

In Studio with

GUY VAN LEEMPUT

Evelyne Schoenmann

Guy is a well-known Belgian ceramist, who exhibits in Europe and Asia. He has made various series with fantasy names like Xylo, Golem, G2 or Boominwarts. However, this interview is mainly about his porcelain bowls, which he builds over a balloon!

Guy, you originally studied mathematics. When did you turn your attention to ceramics? Can you tell us how it came about?

When I was nearly eighteen and I was preparing to go to university, I went to visit a neighbouring ceramist, and I asked him if I could help him, without pay, and learn something in the meantime. After three months with him, I began to study maths, but in my spare time, I kept going

moulded in the inside of hollow trees, glazed with your own ash glazes and once-fired, consists mainly of spiral forms. Have these spirals got anything to do with your past as a mathematician?

Teaching mathematics means a lot of mental work. When I work with clay, I try to find ways that help me to stop thinking. This is why I do not make any preliminary drawings, nor do I spend much time thinking about a form. I simply start work on a

You have just exhibited at COLLECT 2014, TASTE, Design Shanghai and in Beijing Design Week, to mention but a few. How important do you think it is to be professionally represented?

What I want to achieve with my bowls is to fascinate people, to touch the human soul. As the proof of the pudding is in the eating, I have to try to find out if major galleries can manage to sell my work to these people. That is the best kind of feedback.



there (even after I had fallen in love with my future wife). After graduating, I began to teach mathematics and I got married. We built a house for ourselves and our three children, and I didn't have much time for ceramics. But then, when I was about 35, my best friend died. That was the moment I decided not to dream of ceramics any longer but to do it. I took tuition and attended master classes. Then I began to work with clay intensively.

The Boominwarts series, which is

new piece, helping myself to the images stored in my head and to the experience from previous works. The form is dictated by gut instinct, but my head decides. Each piece reflects my own self, and the better I get to know myself, the more profoundly I can proceed with my work. I normally work in series. This has limitations, but it also offers me development.

Your work is represented through galleries like Puls (B) and Terra Delft (NL).

You once said that your work is usually shaped from the inside. The exterior is the logical conclusion of this. But your porcelain bowls are actually the exact opposite of this aren't they?

I have to admit that I only really think about my work after I have finished. But I find your question fascinating and I will look for a good answer. It is probably true that the porcelain bowls are different: I actually don't want them to have an inside

and an outside. I make them as thin-walled as possible so that when you look at them you don't really see what is inside and what is outside.

To me, your porcelain bowls have a feminine look to them. How does that sound to you?

I have heard people say that. I think it is probably true for other work in my various series too. I would say I prefer feminine to masculine forms. Right angles and straight lines are boring and they don't really satisfy me.

In your finished bowls, we can see lots of different structures. Rhythm and repetition are recognisable. Where do you take your inspiration from?

My inspiration is architecture and nature. I would like to empathise with a bee building its honeycomb, or a bird building

balloon, which has been sprayed with water, starting off with a piece that will be in the middle of the future bowl. This also has my mark on it. Then I add cell for cell, like in a bee hive, until I have reached the size I want for my bowl. And while the porcelain is on the balloon, I try to touch it as little as possible. After that, I have to ensure it dries evenly and after a few days I can deflate the balloon and coat the inside of the bowl with porcelain slip.

As my bowls are fired upside down to counteract the effects of gravity and the melting process at high temperature, I now make a support for each bowl. Then they are fired once in a wood kiln to 1300°C (2372°F). This doesn't take long because in my kiln I can go up from 150°C to 1300°C in 3-4 hours. This high temperature is required to give the bowls their strength and their translucency. Firing with wood enhances the beautiful white of the bowl and the ash deposits on them.

that my bowl, Big Anas, has been selected for the finals of the MINO competition. Then in July this year I have been invited to Jingdezhen in China as artist in residence at the Ceramic Art Institute. Jingdezhen is the place to go if you are interested in porcelain. They have been making porcelain there for 2000 years. You can probably imagine how delighted and honoured I felt to be invited to go there. I will be able to work with the raw kaolin, straight from the hills of Jingdezhen, and start a new series of porcelain bowls with it. I intend to make a limited edition of slabs and bowls "made in China", which are mainly for the Chinese market. But a small selection will be on show at Galerie Terra Delft (NL). At the same gallery, there will also be an exhibition from 18 October – 30 November 2014: a dialogue between the porcelain bowls of Mieke Everaet and my own. Visitors will be able to see fifteen of my brand new bowls.



its nest, without involving architects. So I try to find out how a bee gets to work before I start my own. What I try to find out is how the structure evolves, not what the final result looks like.

Now we are very curious to learn how your balloon technique works. Can you explain it to us?

I start by blowing up a balloon. Then I take porcelain reinforced with flax and I use it as thinly as possible. I work direct on the

I know that you have committed to working ecologically. In what way is sustainability visible in your work?

My porcelain bowls, as I said, are once fired in my wood kiln. I find the wood in the vicinity. I feel that I have a duty to my bowls and I want to live in harmony with nature.

Can you tell us anything about future projects?

Just today (April 2014) I have learned

GUY VAN LEEMPUT

Watervoort 42
2200 Herentals / Belgium
www.guyvanleemput.be

Evelyne Schoenmann's next interview is with Zsolt József Simon, Hungary.

Evelyne Schoenmann is a ceramist. She lives and works in Basel, Switzerland and Liguria, Italy.
www.schoenmann-ceramics.ch