

In Studio with Heide Nonnenmacher

Evelyne Schoenmann

Heide lives in an area which 140 million years ago, in the Jurassic period, was under the sea. A cornucopia for geologists. But not only for them! Experimental ceramists like Heide find inspiration for their work there, as we can see in the following interview.



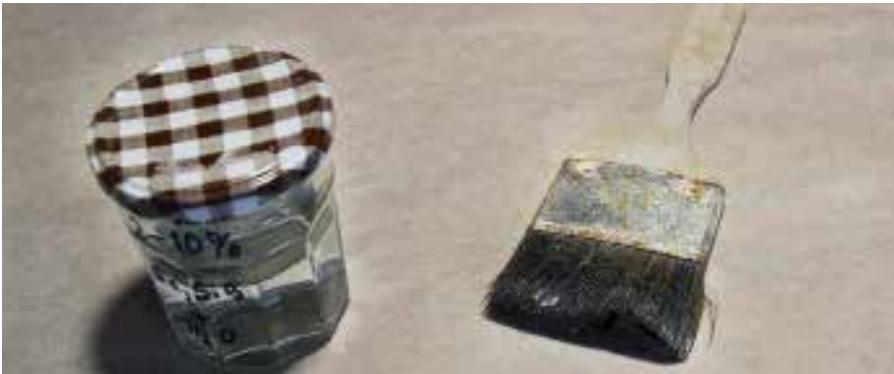
Haide, you are a ceramist body and soul. When you chose your profession, what made you decide on clay and porcelain?

With clay and with porcelain I am fascinated by the various physical states of the material. Ceramics is a material that you can find all over the world. The firing process is an important aspect, which

follows its own rules. I hit upon porcelain when I was invited to the international symposium in Kahla. The porcelain factory offered us artists a huge area to experiment in.

I'd like to quote you now. "In my work, boundaries play a large part." – How do you mean that?

The physical aspect that every material is subject to is very important to me. How can I take the material to the limits of its potential, these are questions I repeatedly confront myself with. The visual stimuli created in this process are also very important. My delicate structures look soft but they are as hard as glass. Trying out how far you can push a mate-



rial to its limits to achieve a certain surface keeps on cropping up in ceramics, which is reflected in wonderful works of ceramic art.

When you are travelling in your frequent journeys, you keep crossing borders...

Travelling is the treasury of experience that I draw on for my ideas. It gives me time out, the stimuli that give me new ideas. Travelling means experiencing other countries with all your senses and learning to understand them. This means you rethink your own ideas and your own working methods. In this context, it is important to me to be able to work in other countries.

The title of your piece here is Homage to the Jurassic Sea I. Has that got anything to do with the region you live in?

I live in a place that was under the sea 140 million years ago (the Jurassic). Geologically speaking, this place is the only one in the whole world whose petrefacts from that period are so beautifully silicified. Natural history museums all over the world that are interested in the Jurassic Sea have fossils from Natheim. I find this special feature of my home town very exciting. This was the reason that twenty years ago I started to study the Jurassic period ceramically. The works are abstract representations and I try make them so that the viewer, depending on their background, can see structures from the botanical gardens or structures from the human body. Structures repeat themselves and you can find them in stones, for instance, or in plants, honeycombs, wasps' and hornets' nests, in bones or in cells.

The outer shells of your works are vessels (functional), but inside they are sharp-edged and delicate so that functionality is negated. Do you play with functionality and art.

The outer shell is either press moulded or freely handbuilt. They may be goblets but they are also a protective shell for the delicate structures. Inside – outside is more about playing with structures that complement each other visually. All of the outer shells are textured with a dotted pattern. I got my inspiration for this from certain kinds of coral.

At the start of the photo series, we see that you use a kind of fibrous paper. – It looks almost like Japanese paper to me...

Yes, it is actually. I use various kinds of Japanese paper. You can use any kind of paper really. Thin, long-fibred Japanese paper has such an interesting feel. So for instance you can tease out the fibres together with the porcelain.

Can you use any kind of fibrous material for your work?

Any paper, fibrous or smooth, is fine for this technique. But other natural organic materials like wool, cotton, linen, natural sponges, cellulose or seed pods can be used as long as they are not woody.

But be careful: please don't use plastic sponges or other non-natural materials because they may produce toxic fumes during the firing. This is vital for anyone who wants to try out my technique.

Tell us more about your technique ...

Firstly I decide on the form of the outer shell of my work. I pinch or mould this outer shell or I handbuild it freehand. When it is leather hard, I go over it with a porcupine brush and give it a fine dotted pattern. Then I see what kind of paper I would like to use for it.

The sheets of paper are first treated with a mixture of water and sodium silicate. Each kind of paper has its own mixture. Dense, short-fibre paper needs a higher concentration of sodium silicate than thinner, long-fibre absorbent paper. I recommend a mixture of between 2 and 10% of water and sodium silicate. This process is important for the firing. With this technique, the paper is transformed into a glaze. If there is not enough, there are cracks.

If there is too much, everything melts and collapses. You have to be careful! It is important to experiment. If the paper is dry, you can brush on a very thin layer of porcelain. The small pieces that had previously been torn up can then be rolled up with the porcupine brush.

Piece for piece, these delicate rolls are joined together until the form has been filled. When they are being fitted together, the fibres are teased out a little from of the moist paper rolls to give a fluffy look. Then you leave the piece to dry and it is then once-fired to 1275°C in an electric kiln. In





some pieces, I glaze the interior or I decorate it with coloured porcelain engobes.

You are on the committee of the crafts association, the Bund der Kunsthandwerker Baden-Württemberg (BdK), and every two years they put on a members' exhibition that you invite other countries to take part in as guests.

With a team, I organise a ceramics exhibition every two years in Schloss Ludwigsburg near Stuttgart. We always invite artists from another European country to take part.

This year it is going to be Switzerland. Eight Swiss ceramic artists and eight from Baden-Württemberg will be exhibiting in the castle's Lapidarium between 23 May and 10 June. The opening ceremony is on 23 May 2019 at 6 p.m. Of course the readers of *New Ceramics* will be very welcome.

And how does the near future look for Heide Nonnenmacher? Will you be on your travels soon?

Ceramics is my life and as long as I am able I will try to work together with ceramists on an international basis. This year I have been invited to Sanbao / Jingdezhen. I am especially looking forward to that because Jingdezhen is the Chinese city that uses porcelain in the most extreme way.

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A TONraum-workshop with
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will take place from 19-21 July 2019
Registrations at:

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bestellungen@neue-keramik.de

Evelyne Schoenmann's next interview
is with

Ruth Ju-shih Li, Taiwan/Australia

Evelyne Schoenmann is a ceramist,
writer and curator. She lives and
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