

In Studio with Ute Naue-Müller

Evelyne Schoenmann



Ute, your training and further education from 1979 to 2001 couldn't have been more varied. Can you tell us how you came to be a ceramist today?

Without going into too much detail, I was born in Dresden but I spent my childhood in Halle an der Saale, a rather grey city at the time, dominated by the chemical industry. My parents, both scientists, had created a kind of island of the arts for me: piano lessons at the conservatory and a large library full of wonderful children's books. I painted a lot and knitted with a passion. Quite naturally, the spirit of physics was al-

ways tangible in our house, and I was certainly strongly influenced by it. And so I first became an engineer, something "with substance", especially since the Technical University in Dresden was then and still is a good place to study. So back to the old homeland. Then came the wonderful but stressful phase, the parallel worlds of bearing and raising children, juggling that with working as an engineer. Finally, I sensed a longing to explore new fields of knowledge. At nearly 40, I went back to university again: German studies and art education with fantastic new worlds of images and text. It was during this time that

I first came into contact with clay in the university's ceramics workshop. Then I gathered further experience by working in two traditional local potteries, as well as self-taught learning.

When you look at the gallery on your website, you are initially overwhelmed by the variety of colours in your works. Does this reflect your character, your being?

For me, colour and music are comparable: both wordless and yet they are language. Both speak to me emotionally, so I have a deep-rooted need to express myself creatively through colour.

There is a lot to consider when creat-

ing a painterly composition: the chiaroscuro, the play of glossy and matt, colour applied linearly or as a surface, the choice of colour in general, the effect on a three-dimensional object and much more. However, these considerations are preceded by the discovery and precise formulation of the topic: until then, not a molecule of clay is moved. And only when a lot, but perhaps not everything, is clear does the clay thing begin.

I am inspired, among other things, by my direct living environment, for instance the garden biotope at my house, photographs of cell structures, minerals, plants with their chaotic or ordered structures, images from mathematics.

Since the beginning of your ceramic career, various animal creatures have populated the stage of your work. Since 2016, this has been reinforced by a whole flock of birds, which you call "human high-flyers and low-flyers". In 2018, numerous beasts joined them. In general, you're brimming with analogies. Am I right?

Absolutely spot on. We humans often look for references to the "natural" as an analogy to the "created environment" in the form of artefacts. And that is where I interface ceramically with the viewer.

In principle, I have at least a two-pronged approach: the "beautiful and good" as a kind of "pots for polite society", without too much irony, with a certain seriousness and targeted expression. This is where the many colourful, fine vessel individuals belong, often very time-consuming to create. Due to the spread of images, from micro and macro photography for example, in the general consciousness, this speaks to many people and they find analogies. All I need to do is give my personal two cents' worth in the form of my own aesthetic interpretation or composition.

The other section includes the high and low flyers you mentioned, the opposite pole to the "polite pots", in the form of the absurd and satirical. Analogous conclusions are particularly obvious here as we simply do not want to move away from the "dodgy dog" and the "dozy donkey".

This is where my desire for productive nonsense comes into its own and

I can come to terms with the melancholic suffering caused by the current brutal conditions in our common world in my own way. In addition, the serious danger of getting stuck on the high stool of meaning is averted.

For our interview, you chose (and I quote) "a figure from a collection, similar to an old natural history book in the form of a bestiary". The so-called Pumice Louse. Please tell us more about how you created it.

The occasion was an exhibition at an art fair in the foyer of a large Dresden printing company, where only small-scale ceramics were possible, to be displayed in an oversized typecase with 26 compartments.

