain inherent toxicity and are often derived from petroleum-based compounds. Composed of natural, waste-derived or “green” synthetic polymers, the gels developed by GREENART are less toxic. They can also be applied better controlled: “Improving efficiency is not only about the quantity of elements removed from the surface of an object but also about the safety with which they are removed,” notes David Chelazzi. The GREENART gels and cleaning liquids allow for detaching varnishes from the surface rather than completely dissolving them, as traditional methods do today.

Durable products

GREENART’s new materials are greener and more effective. Here, the requirement for sustainability does not compromise its effectiveness; on the contrary, GREENART’s ecological approach goes hand in hand with the proper conservation of cultural heritage: a sustainable conservation over time, environmentally friendly but also respectful of the treated objects. Similarly, the emulsions developed by researchers use water, aiming to maximise cleaning effects while minimising waste.

As for the sustainability criteria of a product, they extend to its entire life cycle. “They must also be safe in their application and use by restorers, conservators, and all possible users,” explains David Chelazzi. “We not only want to use innovative and effective materials but also make them, as far as possible, affordable for users. And in general, offer a quality significantly superior to reference products on the market for the same price.” Beyond an obvious ecological dimension, GREENART’s new products must also meet safety standards, providing non-toxic formulations, as well as financial criteria by being affordable. For them to be sustainable, their prices should not be too high. “Or, they must be justified by a very high quality of the material and long-lasting effectiveness, over fifty, a hundred years,” comments the researcher.

Cross-cutting benefits

If the world of art conservation and restoration seems limited compared to the scope of the project, it’s because the efforts made by researchers are not confined to this single domain. Here, it is also a matter of social well-being, preserving the identity of a society through its material goods, and facilitating future generations’ access to artworks, endowing the sustainable approach advocated by GREENART with symbolic value. And in a more concrete perspective,

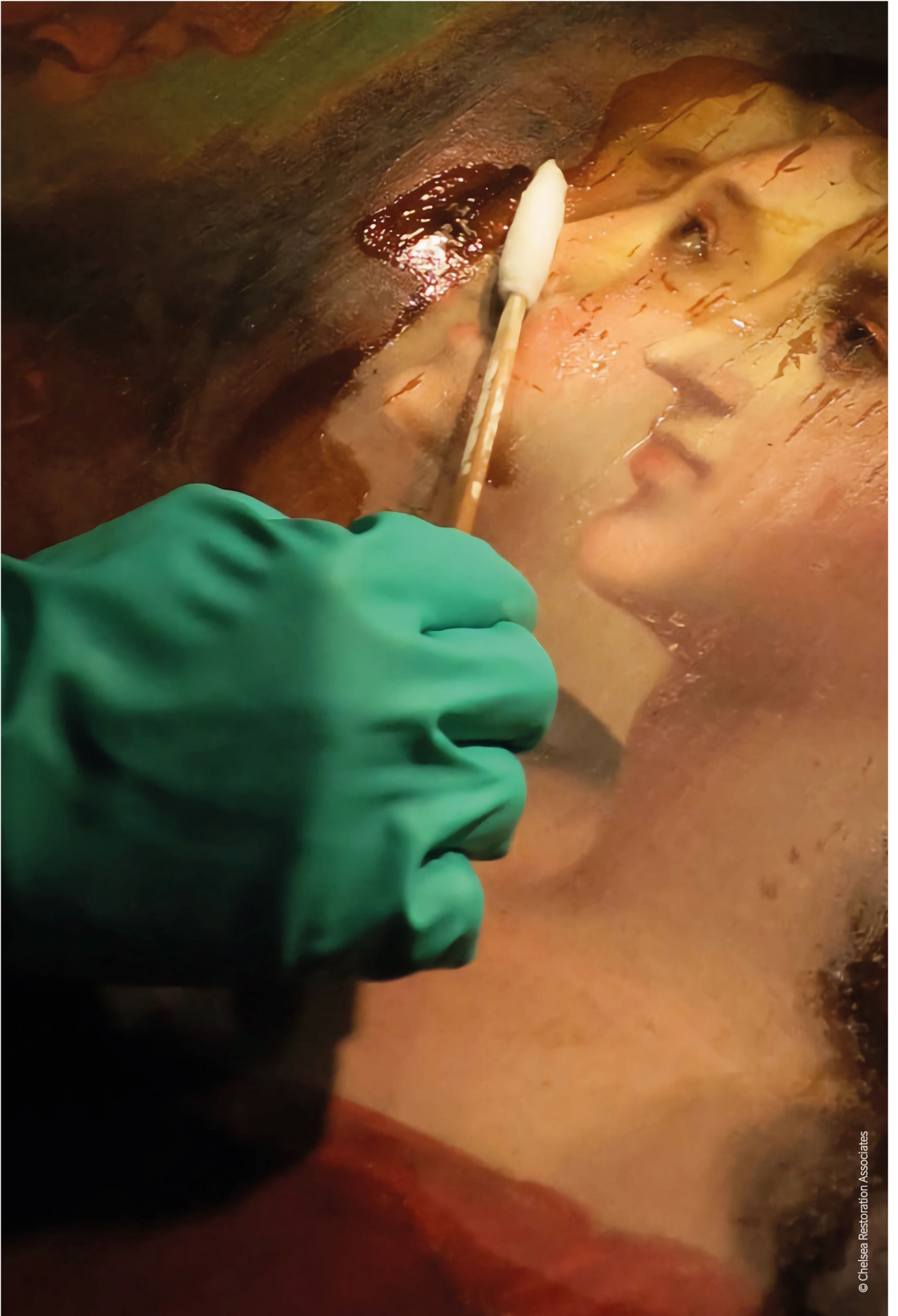
the solutions provided by the scientists could extend to other scientific and technological fields.

If the developed materials can be transferred to other sectors, the same applies to the methodology followed by GREENART. The development of the life-cycle assessment method, in particular, allows for harmonising green standards: “The scientific framework we are developing and the ecological methodology we are following can be used for the food, pharmaceutical, or cosmetic industries,” notes David Chelazzi. The scope of research for the green conservation and restoration of artworks thus goes far beyond this single field.

Towards the transmission of the green approach

In the field of research in cultural heritage conservation, the question of sustainable development is receiving increasing attention. While already in the 1970s, a handful of scientists began to delve into the subject, research has gained momentum in the last fifteen years, with an acceleration in the last five years. “We didn’t exactly start from scratch,” comments David Chelazzi. “Cleaning, in particular, is one of the areas in which the CSGI had the most experience, so we are well advanced.”

Currently, the CSGI team and research groups in GREENART are completing evaluations of their products in the laboratory, which will soon be tested by restorers. Their use differs from traditional tools due to their physico-chemical mechanisms; hence, professionals will also need to be trained. A decisive step, which also poses a challenge for GREENART. As not all users of these products are scientists, it will also involve offering workshops and meetings with restorers to raise awareness of these new products. “And for people to trust us, we also have to show that what we are currently developing really does work,” concludes David Chelazzi.





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