

Interview with Margareta Daepf

Bern, January 2011

What did you bring along today?

A piece from the „Tokyo Line“ – a series of three pieces that reinterprets the pulsating metropolis of Tokyo. It is a vase as well as an object and isn't an object of utility in the first place. It is a contemporary reinterpretation of Japanese ceramics and the overall topic is the use of colour.

Both parts are made of porcelain, but the top part is treated with a bright red car finish so it shines metal-like. On the bottom part, a modified Tokyo Underground-plan was applied by laser print-transfer and then burnt into the porcelain.

I once stayed in Japan to get to know its culture a little better. I spent three months at an international Ceramic centre where I occupied myself with the classic Japanese techniques in the first place. This deep dive into the traditional Japanese techniques from the 17th century led to the design of the “Tokio-Line”.

Define your work in three words...

Experimental, form-conscious, radical.

What is design to you?

Regarding ceramics, good design means function, content and aesthetics build an ensemble. To push the boundaries towards the visual arts as well as the interface between design and crafts are important balancing acts in my work.

So if I develop a vase, different approaches are possible. The vase can be mainly functional: it is waterproof, the flowers appear at their best and the colour of the vase corresponds with the flowers.

But if I apply traditional Japanese techniques from the 17th century, the vase somewhat becomes a body from another time, even though it is a contemporary form. The vase receives a total originality and despite the fact that the vase is not from our time or not from our culture, it can be incorporated in contemporary design. It is an object for use, but the fact that it is a vase is absolutely secondary. In that case, it is all about the character of the object.



What does a normal day in your life look like?

A normal day simply doesn't exist. I teach at the Ecole des Arts Appliqués in Geneva and next to that I have my own practise.

At the moment, I work on the topic of Beijing and I am about to develop forms. The high culture of Chinese ceramics of course is a tremendous theme. To filter out its essence so that it works here in Europe is a major challenge. (This work is now on show in the exhibition “Helvètes vulcains” - Céramique contemporaine at the mudac in Lausanne, from July 5 until September 25, 2011.)

Sketches and concepts come into existence in my study at home. At my workshop, I mainly produce... there I develop casting moulds, work with the material and on the forms. Ceramics are an elaborate craft and I do most of it on my own. It turned out to be that way due to the fact that it is not that easy to find someone willing to manufacture it.

Who are your heroes? What inspires you?

I don't have any heroes. But in the last years, Japan has become a topic of particular importance. The four months I spent there were very significant.

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To me, the Japanese culture is THE culture par excellence.

I later completed a Master's degree in Design, Art and Innovation and my thesis also dealt with the Japanese aesthetics. It is in the radically simple aesthetics of Japanese Architecture, Design and Fashion where I can find topics I am truly passionate about. The radicalness of Japanese creation from different centuries fascinates me.

Next to that, contemporary art is another source of inspiration.

What would you do if you weren't designer?

I definitely need to find topics I can deal with creatively. It doesn't matter if that is in the field of Architecture, Fashion or Product Design. But if I would need to do something completely different, I would probably tend to garden just like this one (referring to the Orangerie Elfenau in Bern where the interview took place.)

Do you think Bern is a good place to be as a creative?

Bern is not a good place to be as a designer, but it is my home town. Bern is a provincial town, I would need a much bigger city that is pulsating. But what city that is, I can't tell. On the other hand, there is not much influence that distracts me from my work. In the end, I can exhibit my objects internationally so that is fine.

Where do you see yourself in five years?

I'd like to have more time for my own work so I could work more intensely on my objects.

But in five years time, my situation will be fairly similar due to the fact that my job as a teacher will stay the same. But you never know, life is full of surprises.

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