

"Open to Art"



photos - Alessandra Vinci, photographer

Exhibition of finalists at Officine Saffi, Milan

Evelyne Schoenmann

Ceramic artists from all over the world followed the call from Officine Saffi in Milan to participate in the first exhibition there, *Open to Art – International Competition for Art Ceramics and Design*. A six-man international panel of judges consisting of artists, gallerists, ceramics teachers and museum directors made a selection of 34 finalists (21 for the category of art ceramics, 13 for design), who were to exhibit their work in an exhibition in Milan. The judges awarded two main prizes worth EUR 5,000 each among the finalists, as well as three recognition awards.

At the opening ceremony

The first prize in the category art ceramics went to Zsolt József Simon (*1973). His piece *Aethera Siderea* represents a vase, or rather the negative form of a vase, made in porcelain (photo bottom right). Of his work, he says, "My sculptures are studies of movement without actual form. I do not want to capture the form itself but rather the process behind it. Not the fruit or the flower, which are forever changing, but the very growing and changing."

The first prize in the category design went to Swiss ceramist Maragareta Daepf (*1959), for her porcelain piece *Bosporus Set Hexagon*. With this prize, the judges have honoured the skills of an artist in balanc-

ing the functionality of a design object in its simple, rational interplay of fullness and emptiness, with the complex, oriental colour (photo top right).

In addition, the following artists were singled out for special prizes: The Special Prize of the Carlo Zauli Museum in Faenza went to Hungarian ceramist Eszter Imre (*1985) and her work *Paper Tray*, consisting of two wafer thin sheets of porcelain (detail photo above), which have the appearance of frequently used, crumpled paper through the coffee stains and handwriting on them – paper as a record of our past. Eszter Imre now has the opportunity to work as the assistant to an artist in the Faenza artist in residence programme.

The special prize from the traditional ceramics manufacturer Bitossi Ceramiche for artists under 30 went to Venezuela born artist Vanessa Redondo (*1987), now resident of Spain, for her piece made of porcelain, wood and USB flash drives entitled *My Work*, a piece very much orientated towards the contemporary digital world (photo opposite, 2nd from the top). She wishes to demonstrate that nowadays we use computers and digital technology without giving it any thought. Vanessa Redondo will have the opportunity to do a work placement at Bitossi Ceramiche.



A special mention from the partner of Officine Saffi, Wiffa per l'Arte went to Belgian ceramic artist Anne Van Hoey for her Earthenware Ferrari, a typical Van Hoey piece sprayed with flaming red car paint that appealed to all the visitors (see cover photo).

The speaker at the well-attended opening ceremony organised by Francesca Salvatore was the initiator of the Open to Art competition and owner of Officine Saffi, Laura Borghi. She presented the prizewinners and awarded them their prizes. Besides the winners, finalists Einav Barness Eliasov, Pálma Babos and Paolo Polloniato were present.

The opening ceremony was the prelude to the exhibition, which runs until 14 July 2014 in the gallery of Officine Saffi in Milan.

The finalists' exhibition is brilliantly designed and gives an attractive overview of art and design based on clay as a medium. Some work in porcelain is on show, e.g. in form of installations by Einav Barness Eliasov: hundreds of small pinch pots, laid out in a spiral in a wooden frame and illuminated from below with LEDs. Or the charming, gracefully collapsing buildings by Hungarian artist Pálma Babos, made from large numbers of small monochrome slabs. Another eyecatcher was the sweeping porcelain wave entitled Oroshi by Satoshi Kino. The objects combined from porcelain fragments from various eras by Paolo Polloniato are always amusing, creating an autonomous artwork from originally functional or figurative pieces.

Malene Hartmann Rasmussen provides splashes of colour in the exhibition with her imitations of nature (branches, leaves, creatures), as does Ann Van Hoey with her Ferrari red-sprayed bowl (see cover photo), the plate-shaped wall pegs by Gloria Lacruz, or the vessels by Flavio Favelli entitled Profondo Cina, stacked inside each other like Russian dolls and sliced open.

Alternative firing techniques are represented on the one hand by the raku-fired Wish Bell by Turkish ceramist Betül Demir Karakaya.

Jane Perryman on the other hand is represented with her piece Conversation. This is a bowl and a slightly arched slab that had organic material kneaded in when it was still soft. During the saggar firing, this material burned out, leaving behind a scarred surface.

Many visitors were also attracted to the sculpture IF by Rafel Pérez (photo right, 3rd from the top), whose highly tactile surfaces are always good for a surprise. This time, he has created three artworks with porcelain and black terracotta.

In an upcoming issue of New Ceramics, we will be discussing the most unusual techniques and the artists who have exhibited in Milan in our In Studio section.

Evelyne Schoenmann is a ceramist who lives and works in Basel, Switzerland and Liguria, Italy.

Officine Saffi
Via Aurelio Saffi, 7 - 20123 Milan - Italy
+39 02 3668 5696
info@officinesaffi.com www.officinesaffi.com

