



## « 8 artistes & la terre »

Champy | Dejonghe | Godderidge | Lerat  
Muraour | Nagasawa | Pontoreau | Virot

THE ARIANA MUSEUM IN GENEVA, SWITZERLAND IS renowned for being an art centre having one of the largest collections of ancient and modern ceramics in Europe. It also has a dynamic policy for organising exhibitions of contemporary ceramics.

In 2013, the curators organised the exhibition « 8 artistes & la terre »: eight artists singled out in France and elsewhere, noticed for their original use of clay as a material, since the 1970s. These artists contributed to the elaboration of the book « 8 artistes & la terre » edited by ARgile Editions in 2009: the idea was that these artists recognised by their peers would stimulate a reflection on their respective work with clay. The book's originality consisted in having the artists describe their creative processes, their stories, their commitments, as well as their places in contemporary art over and above the ceramics field.

Amongst these « 8 » and an art amateur, there developed a period of gestation during which reflections and rather intense exchanges took place resulting in the quality of their writings. Moreover, this book was able to benefit from commentaries made by such personalities as Germain Viatte, former director of the National Museum of Modern Art in Paris; Jean-Pierre Thibaudat, reporter at large and theatre critic; George Collins, philosopher and art critic. Also, on an editorial level, this book was appreciated for its singular presentation: a lively object underlined by the dialogue of photographs, artists' texts and third party remarks. It would seem then to have succeeded in its objective of arousing a reflection in the French art world on clay as an element in the evolution of contemporary art since the 1970s. It has also contributed to the renewed interest for this medium (clay) by both artist and art lover.

Those in charge at the Ariana Museum dedicated the beautiful upper level galleries which enjoy a beautiful natural light to the artworks of Jacqueline Lerat. The works of the other seven artists were grouped together both in isolation and in confrontation, in the beautiful exhibition space of the lower level.

This exhibition was also an occasion that gave rise to two debates: one with the seven artists; the other on the evolutionary trends of ceramics beginning with Lucio Fontana until today. The participants were :Germain Viatte, Valérie da Costa, Denis Pernet, Setsuko Nagasawa and Philippe Godderidge.

In order to underline the interest of the artists' testimonies, I will quote their remarks as taken from their book « 8 artistes & la terre ».

JACQUELINE LERAT, THE ELDEST OF THE ARTISTS, DECEASED IN 2009

"The life of the form depends on the quality of the contact, of the sensitive encounter of the hand, of the gesture and of the clay, somewhat like the pianist whose touch of the note gives to the sound its particular colour, its life. It was necessary for me to rediscover those moments that escape us so easily, where time lives in a privileged relationship with space, inside, outside, the body, the gesture, the thought, those relationships that I relive with music, dance, words. . . an open landscape where the work constructs itself. All these little bits of clay that I save, which I bind together to elaborate this 'other body' are for me as many letters which, assembled, become words, a sentence, an outline in search of a writing. In each volume, fired or not, there is a hope for the vertical, the ability to maintain a tension preserved from a feeble profile or the collapse of the form."

*Article by Françoise de L'Epine*



Facing page: *Installation View*. Photo by N Sabato.

Top left: *Claude Champy*.

Top right: *Bernard Dejonghe*.

Above left: *Philippe Godderidge*.

Above right: *Jacqueline Lerat*.

#### CLAUDE CHAMPY

"Ceramics as far as I am concerned is a void with clay around it. In contrast to sculpture, the connection interior/exterior is one of the components for reading the piece. (Even my wall panels are constructed to enclose a void between the wall on which they will hang and the actual visible surface of the panel). The notches, the tears, the scratches, rest on this void. It could not be otherwise in my mind. Or else, it would be like tiling and that is not my thing. For more than 20 years, I have practically only used two enamels: one black and one white. For me, the enamel is not precious. It is a raw material on par with clay. As such, it does not have a particular value. Only the way I use it, gives it its sense.

#### BERNARD DEJONGHE

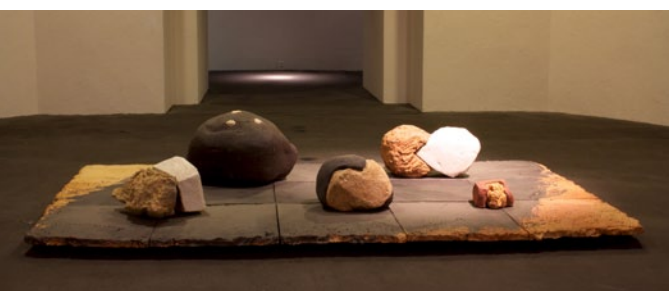
"I think that even with a constraining material such as the ceramic material, one must arrive at a forceful expression, which can be perceived on the same level as painting, sculpture, dance, music, writing. . . The trips to the Sahara . . . have had a large influence on my work. . . I have seen the skin of the earth crackle and I have taken conscience of time as long geological time. The phenomenon of fusion. . . is a trip into the mineral world with all that this might entail; it is being in familiarity with earth. The expression 'playing with fire' is rather accurate. One must be a player, liking risk to practice this activity. . . one needs sufficient time for the minerals to be transformed; one must accept that time needs time, long time. It is out of the question to have someone else do the firing. It is what differentiates the ceramist from the designer or from the manufacturer of an object."

