

In Studio with Martha Pachón Rodríguez

Evelyne Schoenmann



Martha, you were born and raised in Bogotá. Did your career as a ceramist also start in Colombia? Please tell us about yourself.

Yes, of course. Actually, I started working with ceramics at the age of 19 in Colombia, I learned in the studios of master potters and artists. Also, after my degree in Pedagogy of Arts, I studied Fine Arts with specialization in Ceramics. My thesis in ceramic sculpture was selected for a personal exhibition in the gallery of the Banco de la Republica in the city of Neiva

in Colombia, where my passion for sculpture with ceramic materials began. As well, I was a teacher of ceramics at the Faculty of Fine Arts at the Surcolombiana University in Neiva, Colombia. Later, I came to Italy to specialize in stoneware and porcelain at the Ballardini Institute in Faenza.

Which phase of your career has had the greatest impact on you professionally?

The great impact, the formidable meeting in Italy with three great masters

of ceramics: Nino Caruso, Alessio Tasca and Lee Babel. I was surprised by the humility, generosity and the foresight. I began to frequent them in the first decade of 2000, they were already considered "old masters", but they were bolder and more contemporary than the young artists of today. The importance of this fact was not the technical or artistic knowledge received from these three masters. They gave me a lot of energy and left me a life lesson: do everything you love and love what you do. Moreover, do every-



thing in the best possible way, with excellence and with passion.

You live and work in Italy now, having your own studio and school. This leads me to ask what you have to consider when you manage a ceramics studio that is training and producing?

Well, actually, my studio and the school are two different things, but they go by the same way. The school, the FACC, Faenza Art Ceramic Center was created in collaboration with a private company that sells materials and machinery for ceramics, in the city of Faenza. In this school I was the director until last year. Thanks to my experience in teaching, I organized the didactic part, inviting artists from all over the world and also, the creation of spaces and a programme for artistic residencies. Has been a great experience, but also a hard work that has no schedules or limits. At the end of the year 2020 I decided to leave school management and dedicate more time to my studio and my production. The year 2021 is a period of transition; I will finish some projects with the FACC and some courses. It is not easy to have three jobs, artistic production, management and teaching. Something has to be sacrificed. Unfortunately, this idea that I had for a long time and that I was able to develop thanks to the private company, I have to leave it and concentrate on the artistic work. However, I will continue to teach some courses in Italy and abroad and also in my studio.

If you could invite a famous ceramicist (living or gone) to work with you in your studio, who would be your favourite?

Acute question! It is impossible to define a favourite artist, but if by magic, I could meet and organize a course, I would choose several artists (living or gone), for example, Jun Kaneko, Peter Voulkos, Sergei Isupov, Hamada, Maria Martinez, Alessio Tasca, Lee Babel ... and many others.... The world is full of many great masters!

Your work consists of three main lines: sculptures, installations and jewellery. Could you give us some of the background to these works?

I learned many techniques in Colombia, especially to work on a large scale, for this reason, I started as a sculptor. From this beginning the wall sculptures and large-scale lighting installations were born. The famous South American poncho was the starting point for installations such as Wed-



ing the conception of a piece, thinking about it in monumental dimensions and at the same time in small dimensions, a precious dimension. I love creating jewellery. In conclusion, they are an extension of the sculpture. I wish I had more time to create some special jewels that I have drawn in notebooks, but I think it will be for my next life.

We would love you to guide us through the technical process of the "sein-oursin" (sea-urchin) you made for our interview. Perhaps you might also address the sensual component of the piece....

It is very important to prepare everything well. I review the drawings that I have made in my notebooks; I review the colour combination drawings on the computer, the tests of the coloured porcelain body. I prepare all the necessary tools and material. First, a few days before starting the sculpture, I prepare the coloured porcelain body. Then, with the white porcelain body, I make large thin plates and cut and prepare many leaves. These leaves are kept covered with plastic to prevent them from losing humidity and elasticity. Subsequently, I prepare the leaves with Nerikomi. The Nerikomi is an ancient Asian technique where I mix different-coloured porcelain pastes in a certain way, creating a pattern. Later, this pattern is flattened until creating a thin sheet from which I cut pieces of different shapes, in this case in the shape of leaves or petals. I cover everything with plastic until the day of piece building. For the construction of this sculpture, I use a three-part mould. I'll start with the lid of the mould and apply leaf after leaf, pressing delicately to form the crown of the piece. Later, I build the body of the piece. I prepare two thin plates and press them into the other two parts of the mould. Once these plates are added, I close the entire mould: the two halves of the body with the crown of the Sea-urchin. When I open the mould, I finish and clean carefully. Let it dry calmly for more than a week. After the first firing (950°C), I proceed to

ding Cloak, Medusa and Water Garden. These installations were also influenced by European culture, specifically Italian, such as Mappa celeste, the installation inspired by Giotto and its ultramarine blue skies upholstered with golden stars. Regarding the sculptures, I have always designed closed shapes, like seeds, gems or eggs.

These sculptures were born in stoneware, very connected to the earth and in the last 18 years they have evolved open, made in porcelain, with the influence of the sea, of the magic Mediterranean culture. All my life I have thought that sculpture should be carried with us, like an amulet, like an ornament, like a jewel. I cannot avoid, dur-



clean and correct any defect delicately. A fine sandpaper can be used to correct and polish. Finally, the 1280°C firing and again delicately cleaning under water. Mixture of human eroticism and seduction with animal nature is the inspiration of "Sea-urchin". Actually, the name is "sein-oursin", it was born from two French words: breast and sea-urchin that has double meaning, one erotic and one animal and also, these two words have rhyme in their pronunciation. Rhythm and meaning in this "sein-oursin" series.

You are working mainly with porcelain, so the firing temperature must be very high. What do you have to take into account so that the works do not warp in the kiln? Do you work with aids, props?

It's true, high temperature can deform or break the porcelain. Several aspects should be kept in mind: the firing curve must be slow to avoid deformations, slow drying to avoid breakage and protect the piece with a stoneware support. This stoneware support has the same shape as the piece and it is fired inside avoiding many risks. In this case, simply a stoneware cone where the piece is placed inside and then placed in the kiln where it is fired quietly.

My last question is always about the future of my guests. If you had three wishes, Martha: What would they be?

I really have one only: I wish a world more honest, more humble and more respectful of the environment. The recent world situation has shown how ignorant, impatient we are and we care only about personal well-being. I hope that everything that has happened will be useful to humanity to make a change of mentality.

MARTHA PACHON RODRIGUEZ
Via Laghi 51A - 48013, Faenza (Ravenna) ITALY
Mobile: +393337228967
marthapachon7@gmail.com
www.mprodriguez.com

Evelyne Schoenmann's
next interview partner is
Jane Jermyn, Ireland

Evelyne Schoenmann is a ceramist,
writer and curator. She is an AIC/IAC
member, and lives and works in Basel.
www.schoenmann-ceramics.ch