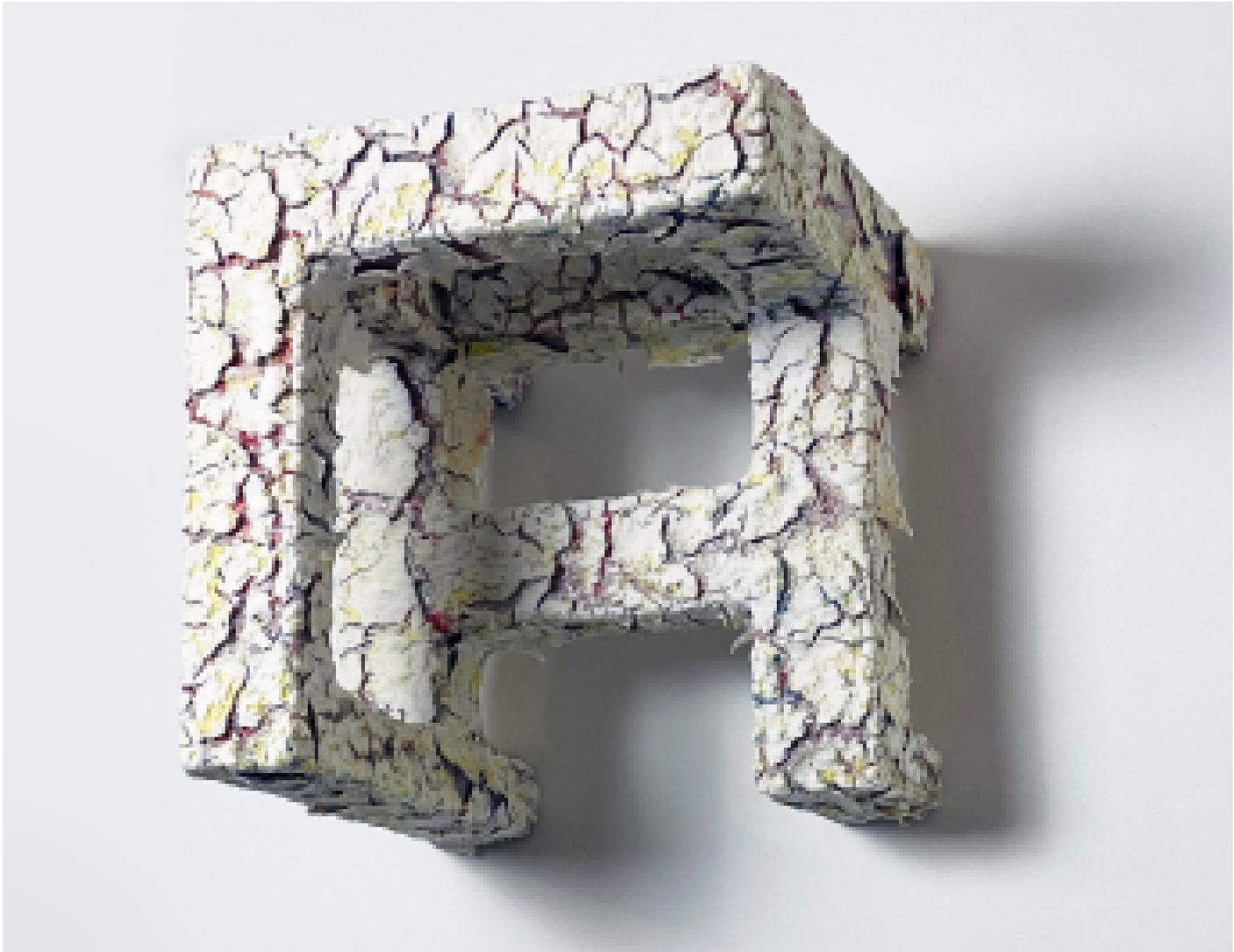


In Studio with Irina Razumovskaya

Evelyne Schoenmann



Irina, I've read in an article that your interest in art started already at the tender age of five. That is very young and calls for an explanation....

I come from the typical Russian intelligentsia family of scientists. We lived in a grim communal flat, which is my earliest memory - endless corridors with closed doors, shared 100-year-old kitchen with dozens of pickling jars, myriads of cockroaches and odd neighbors. At the same time my family and I was immersed in a bubble of culture and beauty. In these days this cultural overdose was a way to escape the grim reality. And this is how

my love for art has evolved. At the age of 5 I enrolled to the Kustodiev State Art School and the Hermitage Museum Art Lecture program, and since then, I have never stopped working in the world of art.

Can we just add your training background here?

My first degree was from Saint-Petersburg State Academy of Art and Design, it is a 6-year program, where you get first a BFA then an MFA. In 2015 I decided to do a second MA at the Royal College of Art, London, as I wanted to learn a more contemporary approach to ceramics. It was a

fantastic experience. Everything suddenly became real for me there. I learned so much at the RCA that I feel I am still processing it now, even though I now teach there myself!

