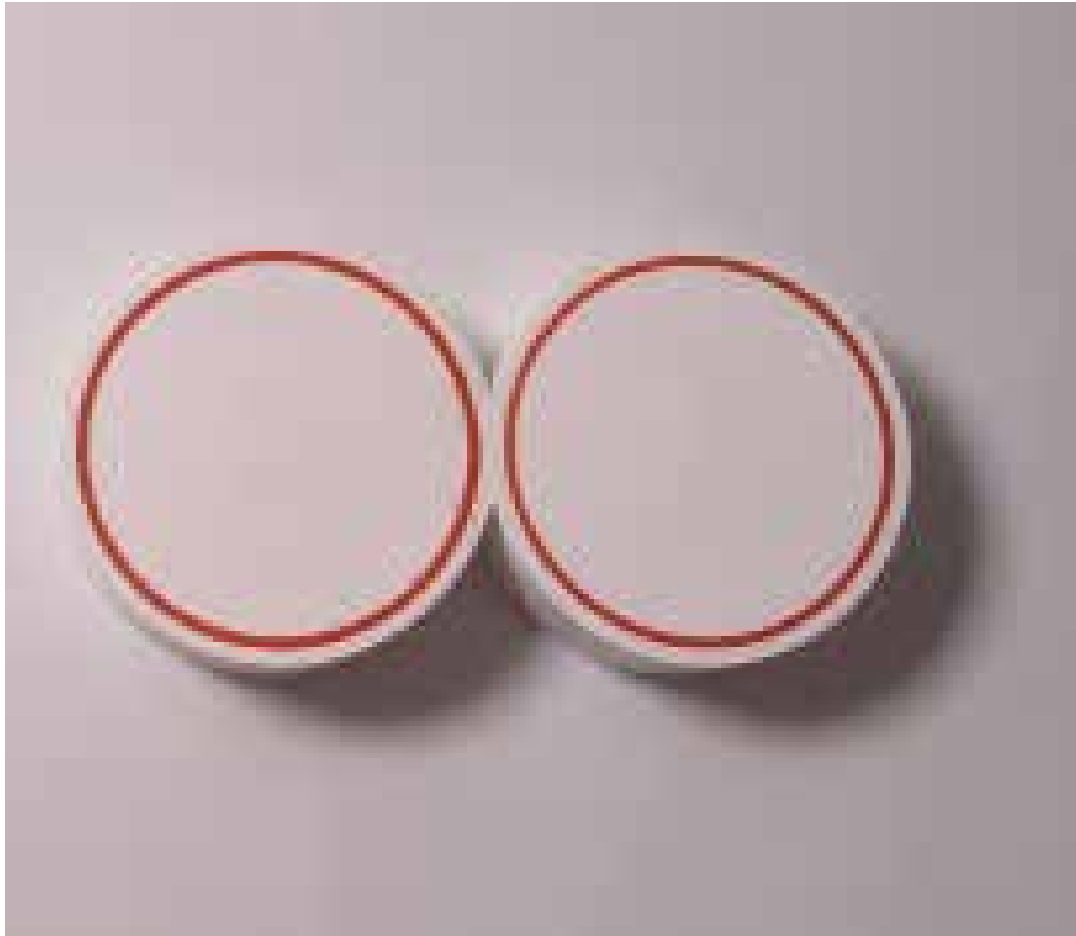


In studio with Juan Ortí

Evelyne Schoenmann



Juan, was it one of your childhood dreams to be a ceramist one day?

No, I'm a ceramist by chance. I grew up in an artist family and in the beginning, I was not interested in art or in studying. After I, even so, studied Industrial Design, which I didn't like, but I needed credit points, I began to take potters-wheel classes. I immediately realized that this is what I wanted to do and abandoned everything to focus on ceramics. I studied in the Arts and Crafts school of Valencia with Enric Mestre.

Most people, when they hear your name, think of your cylinder-shaped

sculptures. Is this your signature style?

For me, the cylinder is the main shape, from the cylinder all the shapes came out and with the potter's wheel you can model all. I imagine all the shapes that surround us are made by cylinders. The limits are in your imagination.

Would you call it "architectural" or "industrial" ceramic art? Or maybe something else?

I like "industrial". I'm interested in daily forms that surround us: objects that have industrial, architectural and daily use influence. They are usually objects that are associated with a work environ-

ment. The human being when working does very beautiful things without realizing it: why are the fields, the traditional architecture, the small objects with which we live together beautiful? Simply for love, when people do things with love for their work, they do beautiful things. That is the kind of beauty that interests me, it is subtle and hidden but we live with it every moment of our lives.

