

In Studio with Paula Bastiaansen

EVELYNE SCHOENMANN



photos - Marja van Hassel

Paula, you were fascinated by porcelain very early on in your professional training. Would you tell us a bit about your biography and how you came to work with porcelain?

During my studies at the Royal Academy of Art and Design (NL) I visited the Princessenhof, a ceramics museum in Leeuwarden (NL). While viewing a tiny Chinese bowl, I experienced an astonishingly breathtaking feeling. That specific moment determined the rest of my life, and my passion for porcelain.

Porcelain is something you have to get

used to because it's a very difficult material to work with. Did you know right away: this is it?

Yes, from that moment at that exhibition it was completely clear that I wanted to work with porcelain. The beauty, the transparency, the refinement, the movement, the rhythm and the strength. I knew this is it and I knew I wanted to translate all these elements into my own work.

Your artwork has an incredible dynamism, lightness and vehemence. Actually, looking at your pieces, one thinks:

that's not possible with porcelain. At the beginning of your career, were there people who tried to prevent you from trying such forms?

At that time my teachers were very much against it. They thought it was not possible to execute what I had in mind in porcelain. But their reluctance never stopped me. I was so convinced that I could do it.

When I look at your works, I imagine porcelain slip in a centrifuge that turns faster and faster, the slip sloshes out and solidifies in the air. How did you come up

with the idea of these magical forms and patterns?

It's funny how you imagine the work process!

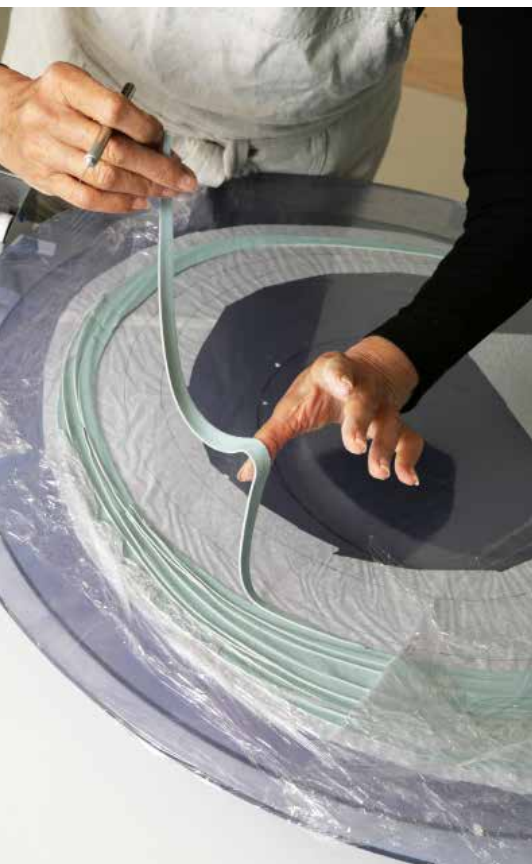
At first my objects were recognizable as a bowl or a plate shape. But I wanted more movement, weightlessness, lightness, fragility and rhythm, away from the solid form. So, I went looking for formless elements which I combined in a fixed form or object. Later I only used the formless elements so that they could move more freely and I was less bound or limited in expressing my ideas. The objects developed into bowls with separate fragments. They initiated a dialogue with space. They had a centre from which the shapes develop outwards.

Again after a few years the centre disappeared. In retrospect, this is a logical development, but when it took place, it was quite a drastic change. Space itself had become the centre. Strips of very thin porcelain whirl and take shape in a curling way. The curl is like a wave. The idea for the patterns also developed step by step. I researched the use of colour to reinforce the form. For example, by using black and white or intense colours like red with small white dots.

We'd love you to guide us through the making process of your pieces, please.

First, I make a 1:1 drawing. The drawing is important to see how the pattern will fall into the mould and how I can make the construction. After that I decide which colours I want to use. I colour the clay and prepare it for further use. Then I roll out extremely thin layers in white and when I use colours I do the same with the coloured clay. After that I make a pattern. For example: a strip of white, a strip of blue and so on. When the patterned layer is ready and the white layers too, I start by cutting the strips and putting them, strip after strip, on the drawing. Meanwhile it's important that the clay keeps the right moisture. Most of the time I put them on wet cloths. I use plastic beneath and above the strips, which keeps the right humidity. When the drawing is completely covered, the strips can be laid and arranged in a





stoneware mould (these moulds are made beforehand). This is a very important and concentrated moment. I have now worked for one or two days on the preparation and in five minutes the strips have been constructed in the mould. Then after a few days of drying in the mould, the form is ready and I can put the mould with the form in the kiln and fire it to 1260 degrees Celsius. After firing it is a rather complex object in several parts! I join them together with a two-component adhesive.

At the moment I am working on bigger installations. Starting from simple basic shapes as in the beginning; each element or object consists of two separate shapes that are placed on top of each other. The loose shapes balance on each other, I do not use the adhesive here. It is all about the balance. Several elements together make the installation. For me this is a very big step forwards. Because here my work can grow to larger dimensions on the wall or on the floor for example. This was not possible with the previous objects. It is a new, exciting and major challenge for me that I would like to develop further.

The walls of your pieces are insanely thin. I wonder why they don't collapse in the porcelain high fire? Or do they, and you go with the flow?

Each element is fired in a stoneware mould which supports most of the shape. The parts that are not supported have somewhat a life of their own in the kiln. So it is always a surprise when the kiln is opened.

For over two years now we have been working under the thumb of the pandemic. Exhibitions had to be cancelled, conferences and workshops to be postponed. Has this also thrown you off track or do you still have ideas and hopes despite the uncertain future?

In recent years but before the pandemic, I regularly did residencies and exhibitions in China and Korea. It is rather unfortunate that this has come to an abrupt end. But the good



thing is that, during the pandemic, I started making these installations. They are far less vulnerable to transport. Which gives more opportunities to participate in exhibitions and projects worldwide. I hope that it seems that my objects have always existed and that they recall that exciting feeling that inspired me so much after seeing that Chinese bowl a long time ago. That is the feeling I want to capture every single time.

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Evelyne Schoenmann's next
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