

# In Studio with Paolo Porelli

Evelyne Schoenmann



Metamorphoses of Minerva

**Y**ou began your creative life as a painter before turning to ceramics and sculpture. What drew you specifically to clay as your primary medium?

After graduating from the academy of fine arts with a specialisation in painting, I entered a personal aesthetic crisis. The illusion of volume and space created by painting was no longer enough for me. I needed physicality and concreteness of form, and by chance I encountered ceramics, which became an extension of the pictorial material with which I could create volume and preserve colour as a fundamental part of expressive reality. As a self-taught ceramic artist, it took years

before I began to think in ceramic terms and adapt to its nature and timing, and understand the physical state of the clay at every moment of the working cycle. I also had to learn to note down the materials and quantities of raw materials that I used to achieve consistent results. This aspect was of particular significance in my experimentation in a totally intuitive way with the in-glaze lustre technique that through a chemical transformation of the glaze, creates surprising chromatic effects at low temperature.

*Does your training in painting continue to influence your sculptural work?*

For me, painting and sculpture continue to go hand in hand. Painting is

an autonomous dimension that relates to sculpture; both are potential creators of images and thus support each other while maintaining their different natures. I mainly work in ceramics, but I also devote periods of time to works on paper, mixing water-based techniques such as gouache, acrylic and crayon, graphite and collage, and using Xerox prints from the infinite number of images carefully selected from the web. In the past, I mainly worked in oils, but I have now abandoned this technique due to the lack of a dedicated space.

*You sometimes use slip-casting, press moulds, 3D scanning, and 3D printing to*

generate forms. Could you describe how these technologies enter into your creative workflow – and how you balance mechanization with the hand of the artist?

Techniques are all interlocutors of the unconscious, the starting points for stimulating creativity. It is in the nature of ceramics that the indirect process of modelling occurs in different stages. "Techne" is only a means of realising an idea,

which in my case is revealed in the process. Everything is balanced by the great immediacy of clay, which is an extremely sensitive medium for recording expressive trends. For my part, my involvement with ceramics is the means that determines my creation. Utilising slip-casting, press moulds and 3D scanning/printing is only a point of departure for me. In series, I transform each stereotypical figure into infinite archetypes through multiple

modifications of the original prototype.

Your sculptures often hover between the ancient and the surreal, drawing on classical visual language while distorting or reconfiguring it. Would you describe your work as responding to contemporary culture, or as more engaged in a timeless, perhaps internal, dialogue?

A work of art is the result of a series of specific elements of one's own education

3D printed prototype in acrylic fibre of lower part of Minerva



Joining of two halves of the press-moulded lower part of Minerva



Removing the upper part of the press-moulded lower part of Minerva from the plaster mould



The press-moulded figure in the mould before removal



Hand-built slab construction of the upper section of the figure, with a perpendicular support in the back



Dipping pieces of fabric in the slip





The fabric dipped in slip added to upper part of the figure the front of the figure showing both the lower and upper section with the addition



Coil element inserted in the composition



Insertion of another element of slipped fabric on the coiled element in a transitory moment.

Adding additional slip to the slipped fabric



Final placement of the fabric on the coiled element showing various interventions (addition of appliqués on left and a press-moulded head on upper right, and two holes)



and the circumstances of the moment. A chaos of various internal and external tensions, which determine a process of doubt and self-criticism. My work is a sort of globalisation of the languages of art history, organised within a vision of a collective unconscious of reality fuelled by personal experience in search of the inner symbolic form that I bring to light through the creative process. I believe that this belongs to a timeless dimension and at the same time is strictly contemporary, also because my work offers itself as a possible solution to the problems of the present reality.