People tell me that your much reduced, cylindrical pieces remind them of silos/granaries on farmland. Can you tell us if this impression is right, or what the sculptures are meant to be? What is their conceptual meaning?



Yes, the cylindrical shapes come from the silos. I love those buildings, I call them invisible architecture, they are everywhere but we can't see them because they are part of our landscape. For me they are like amazing sculptures, usually they are hidden in dirty and polluted places that we don't like; what I do is find them and take the part that I like and then make a new sculpture.

And now your pieces are still circular, but wider at the base and shorter and you hang them on the wall. In addition, colour is coming onto your pieces. What do the newest pieces represent?

I had some sketches about wall pieces many years ago but now I want to focus on it, usually I work by series and try to go deep and get out all I can. The shapes, as I already mentioned, come from the silos and water tanks, but I wanted to change the view, try to work in wall pieces. Usually, I don't use colour, but sometimes it helps the shape because I play an optical game trying to find imagined spaces. I need to go deeper in this series, this is only the beginning.

The In Studio interviews are mostly about the technique my guests use in making their ceramic pieces. Since the pictures of the piece in this interview are very expressive, would you tell us a bit more about the technique of this, but also of other pieces like the silos and the split-level pyramids?

I feel free working with the potter's wheel, I try to do everything on it, many people say that the potter's wheel is a limited tool but it is not true, in the industry they make infinite objects using the wheel. The problem is that we learn how to do a vessel, we made vessels 4,000 years ago and

that is not easy to change. Usually, my sculptures are made by several cylinders of the same size. I throw each one by one on the wheel and I trim them to get the exact size and then unite them. So, trimming is the most important technique in my work because the parts have to fit exactly. Always I use white clay, usually earthenware fired to 1100°C. For example, everybody wants a huge sculpture made in porcelain, with a beautiful glaze and without deformations and cracks but that is impossible to get. Every technique has its own limits. The ceramist has to choose between the quality of surface and keeping the main shape. I choose the shape so what I do is use a low shrinkage clay fired at a low temperature to avoid cracks and deformations. To avoid cracking or deforming problems, I “glue” all the parts of my sculptures together with slip when the pieces are dry or almost dry. Last year I used a terra sigillata slip to get a polished surface and also the colour red. The slow firing is very important to my works because I don't use clay with chamotte, especially around 600°C (from 500°C to 700°C I fire 50°C/ hour).

*One of your works, made 2015 – untitled – (I think you showed it in the Liling Ceramics Museum in China?) consists of many small pieces. Can you tell us more about this interesting work? Has the poem *Náufragos* by Pablo de Jevenois something to do with it?*

During the last moments of the silo series I wanted to create new shapes on the wheel, so I began to make sketches and I realized by chance that all together can be interesting. Afterwards I made many of those small works; some of them you can recognize the shape and others are invented. It was a very pleasant series because I worked very fast and with freedom.

Pablo de Jevenois I met at an Art Fair in Paris. He liked so much my work, we were talking and we realized that we were interested





in the same things, he is a poet and he gave me one of his books, it was amazing because our works match perfectly. If you read his poems you can see my works in it. Usually few people understand my work, but when you find a person who does, it is very interesting because they see things that maybe I don't realize.

Let us briefly talk about your mentor, Enric Mestre. You were his assistant for many years. And you once said he's like a father to you.

Yes, Enric is like my father. I learned everything from him, I chose the ceramic path thanks to him; first in the Ceramics School and then helping him in his studio. He has taught me to be rigorous at work, to constantly think about the things you do. Everything has to be done perfectly from the beginning to the end piece. Those seem simple words, but they are very important for art. In my work the importance of simplicity, rotundity, sobriety, and perfection comes from Enric's teachings.

In which direction will the works of Juan Ortí tend to go in the near future?

At this moment I'm working on the wall series, but as always, it is difficult to continue because I only use white and thrown cylinders. Very often I suffer because I'm afraid of not finding new ideas for my new works and I don't know how to continue, but if you work every day, you always find a new path. Usually in the ceramic world it is very easy to distract yourself learning passionate techniques, but I think it is very important to focus and to express what you want, to be faithful in your own path.

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Evelyne Schoenmann's next interview is with Marcia Selsor, USA

Evelyne Schoenmann is a ceramist, writer and curator. She is a member of the AIC/IAC and lives and works in Basel.

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