

A passion for porcelain

Artist Claudia Biehne moulds both light and heaviness

Those on the search for interesting and idiosyncratic works of art made from porcelain or even smaller, subtler pieces for everyday use know the way to building 10 at the Leipzig Spinnereigelände [spinning-mill area]. The porcelain studio located in this cultural area in the western part of the city has for some time ceased being a well-kept secret. Both the presentation rooms as well as the adjoining studio have been open to the public for many years. Anyone may come along during their regular business hours and take a look, be amazed and ask questions. But above all, it's the porcelain works by Claudia Biehne that have been creating such a sensation and generating so much interest.

The artist is from Leipzig, Germany. Born in Leipzig in 1974, she grew up along the Pleiße River and went to school there. Her training took her to other places on many occasions. However, since 2004, her home and studio are located once again in the city of her birth. In addition to the workshop and studio work, in the last few years there have been presentations at selected art fairs and museums worldwide, which have become the most important aspect of her work. Since 2007, Stefan Passig has been responsible for the necessary (but also time-consuming) task of organising her work. At that time, it was decided that they would professionally run the porcelain studio together as business partners. By running marketing campaigns, developing all of their financial procedures and with his representative photographs of the porcelain works, the studied photographer supported the creative work of his business partner, Claudia Biehne.

This co-operation has proven to be the correct path to follow. The artist has had a lot of positive feedback on her interesting and idiosyncratic porcelain works for quite some time now. In 2014 alone, her works could be seen at important exhibitions in the USA, UK, Japan, Austria, and the Netherlands, as well as in Germany. In 2013, Stefan Passig and Claudia Biehne were awarded the special prize by the Saxon State Ministry of Science and the Arts in the fifth international Marianne Brandt competition. In 2014, the partners from Leipzig won the jury prize at the 10th International Ceramics Competition in Mino, Japan. Her works can today be found in renowned museums and international private art collections.

Such a long and intensive process of examining the material led Claudia Biehne to the freedom of working in such an expert and experimental way, exploring the limits, and overcoming these to open up new design possibilities for her porcelain works.

The start of this process was marked by her time as a scholarship student in Luxembourg. There she attended the École des Beaux Arts [School of Fine Arts] and studied in an academic environment. This also included the disciplines of painting and drawing. It also opened the door to her working in a private potter's workshop where she was given free rein to explore for herself. When she returned back to Leipzig, she started her vocational training as a potter in Angela Teubert's workshop. She then learnt how to master clay as well as the respective glazing and kiln techniques. In 1996, she was accepted onto a degree course at the Burg Giebichenstein University for Art and Design in Halle. There she studied in the field of ceramics and glass design under Hubert Kittel. The orientation of the Halle school is focused on an "exciting field of product design and applied art - with a particular focus on workshop relevant design competencies" (university publication). At the Burg, the student worked in the raw materials of porcelain and glass.

Looking back, she can today say that her studies brought her to working with porcelain in many different ways. The strictly materials-focused training in Halle as well as the experiences from her time in Helsinki, Finland, which was funded by the Erasmus programme, helped her to make up her mind. She spent one

semester at the University of Arts and Design in the Finnish capital. There, she was granted access to creative work for the first time. She was surprised to be asked questions like this one in particular: What is it you really want to achieve? This resulted in a change of focus and she seized the courage to work on her own free and creative development.

She completed her studies at the Burg with a diploma in 2003 and then started a 2-year-long postgraduate course under Hubert Kittel. She had already obtained her own working rooms at the Leipzig Spinnerei in 2004.

First and foremost, she has since created several collections in porcelain as well as some individual pieces that are occasionally made out of clay. These are formed into 2 categories: translucent lightness and deep heaviness. The artist uses the word 'Lumos' to describe those objects which are made from uniquely cast porcelain that she is able to make highly translucent.

She has tried many things to be able to achieve this. Each failure brought new knowledge that pushed her forward. Today the light and fine bowl objects are embossed with delicate lithophanes (relief designs in the translucent material). Claudia Biehne collects and presses flowers and leaves for this purpose. She has since learnt exactly how to handle the individual parts of the plant and when and how she can place them into a casting mould, how she needs to cast them and how the objects need to be dried so that they can be integrated with the other structures and arranged to set the scene. Furthermore her work is in stark contrast to the usual idea of the finished form: unusual moulds, folds as well as creases and broken frames are all included.

That's how dreams are realised out of solid and razor-thin porcelain, which, when light is shone on it glows in its own very unique and interesting way, allowing the object to carry experiences from nature. This is further advanced in the 'Lumos' works which are true objects of pure light.

The objects in the collection grow from countless individual parts which Claudia Biehne terms 'Between the Tides.' Initially, observers feel that the works are evocative of coral, a life form that's intricate and gentle as well as fragile; which is a complete contrast to traditional designs that are made of smooth porcelain as the surfaces of the works - both outer and inner - are designed in a structured way. Through extremely patient work, the artist assembles hundreds of individual porcelain segments together. Multiple burning processes are required and multiple additions need to be added before a work is completed.

Far beyond the aesthetic impact of the works, the collection also contains interpretations on nature and its tarnished form, on beauty and also on loss.

The interleaving of perception and design is particularly apparent in her works from 'Time and Visibility'. In this piece, the Leipzig-based artist combines shapes from "numerous dropped" porcelain (scraps from a workshop) from over the years with her own moulds, in which she had even gilded partially. These works develop an impressive energy through their forms and structures.

The objects in the 'Vulcanoid' collection are earthbound in expression and weight. The material appears massive in contrast to the backdrop and real lightness of 'Lumos'. Although the basic form of each vessel is a bowl, they are more reminiscent of lava, drips of glass, and pieces of rock in between ice and fire.

Even if the title of the collection is initially reminiscent of the volcanic geology of the Earth, the term 'Vulcanoid' stems from astronomy. It refers to hypothetical asteroids within the orbit of the planet Mercury. They represent something possible, existent, but not yet certain. Just like the poetical form of Claudia Biehne's porcelain art works as well.