#### PHILIPPE GODDERIDGE

"I like my work to be a constant seesaw between object and installation, between pottery and sculpture. . ." Of the beautiful text that he read at the June 7th conference in Geneva at the Ariana Museum, certain passages appear essential to his work and perhaps even for all « 8 » artists: "Ceramics has always had the problem of being considered on the other side. . . relegated to art objects, listed with industrial arts. . . to admit to being a ceramist, can at times, be a provocation. To accept the void : one must just accept who we are. . . and we are what we make. To invite the unknown: the specific relationship to time that ceramics entertains, allows me to accept a world where slowness would be normal. . . It is a question of resisting (eminently political) to find one's proper rhythm, to avoid the frenzy that would make us forget how to think. To keep away from the flock. To maintain the will to slow down despite the pressures encountered to do otherwise."

#### MICHEL MURAOUR

"Ceramics came about and I knew it would give a sense to my life when I met José Llorens Artigas. . . Aimé Maeght, who appreciated Artigas and his work, would give to ceramics recognition when in 1970 he suggested I install a ceramics workshop in Saint Paul de Vence. In this studio, afterwards directed by Hans Spinner, worked Chillida, Tàpies, Rebeyrolle. To work with Rebeyrolle was a pleasure. He liked clay and was not afraid of accidents. . . He came to my place with a



Top left: Michel Muraour.  
 Top right: Netsuko Nagasawa.  
 Above left: Daniel Pontoreau.  
 Above right: Camille Virot.

small maquette scale model. . . Totem six metres high is now in Eymoutiers at Espace Rebeyrolle.”

**SETSUKO NAGASAWA**

“Ceramics is the essential medium in my creation. Unconsciously, I carry within me a refusal for the sedentary and an assertion for my wild side. One must learn to listen to it (the material clay) to know it in depth in order to take the best advantage of its malleability as well as of its resistance. I always proceed with a double approach: as a potter, I work with a clay that I know to be alive ; as a sculptor (and that is the acquired dimension), I am the creator who dominates the material. But the more profound part, the first, the essential, tends to take precedence. As for the majority of Japanese of my generation, my aesthetic apprenticeship came to me via the garden. . . I was therefore able to learn about space, light, sensations.”

**DANIEL PONTOREAU**

“I consider that objects do not exist as such; their perceptions vary according to the environment. I feel a relation of fusion between the form and space, as if the void becomes palpable. The void takes on a thickness, a different density, determined by the dialogue that the objects establish between themselves. I have an ambiguous rapport with the material. . . I don’t make a great distinction with the materials I employ. I use simple and physical elements that in place, tend to inverse the gravity, disturb, perturb, even unbalance it. I would like my sculptures to attain that quality where the elements would be in symbiosis; as if it were evident that the atoms of the void were of the same nature as the atoms of the material. After 40 years of sculpture, I am ready to become an architect.”

**CAMILLE VIROT**

“I think today (interview of 1994) that what interests me in the Japanese raku is not Japan but what the raku could have of black Africa: a work that is instinctive, physical, sacred; a work that remains faithful to the material without denaturalising it. The Japanese bowl is black African in the sense that it integrates nature and does not compete with it. . . the bowl will always be part of my work, a sculpture with a human dimension that never gives in to the spectacular or to the gigantic, that questions the problem interior/ exterior and the relation between the two; of the modesty of the work, of the verticality, of multiple positions, of shifts in space. The ceramic object is not ‘a real sculpture’ as it can be held in the hand; it begs for this contact. If one contents oneself with looking at it from a distance, it is no longer an object but a landscape. Three golden rules: matter, shape and scale will underline the plastic construction. What matters is situated at the level of the articulation between the volumes that compose the same object. Or, the void between two objects. . . the void between the body and the cover as in Ronchamp (Le Corbusier) between the wall and the shell of the roof.”

Thus, this exhibition was an occasion to prolong the reflections and the analyses treated in the book while stimulating an exchange of viewpoints between curators, art historians, artists and the public. Those responsible hence contributed to underlining the value of the evolution of clay as a medium who over the last decades have developed diverse singularities and for which artists of the younger generation are becoming increasingly interested.

Françoise de L’Epine is a writer on the arts living in Paris. Translation by Elisabeth van der Does-Szantyr. The exhibition was held at Ariana Museum, 27 March – 8 September, 2013.