

In Studio with Gustavo Perez

Gustavo Perez follows no trends in ceramics and does not want to know what is currently in vogue. He prefers to draw inspiration from classical music and good literature. Or from an idea that he had as a child and that then, decades later, floats up to the surface.

Evelyne Schoenmann

Gustavo, I wonder: does your work have a pre-Hispanic background?

I have of course great interest and attention for the pre-Hispanic past of Mexico. But my own work does not consciously try to get anything from it, nothing at all.

Whatever influence can be found (or imagined) from this historical background is the result of an unconscious process, never something I look for. It is

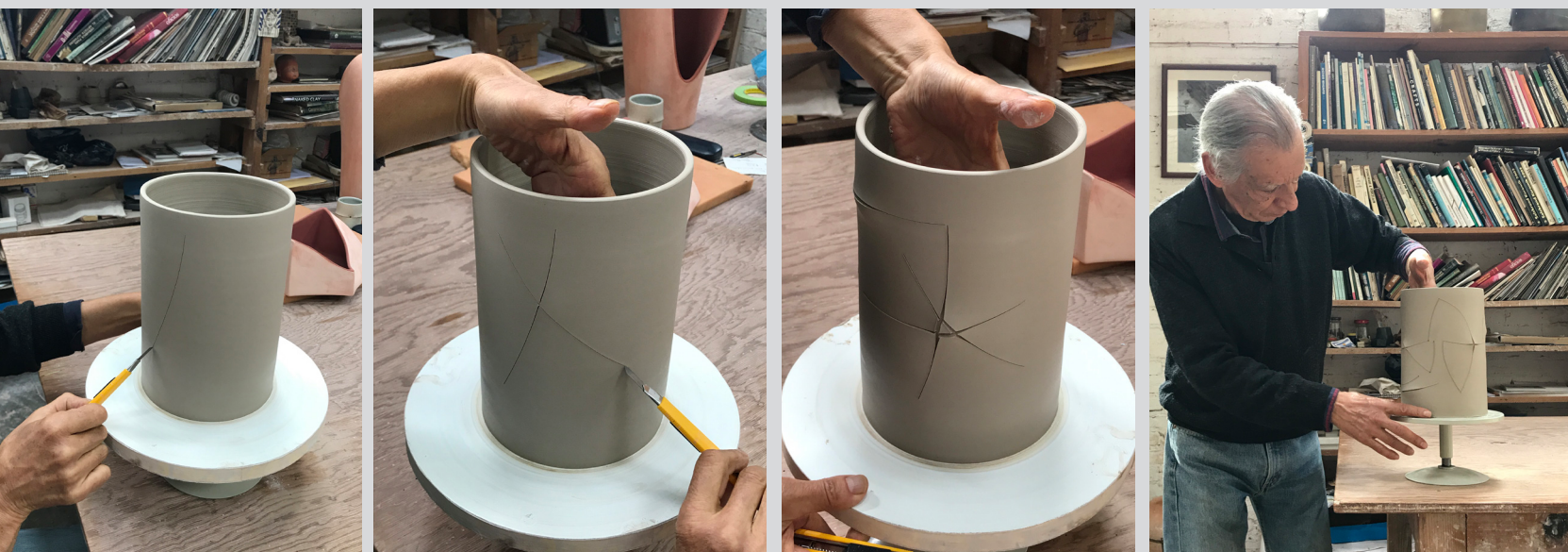
Are there any sources that influence your ceramics?

I am sure that it is impossible to say exactly what are the significant or meaningful influences that determine what an artist makes. They are just too many, and of all kinds: literature, music, painting, architecture, dance, etc. And ceramics of course.

But trying to list a few essential influences, I would say Brancusi and Hans

In the picture sequence here, we can see you working on one of your well known incised pieces. Can you explain the technique, where you got the ideas for the design, the surface treatment, the colour choice?

The technique I have used for many years is in fact quite simple. I think it certainly has to do with other technical possibilities developed in the past, but surprisingly enough I have not found



interesting to realize that in some cases, there can be something characteristic in what I make that can be thought of as Mexican, but I definitely refuse (and dislike) the idea of consciously using some examples of the past as models for what I make.

There is a Mexican trend known as “neomexicanismo” which I consider cheap and superficial; it has certainly had a certain commercial (and maybe critical) success, but this does not mean much artistically speaking.

Coper. Bach and Schubert. Jacques Brel and Leonard Cohen. Coetzee and Philip Roth and Saint-John Perse and Borges and... so many others.