*Your project *Metamorfosi di Minerva* seems to draw on the layered symbolism of Minerva - goddess of wisdom, war, and craftsmanship. What drew you to this mythological figure, and how does she reflect your own exploration of transformation in sculpture?*

Minerva represents the rational part, the objectification of thought that allows us to plan, share knowledge and understand it. But reality is also madness, irrationality, the overturning of conventions, the unknown and mystery. Two complementary realities that I wanted to represent with Minerva's metamorphoses. The series I have created has a lower half that reproduces, through a cast from a 3D

original, a Greek sculpture of Minerva from the 5th century B.C., attributed to Phidias. On this undifferentiated base, I built an arbitrary sculptural invention, modelling it with an expressly manual and variable intent in the use of ceramic techniques, as if to demonstrate an indeterminacy and expressive inconsistency that nevertheless tends towards balance and harmony. The result is a metamorphosis of form that develops from the same stereotypical iconic root.

*Is there a narrative arc (e.g. transformation, conflict, rebirth) embedded in the sequence or arrangement of the sculptures, and do parts of the sculptures actively "morph" (split, overlap, dissolve)? How much of that is literal vs. implied?*

Each Minerva responds exclusively to the idea of the complementarity of opposites that coexist in each of us and have not yet had a narrative sequence, although it is not excluded that one may be found retrospectively or in the perception of the interlocutors. The metamorphosis manifests itself in the transition from one creative situation to another, giving rise to a parade of characters born from the uniqueness and unpredictability of circumstances. In this series, I did not intervene on the "sculpture-citation" that I usually use, as I did in the *Protestant Madonnas* or in the *Reflex: Figures for Reflection* series, in which I transform the prototype, cutting into and carving it, removing and adding parts, modifying it until I create a new individuality, thereby relating two different parts, one mechanical and the other creative.

*You and Lori-Ann Touchette co-founded CRETA Rome and recently you also collaborated together in ceramics. Lori-Ann's background is archaeology, art history and classical studies. In what ways does Lori-Ann influence your work (choice of subject, critical framing, editing, theoretical lens) and conversely, have your sculptural experiments influenced Lori-Ann's writing or curatorial practice?*

Lori-Ann is a fundamental presence in my life as a partner. We founded CRETA Rome, where we have different, defined roles but now share all the issues that reality presents us with. Professionally, she supports me, advises me and gives me the strength to continue my work.

Technically, she works directly with the 3D clay printer to transform 3D images into elements which I use in my work. Her vision as an ancient art historian has amplified my view of art to more distant periods, but at the same time, Lori-Ann has delved into the contemporary world, interacting with the international artists with whom we deal daily, both at CRETA Rome, NCECA and AIC and through attending international exhibitions. In addition, her direct involvement in the ceramic process in my studio, in numerous international residencies and at CRETA Rome has enhanced her art-historical writing and resulted in her curation of critical texts for exhibitions and ceramics magazines.

*Are there upcoming projects (installations, collaborations, performances) where metamorphosis is a key driver?*

Every exhibition is a bit like a metamorphosis because it forces you to tackle a new project that you will have to bring to life, requiring a mental and physical effort that brings about a transformation at every stage of your artistic career. In 2026, I will have museum shows in Germany, Italy and the USA. At the Stadtmuseum in Siegburg, Germany, the solo exhibition, *Zeitgenössische Keramik aus Italien*, will contain a retrospective of my past and more recent installations.

During Argilla 2026, at the Museo Zauli in Faenza, I will present "A Party for Betty", created during a residency at Betty Woodman's studio in Italy, alongside a selection of Betty Woodman's pieces.

My itinerant exhibition, *Figure Out. Catastrophe or Regeneration*, will be shown in two American venues, first at the Alfred Ceramic Art Museum in 2026, followed by its presentation at the Fuller Craft Museum in 2027.

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Evelyne Schoenmann's next interview partner is **Ernest Aryee, USA and Ghana**.

Evelyne Schoenmann is a ceramist, writer and curator. She is a member of AIC/IAC and lives and works in Basel, Switzerland.  
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On the left the sculpture presented after the first firing, on the right another figure of the series that has already been covered in low-fire white glaze before the second firing

Final version of the sculpture