You and I first met a few years ago in Milan, at the exhibition "Open to Art" at Officine Saffi. I remember an extremely shy young girl. Today you stand with both legs in life and knows exactly what you want. What happened to you in the intermittent time?

I really am still quite shy. I do my best with networking and Instagram, because they're an important part of building a

career as an artist. But that doesn't mean I'm not cringing on the inside at every opening. And there are many parts of my life that never get shown on Instagram. I know that I've made some good steps forward in my career, but as an artist I am never satisfied with my own work. It is never as good in execution as it is in my imagination.

You are... let me see ... ceramist, curator, designer, producer, tutor, and art auction organizer. Do you have a sense of mission regarding ceramics?

At the moment I have managed to focus my efforts across two main areas: my own artistic practice and teaching students. I feel that it is really important to develop the next generation of artists and push forward the discipline of ceramics. I am currently doing this through teaching at the RCA, some selective one-on-one mentoring, and my own online teaching platform "Get Art Fit" (which is currently only available for Russian-speaking students). In terms of my own artwork, I always feel there is more to do and I always get excited about my next project in the studio being better than my last. My biggest ambition is to create work that I am completely happy with, so when it is exhibited I feel that there's nothing that could have been improved. Although I don't think I'll ever reach this point!

When I look at your art, I see altered cylinders, geometric forms, and an imaginative blend thereof. The surface designs are sometimes pretty rough, other times smooth. If there is color on your work, it is restrained and subtle. What stimulates you?

Inspiration really can come from anywhere: the news, books, documentaries, or objects I see. Sometimes I'll come across something that resonates with me aesthetically or philosophically, that will end up in an idea for an artwork. In terms of shapes I frequently look at Soviet architectural studies. I also like to look at Classical and Neolithic art as a source of pure, primal shapes. When I'm visiting ancient ruins, you'll find me taking lots of pictures of small details and surface textures. When I see something that strikes a nerve with me, it goes into my artwork.





For this interview, you decided to make a wall piece that is: "like some kind of a strange geometric structure coming from the surface of the wall"

In this work, "Megalith", I wanted to create an imagined replica of dilapidated architectural forms: structures that once served a purpose that is no longer required. Built with uncompromising visual grammar, which has become softened by the touch of time, creating a poetic resonance. I start with creating my own clay. I adjust store-bought clay for different types of work. For this work I need a very sturdy clay body that won't warp or shrink, so I add fire clay, fine grog and malachite. I construct this sculpture like a builder: initially I create ceramic "beams" in press-molding technique and then attach them together. In most of my work I only create the "core" - a perfect geometric ceramic carcass, then apply glazes to allow the "magic" of the texture to happen by itself in the kiln. When I fill the mold, I first fill the corners with coils, so they are very sharp. I like to have as few connections as possible in my press-molded "beams", therefore I roll quite a large slab that would fill the whole mold. Once the mold is filled and pressed, I add the top slab to close the form. Then I let the molds rest overnight. I keep them under a plastic sheet, as it is crucial, for the same level of dryness. I assemble the clay "beams" together in order to create the desired shape. I also make a sacrificial slab and props that I place between the legs of the sculpture to prevent warping. I actually don't glaze my work in the traditional sense, I mostly use altered clay. The various layers of ceramic materials are applied subsequently. Then, all these materials start to melt and "peel" in the firing, creating an unexpected result. I create my clay-glazes sometimes quite intuitively, using my knowledge of chemistry and materials. I don't like to work with recipes, as in this case the whole process becomes a bit boring and mechanical for me. I like the excitement of the unexpected. I apply glazes with a brush, my fingers, a sponge, or a pallet-knife in various thicknesses. I layer the porcelain and glaze-like mix-



tures. The logic is simple: one layer of sturdy material and one layer of vitreous material over and over again, so in the firing there is the “fight” between the melty layers and the sturdy ones.

You exhibit your work in famous galleries. What does it mean for you to be at the top?

I would never say I am anywhere close to the top, because I really don't feel like I am! I think everyone has different definition of where the top is. A lot of people in ceramics judge their success against other ceramicists. But I think of myself as part of the wider community of fine art and design. I really believe that the best in ceramics deserves to be regarded alongside the best in painting, sculpture and installations. Too many people see it as a craft, rather than a medium for the highest artistic expression. This is a perception that is starting to change and I am very excited to be a part of this, but it also means my vision of success is still a long way off.

How do you see yourself in, say, 10 years' time? What are your plans?

A few years ago, I would have said I see myself travelling around the world, from residency to opening. And of course, I would be very commercially successful and actively engaged with the fine art scene. I still want all this, but I've come to realize that real success is about more than external recognition. I truly hope that in ten years I will be healthy, comfortable and happy, making work I am personally proud with. I am still very ambitious, but I don't want this ambition to take away from a fulfilling life and practice.

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Evelyne Schoenmann's
 next interview partner is
Luca Tripaldi, Italy.

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