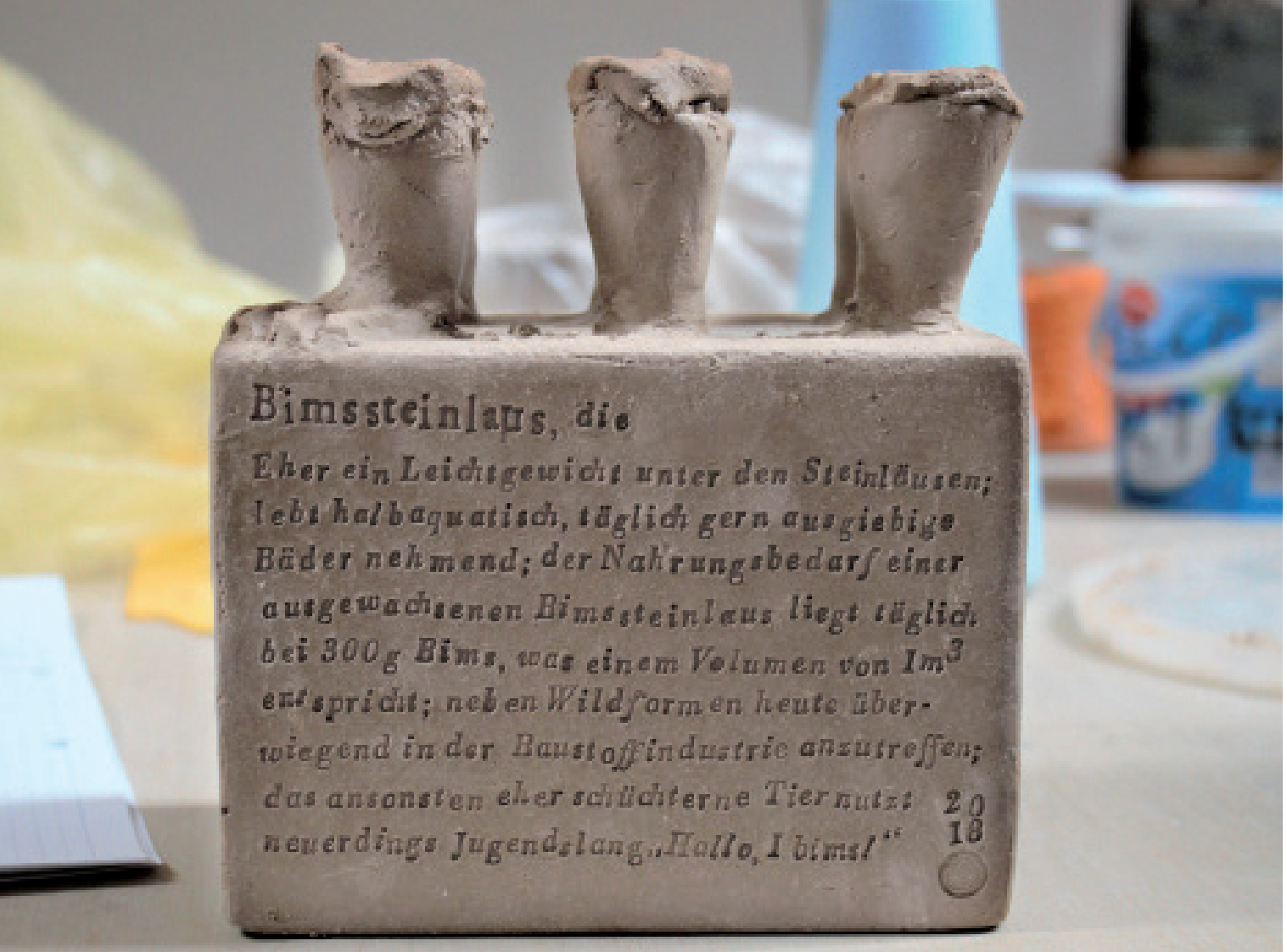
What our human lowlands have in common is that they are numerous and therefore the material does not run out. And so, after the flock of birds from 2016, I created another collection of beasts from A to Z. The Pumice Louse is one of the friendlier representatives in this collection.

First of all, I alphabetically collected a large number of animal metaphors to describe our human weaknesses. Some letters provided a lot of material, with some I had to "help" by specially inventing creatures.

The Pumice Stone Louse is my homage to (German humorist) Loriot, who created a Stone Louse for a small cartoon film decades ago, and it is said to have caused church ruins to finally collapse in the post-war period and to have completely metabolized the remains. I found it sensationally funny to blame this little insect for our cultural barbarism. And so I thought to myself that this could perhaps still be causing trouble today, currently in the building materials industry. Such a greedy pig stealing resources, a louse in the fur, feeding on "our" pumice. A porous creature, light as a feather and therefore difficult to catch. In addition, the fact of the youth word of the year 2017, "Hello, i bims!", ("Hi, it's me", "bims" is the German word for pumice) which had just been published at the time, was woven into my head, a kind of modern gesture of revelation. So I brought the Pumice Stone Louse into existence and put it on a pedestal.

Technically, this small figure, just under 40 cm in height, is made of clay







slabs, which were given their 3D texture in advance by scattering lentils over them, reminiscent of the structure of pumice stone and at the same time the crater landscape of an uninhabited planet. Unfortunately,

I had to stop the germination of the lentils, or the greening of the louse, prematurely because roots were forming. The clay structure was becoming increasingly unstable. The base was also made of clay slabs. A small text specially developed to describe this (non-)creature was embossed all around with metal letters. After the bisque firing, it was coloured with oxide and finally fired at 1150 °C.

I think it's great that you don't concentrate on a specific theme for ever, but that you use the material clay in an extremely playful way. In our e-mails you sparked with ideas. Can you even finish pursuing a topic before the next idea replaces the last one?

I'm almost always very focused on an idea, especially in the design phase. And I then implement this specific theme in ceramics in numerous variations, although I

don't find all of them are satisfactory.

But sometimes there is time, a lot of time, between an idea and its implementation. And so sometimes it doesn't work at all, which can have various reasons.

For instance, back then I planned to bring a series of stone lice to life, like a concrete stone louse, which would have had a say in the fall of the Berlin Wall. The text has already been written... "in the beginning was the word" (JWG) – the implementation is a long time coming, "for eternity is long" to paraphrase Wilhelm Busch.

Will there be new beasts to admire in the future? Or do you have ideas in a completely different direction?

Beasts for sure – they aren't going to die out. In the near future I have planned a kind of baroque cabinet of curiosities for a solo exhibition here in the Dresden gallery, Kunst Exhibition Kühl. Naturally there will be some absurdities. Odile and Odette from the Russian Swan Lake have been dancing around on my windowsill in the workshop for a few weeks now. But classic items will also be on display in the

Chamber of Curiosities.

And I will definitely continue to rely on the "affect of transformation as a planned expectation into nothingness" (Immanuel Kant in Parody and Satire) in the future and not overcomplicate things.

Beyond that, I would like to see many conversations about ceramic work and beyond, to give each other courage. With that in mind, thank you very much!

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**TONraum Workshop with
 Ute Naue-Müller**
 from 1st to 3rd December 2023
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Evelyn Schoenmanns next
 interview partner is
Ioan Iosif, Romania

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