

In Studio with Yael Novak

Evelyne Schoenmann



Yael, can you share the story of how you first discovered ceramics and what drew you to the medium?

My journey began when I was working as a teacher and guide at the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem. I was allocated a room filled with beautiful ancient Nabataean pottery and that is where my fascination with ancient cultures and ceramics first took root. Being surrounded daily by these vessels – objects that carried both history and function – sparked a deep curiosity in me about clay as a medium. Over time, this fascination grew into a calling, leading me to explore the expressive, material and cultural dimensions of ceramics as my artistic language.

The fascination with the tactile and

transformative qualities of clay sparked my artistic journey. There was something both grounding and limitless about it. I was drawn to the immediacy of working with my hands, the dialogue between fragility and permanence and the deep history of clay as one of humanity's oldest creative languages. Over time, I realized ceramics wasn't just about form or craft – it was about narrative, symbolism and the way objects can hold meaning across centuries.

When you're starting a new piece, what usually comes first – the concept, the form, or the material? Or does it change every time?

It changes from project to project, but with my latest installation, Sympo-

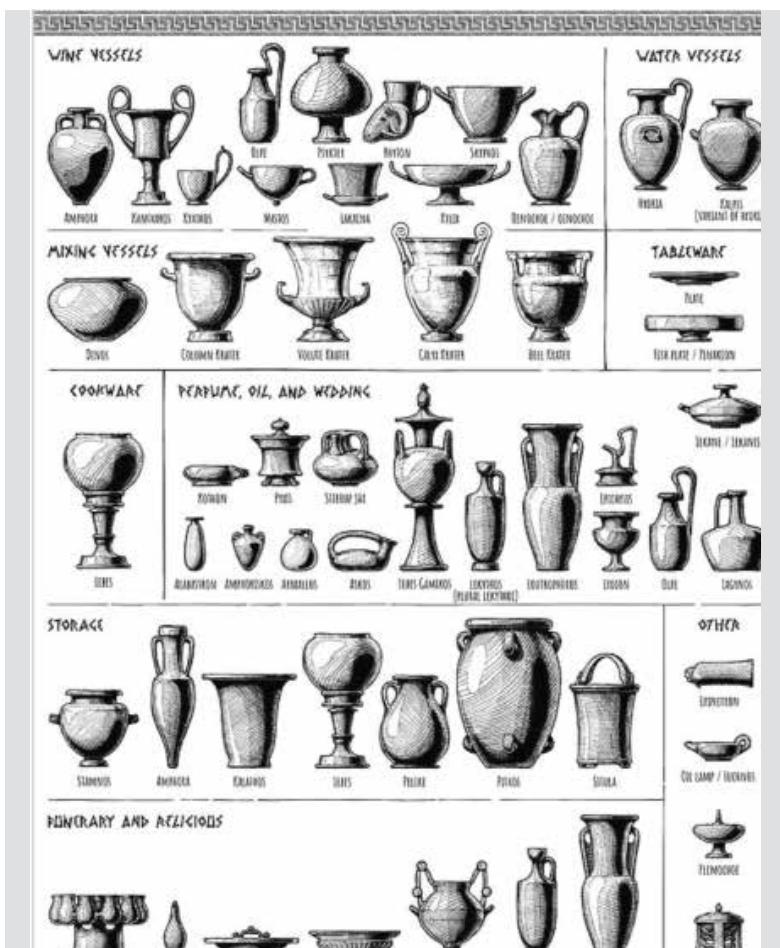
sium across Time, the concept came first. I wanted to create a dialogue between the ancient symposium and the contemporary world, exploring ideas of community, dialogue and sustainability. From there, form and material followed as natural extensions – the vessels and objects had to carry both symbolic weight and aesthetic presence, and recycled stainless steel alongside porcelain became essential to the story I wanted to tell. It usually starts with an idea I want to explore, often connected to history or context. From there, form and material develop together. Sometimes the material suggests a form; other times the form calls for a particular material. It's always a dialogue rather than a linear process.