You seem to work a lot, and always very secluded. Would you say you are a loner?

I don't know if wanting to work alone makes of you a loner... because for me it is a natural thing: in order to work you must be alone.

examples of it in the long history of ceramics, which makes me think I have been very lucky to discover this. To make the lines I use a blade, a sharp blade to make superficial incisions in the leather hard clay, getting then a very neat and clear design. But another element of this idea is the very interesting effect that I get by pressing from the inside of the piece, which makes the lines “open”, become wider.

Resulting in something that some critics have called wounds. This effect

I discovered by accident in 1989, and I used and developed it intensively for some ten years.

Later on I have used it much less, being interested in other ideas, but never really abandoning it as a possibility. Once the design is made, the piece must dry and be fired (biscuit) before proceeding to the application of glaze in the incisions.

For this I use a brush and normally a dark glaze that will enhance the contrast of the lines. The application of the glaze with the brush is not necessarily a very careful process, it is not as precise as some people think. Because in fact it would be almost impossible to apply it only inside the incisions.

The point is then that after it is applied more or less freely and when it is

you find, and that in fact it can be a good thing to move freely and without such concerns.

So, I do not worry at all about the many that copy me. Though I must admit that once, a clear case of plagiarism did really bother me... someone who pretended that some absolute copies of my pieces were his.

At NCECA in Kansas City I attended your presentation. I was fascinated by how you hover above a thrown piece with the knife and then, at the right moment, make incisions in the wall. Does it hurt your soul to cut into the pieces?

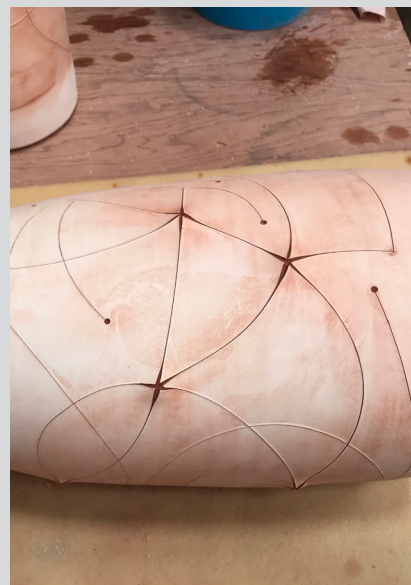
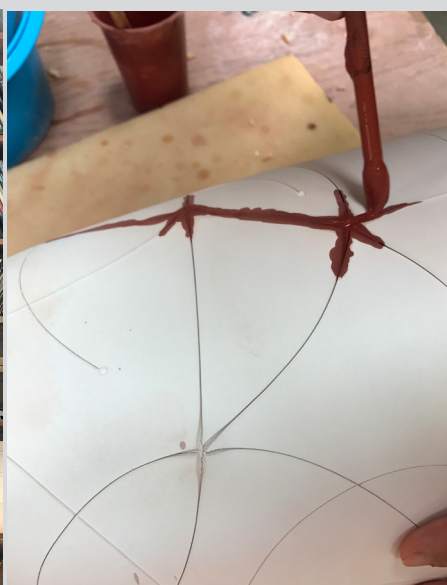
Not at all! I find a definite pleasure in feeling the knife move around the surface of the clay, but in no way

there is only the lines and the pigment in the lines, the results are easy to imagine.

What does the ideal future hold for you?

The future is something I don't like to think much about. And it is a very difficult question to answer, because I am afraid we are not going in a direction that could lead to any kind of ideal world.

Therefore, we must try to continue making what we know how to make, hoping or believing that even though our work will of course not change or save the world, at least it will do no harm to anyone. And personally, it will give us the pleasure that creative work can provide.



dry, the excess is removed with a wet sponge, making it in a careful way so that the glaze remains only in the incisions. Then it is finally fired to high temperature.

The firing is to cone 9 (approx. 1,280°C) in a slightly reducing atmosphere. And the ideal results are like a drawing with ink on paper. I have never tried to keep this technical resource as a secret, and for many years I have been showing to many how I make it, believing that it is not necessary to hide what

I can think of this action as something that "hurts" clay. This is why I found it nonsense when a critic once wrote something about the "Aztec cruelty" implicit in my technique...

When you start cutting in the wall of a piece, do you have a vision how the piece shall look in the end, including the shape and the colour?

Normally I do not think about that. But it is true that in some cases, when

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Evelyne Schoenmann's next interview is with
 Jennifer McCurdy, USA

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