

# In Studio with Velimir Vukicevic

Evelyne Schoenmann



**V**elimir, can you tell us about your educational background and whether it always was a dream of yours being a ceramist?

As a young man I was attracted to different disciplines. Art was one of them. I was surprised when I passed the extremely difficult entrance exam. My score was very high, and this exam is a prerequisite for enrolling at The Academy of Applied Arts in Belgrade, Serbia.

I quickly realized it was the right choice for me. I enjoyed learning along with my peers during 5 years of undergraduate studies and later, 2 years of specialization as a graduate student. My father was also ceramic artist and his support was significant.

You mainly work with ingenious illusion painting on your objects giving them a perplexing spatial effect. What was at the root of this idea?

I value individual expression in the visual arts the most. I think it is necessary to dive deep into oneself and find what is unique. Persistence is also of key importance. I feel it is necessary in order to develop a personal artistic language. It is like words in language: we can use them in such a way as to change the meaning of our writings. Early on, I couldn't decide what I prefer to do more, modelling or painting, so I decided to combine them. Ceramics was the perfect medium.

There are sculptures of yours which are joined together by a solid and a more fragile part. I guess there is lots of preliminary planning and construction work necessary?

I draw a lot and create 3D sketches. My approach is quite formal, but I consider my ideas often as being romantic, fun, and positive. I hope the result is not dry.

Think of a brand-new future piece: what is first in your head, the finished idea, the form of the object or the illusionary painted part?

I always think about the form that is suitable for painted elements - to create an illusion of three-dimensionality and extension of form.



*You use the same plaster mould a few times to get a series of the same form, and then you give each one its distinctive aspect in using your imagination with transfer paper and air brush. Is that correct?*



I use different techniques to construct forms. One of them is slip-casting. Although my school and teachers were excellent, I decided to freely break the technical rules. One of them is that plaster moulds should be used only for creating multiples in the context of design. I enjoy working with the same moulded form, and depending how I alter and paint them, they can appear completely different from one another.



*The object in this article is called "rainy day" from your cloud series. Can you lead us through the construction of this sculpture from the idea to the final work?*

Clouds are inspiring. They symbolize impermanence, movement, and changeability - basic phenomena of life and our existence. They provoke imagination; they are like a floating dream.

When I decided to combine sharp edged forms with a soft style of painting, I used stoneware clay to build a model for the plaster mould. The model was bisque-fired





and sealed with shellac. Then I made the plaster mould. I use various porcelain slips. Mont Blanc G001 for 1300°C proved to be the best. The mould has two openings, up and down, so when assembled, I can perform the whole pouring process myself. When the form is dry, I fire it in a fairly low bisque firing at 800°C.

Then I sand the surface and draw a composition – perhaps with clouds. I try to avoid floral references by emphasizing movement and the overall interrelation between compositional elements. I use liquid latex (drawing gum) to protect areas that I want to remain undecorated. Then I spray my own engobes.

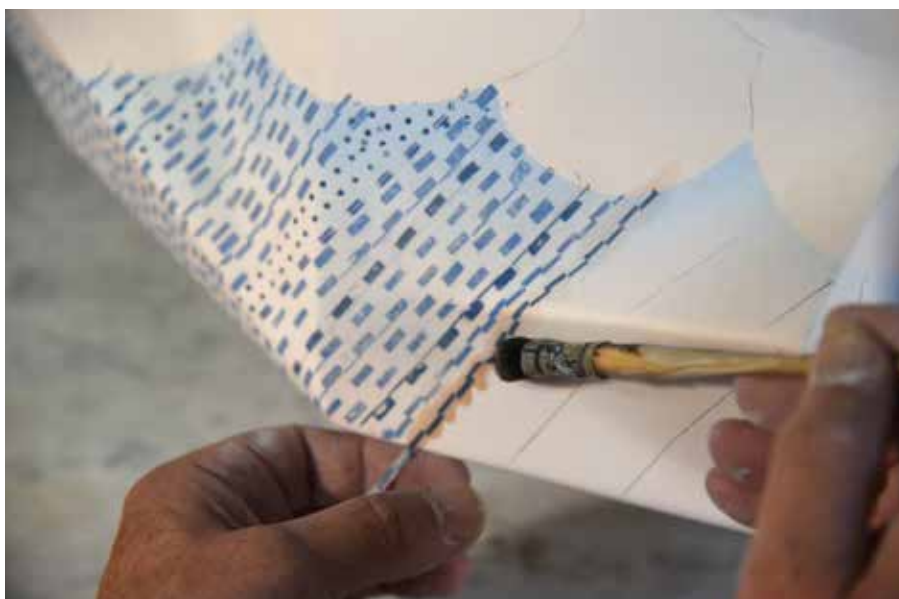
I make them myself by mixing stains with the casting slip, and I also add a little transparent glaze. For application, I use a big spray gun. Then I bisque fire again at 1050°C. During the next stage, I cut different Japanese transfer papers (decals) into strips to get lines and attach them to the surface of the object with a brush dipped in water. At this time, I can also apply transparent glaze to some smaller areas – especially if I want to use gold or platinum lustres.

Then I high fire the artwork, cradled in a supportive stoneware form, to 1280°C in an electric kiln. This minimizes deformation and slumping. Finally, I mix black overglaze with water-soluble medium and water and airbrush the shadows. In this phase I also use paper stencils to control the sprayed medium. At the same time, I can also apply gold or platinum lustre if necessary. I fire the work a last time at 850°C.

*When I look at the gallery of your works, I have the impression that you enjoy playing with perception, with illusion, visions and new vantage points ...*

Yes, I enjoy the process, especially the creative parts of it. Sometimes I have an impression that I move in circles, often returning to old themes - but with new knowledge or technical possibilities. Ceramics is such a vast discipline, so I am still learning, asking questions and researching.

The possibility of realizing an idea still fascinates and bring me joy.





*Almost the whole world was in lockdown the last few weeks because of the Coronavirus pandemic. What did you do during this time and what did you learn for life, for your work in ceramics, out of this crisis?*

I try to speak through my work. This is of primary importance. Therefore, I continue to exhibit and lead workshops.

But now the exhibitions have been cancelled, and travelling is not possible. It has troubled me a lot. I cannot focus enough to be able to create new pieces while being in quarantine. As a result, I have been finishing pieces I started earlier.

*“In an attempt to grasp universal, dwelling on the verge of illusion and reality I try to move from material to immaterial.”*

For more information please consult my website:  
[www.velimirvukicevic.com](http://www.velimirvukicevic.com)

Evelyne Schoenmann's next interview partner is  
**Tan Chia Chuen from Singapore.**  
 Evelyne Schoenmann is a ceramist, writer and curator. She is an AIC/IAC member, and lives and works in Basel.  
[www.schoenmann-ceramics.ch](http://www.schoenmann-ceramics.ch)