The first few pics in this article are from your research phase. How long did you spend approaching this installation before you sat down at the wheel and started making?

The research phase was quite extensive. I spent months immersing myself in the history of the Greek symposium, the writings of Hesiod and the material culture of ancient Greece. I also researched contemporary issues of sustainability and recycling, since these were integral to my vision and that of Hesiod's. Only after this deep dive into both history and philosophy did I begin working at the wheel. That balance between research and making is vital for me – the making grows out of the thinking.

The title of this installation "Symposium Across Time" suggests a cross-temporal exchange – were there historical references, artists, or movements





that you were responding to in this work?

Absolutely, very much so. Historically, I was inspired by the ancient Greek symposium, which was not only a feast but also a space of conversation, philosophy and exchange. I also looked closely at Hesiod's writings, particularly his reflections on transformation, cycles and making something new out of what came before – ideas that feel surprisingly contemporary in our current moment of environmental concern. In terms of artistic references, I was informed by both archaic Greek vessel forms and modern approaches to assem-

blage and reuse, particularly artists who blur the line between functional object and sculptural presence.

Because it's an "installation", there's a spatial element – how did you approach configuring the space and arranging the elements? Can you give us a summary from the idea to the working process to the finished installation?

From the very beginning, I imagined this as a re-creation of the symposium table – a gathering point where ideas were exchanged. I designed a low platform around which viewers could imagine themselves as participants, echoing the ancient practice of reclining on cushions around a shared table.

The process began with concept and research, followed by sketching possible arrangements and experimenting with hybrid forms that combined porcelain with recycled stainless steel. I wanted the materials themselves to embody the dialogue between past and present: porcelain as a timeless medium, stainless steel as a marker of our industrial, disposable culture.

Once the forms were completed, I carefully arranged them on the table to create a rhythm – a sense of conversation between the objects. The installation became not just a display of individual works, but an environment that evokes gathering, debate and reflection.

Your work often combines form and narrative in unique ways – how would you describe your artistic philosophy?

My philosophy is rooted in the belief that objects can carry stories, histories and values. I see my role as both maker and storyteller – shaping forms that speak to ancient traditions while engaging contemporary concerns; sustainability and recycling/upcycling are at the heart of my practice, both materially and conceptually. By transforming discarded stainless steel into sculptural objects, I'm reminding viewers that what we consider disposable can be reimaged, much like Hesiod's idea of renewal. For me, narrative emerges not just through metaphor, but through material itself.

The pieces in the installation seem to be in dialogue with each other. What kind of conversation are they having across different eras or traditions?

The conversation is layered. On one level, the pieces speak in the language of ancient vessel forms – echoes of the symposium table. On another, they speak in the language of contemporary sustainability, where recycling and reuse are urgent necessities. Together, they stage a dialogue between permanence and impermanence, tradition and innovation, past and present. The symposium becomes a metaphorical table where different eras, materials and values are brought together for debate.

If a young artist came to you looking for advice, what's one thing you wish someone had told you when you were starting out?





I would tell them to trust their curiosity and to embrace research as part of their practice. Ideas don't exist in isolation; they grow richer when you engage with history, philosophy and contemporary issues. I'd also remind them that art takes time – that patience, persistence and reflection are just as important as technical skill. Most importantly, I would encourage them to stay true to their concerns and values, because authenticity is what ultimately resonates.

And what will we see next from you?
I'm continuing to explore the intersections of form, history and sustain-

ability, expanding the dialogue between recycled materials and ceramic traditions. I'm particularly interested in how installations can create environments for reflection – spaces where viewers consider their own relationship to objects, consumption and the environment. At the same time, I remain committed to the singular sculptural object, creating works that hold meaning on their own while resonating within larger installations. Moving forward, my practice will flow between the collective energy of installation and the intimate presence of individual objects, both engaging with the urgent concerns of our time.

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Evelyne Schoenmann's next interview partner is **Paolo Porelli, Italy**

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