

YNA VAN DER MEULEN

Touched by Life

Madame Pourquoi



Dutch artist Yna van der Meulen seeks out the essence of humanity: memories, emotions, captured in ceramics. She makes haunting sculptures which deeply affect the viewer.

When Yna van der Meulen first handled clay in 1997, she had no idea how this material would change her life. Besides her busy career in the communications industry, she had done a lot of painting over the years, but now she wanted to make “a few wine goblets...” The goblets never got made, but the expression of the human form in clay fascinated her inordinately.

Her work developed rapidly. For a few years, she became involved in the study of anatomical proportions and working from life. Then her work took on a new dimension. Her sculptures became more stylised... and emotions crept in. Human heads blurred to become “Memories”, figures radiated a sense of desperation or anger. It was the reflection of a difficult period in her life.

Animated Images

The hectic nature of her work in the field of communications had long been left behind, allowing her to dedicate herself entirely to writing stories and articles – some of which were for KLEI, the Dutch ceramics magazine. She attended workshops and residencies as well as interviewing ceramic artists in many different countries, thus gaining a great deal of experience in this field.

Almost without trying, this link between her writing and her art became closer and closer. She says, “Both in my articles and in my figures, I try to capture the essence of what it is that moves people, literally and figuratively. A figure or a story only has expressive power for me if something of this inner world can be found which may be full of joyfulness and lightness, or equally a pit of despondency and bitterness. I want to touch people...” This emotional profundity has become characteristic of all her work.

Frozen Memories

Just as one word can conjure up a whole world, one image can also transport the viewer emotionally. The intensity of the emotions that she represents, simply, almost unassumingly, af-

top **Rage**, detail, glazed stoneware, h 46 cm, 2003

left **Lot's Wife**, detail, glazed stoneware, h 51 cm, 2007

opposite **Mugs**, stoneware, smoke fired, 2007



Yna van der Meulen was born in the Netherlands in 1956. Since 1997, she has been an artist working with clay. She also writes stories and articles, including for the Dutch ceramics magazine, KLEI.

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Yna van der Meulen's work is on show from 29 June – 9 August at Galerie Theemaas, Karel Doormanstraat 469, 3012 GH Rotterdam, the Netherlands, +31 (0)10 4111213, www.theemaas.nl Further details on her work can be found on www.hetsteenenhoofd.nl

fects the viewer deeply. At the annual ceramics market in Giroussens in France, there was a visitor who liked her figures immensely, but who also pointed out that he wouldn't like to wake up next to a figure like that every morning. He called it "suicide art". And she can see this herself: "I tend to dramatise. I lead my own life with great intensity too, with ups and downs, never superficially. That is why it is hard for me to make cheerful superficial figures." Lot's wife is a popular sculptural theme. Regretting decisions taken, unwelcome turning points appearing in life, things past... Have I lived life to the full? Could I have achieved more? "These are frozen memories. This is really what I would like to capture in my work. No more and no less."

Observations on life

Yna van der Meulen clearly concentrates more on expression than on technique. "Many ceramists are prisoners of technique", she explains, "but my target is the emotions that I want to express." She usually works with stoneware clay, sometimes porcelain. She does not like bright, glossy surfaces. She decorates her figures with slips and very matt glazes. For her functional pots – a second line beside her sculptural work – she uses the smoke firing technique: the stoneware body is coated with porcelain slip, burnished, and then, after the biscuit firing, it is smoked. Even in these functional pots, she tries to establish a link to humanity: "For me, even my mugs are philosophical. They are reflections on the nature of life. The Dutch work for "head" means face or head, but it also means a drinking mug. There is no difference. Human beings are vessels. Full of emotions, full of memories."

Madame Pourquoi For many years, she had an important role at the Dutch ceramics magazine KLEI, but she has recently taken a more backseat role and only writes occasional articles so that she can concentrate on her ceramics. Writing never completely leaves her alone because it certainly remains one of her passions; interviews are very dear to her. To her mind, an article based on an interview is like a carefully constructed composition in which the character of the interviewee is captured. French ceramists call her "Madame Pourquoi..."

