



above Biennale poster illustrating a piece by Sergei Isupov, "Soaring Power"

below l. Frank Louis, "Nightmare"

below r. Yves Malfliet, "Black Hole"

Vallauris, set in art-loving Provence, is a household name to many ceramists and art lovers – many famous artists have worked there in the past. In particular, citizen of honour Pablo Picasso must be mentioned here, who had exerted a considerable influence on the town during the time he spent there in the 1950s. The chapel beside Musée Magnelli in which Picasso realised his work, *La Guerre et la Paix*, is familiar to many.

And it is in the Musée Magnelli that from 5 July - 17 November 2014, the exhibition of the winners and finalists of the XXIII Biennale Internationale Création Contemporaine et Céramique is taking place. Since 1966, Vallauris has been conducting a biennial competition for ceramic artists. The rules state that citizens of EU member countries are eligible to take part. In addition, a guest nation from outside the EU is invited to participate. In 2014 this was Russia. In addition, accompanying exhibitions take place in various other galleries.

For the three categories of Vessel, Design and Architectural and Conceptual Ceramics, 255 artists submitted their portfolios, from among whom the judges selected 32 works to compete for the prizes. In the category of the Vessel, the prize was shared between Lourdes Riera Rey (Spain) with her piece *Lavas Pillow* and the young designer Ariane Prin for her captivating *Water Cups Fountain*. In the category of Design, no prize was awarded; instead Zélie Rouby received a special prize for emerging artists under 35 years of age for his work *Nature morte: "poison fish"*. The prize for Architectural and Conceptual Ceramics went to the Belgian artist Yves Malfliet for *Golden Shower / Black Hole*, a fantastic mix of various materials juxtaposed creatively consisting of porcelain figures, rubble and other materials covered with varnish. The Grand Prize of the Town of Vallauris went to Frank Louis from Germany for his three large stoneware mattresses entitled *Nightmare*.





above Claire Mayet, "Meret"

right Paolo Polloniato, "Off Road"



The prizewinning pieces and the work of the finalists cover a wide-ranging palette of imaginative concepts such as Saana Murti's 18 pairs of porcelain shoes, Conny Pols' black cone with an opening from which linen threads curl like hair, or Martha Pachon Rodriguez' typical vessels – this time in black – arranged in a circle, each object with a white line marking. Other notable pieces were the wonderful collection of flotsam and jetsam by Sixtine Jacquart, and the severely geometrical cylinders by Juan Ortí García, standing side by side like grain silos. In the entrance, there is an impressive tractor tyre, almost six feet in height, made of porcelain with a floral pattern, made by Paolo Polloniato, a powerful combination of male and female aspects. In the categorie of the Vessel, there are familiar names like Ken Eastman, Lut Laleman, Weronika Lucinska, Laurent Greslin and others. I would like to make special mention of Claire Mayet, with her homage to Meret Oppenheim. However, Claire has not covered her cup and saucer with fur but with hair shaved from her own legs.

The exhibitions accompanying the Biennale are all of a very high standard. In two large rooms at the Musée Magnelli, there is an exhibition entitled Here and There by Sergei Isupov, which includes fantastic, epic, surrealist installations combining ceramics and painting. For example: the head

and shoulders of a woman with a mane of orange hair, an indefinable expression on her face, all in ceramic, hangs high up on the wall. Immediately beneath it, a dress has been sketchily painted in yellow, and under it there are legs standing on a pedestal. In her hand she holds a large hammer. From a distance it is impossible to tell what is painting and what is ceramic.

In the Eden Room near the Museum there is an exhibition with work from the guest nation, Russia. Eight Russian artists exhibit in this vast space with various richly composed installations. In their works, they have all added one other non-ceramic material, ranging from furniture, pictures, plastic, video or sounds, and even a metal cage.

In the Maison des Quartiers there is an exhibition entitled Le Bibelot (trinkets or knick-knacks), mainly showing figurines. On entering the room for the first time, one has the impression of being confronted by Meissen porcelain figures, but at second sight, it becomes apparent that the figures on show have been reinterpreted, and now represent Superwoman and Batwoman, police officers and clowns, punks and upright citizens, scenes of domestic life and figures from the Commedia dell'arte.

In the Chapelle de la Miséricorde there is an exhibition by Japanese artist Masamichi Yoshikawa. His work is largely based on

the Chinese blue-and-white tradition from the Song dynasty in the 12th century, and shows monumental vessels in a stimulating dialogue with the Baroque architecture and the dimensions of the chapel.

At the Espace Grandjean, the Swedish artist Gustaf Nordenskiöld exhibits vessels reminiscent of stalactites and stalagmites, which blur the borderline between functional ceramics and art.

Artists from the design studio Pierre-Yves Le Sonn together with ceramist Gérard Crociani from Vallauris literally take the visitor up the garden path in their exhibition Tour au jardin at the Salle Jules Agard. An exhibition which was not a part of the Biennale but was definitely worth a visit was by Robert Lawarre III at C k'OMSA Gallery, which belongs to the VIA (Vallauris Institute of Art). Robert Lawarre III is an American artist with a great sense of humour. In 2013, his funny teapots won the first prize in the Crazy Teapot Competition. He produces matching mugs to go with the teapots, which are extremely colourful, wild and animated.

A successful close to a day filled with quality ceramics!

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