

Dirty Magazine

http://dirty-mag.com/01/art_lcraste.html



AT FIRST GLANCE, LAURENT CRASTE'S WORK MAY APPEAR TO BE ABOUT VIOLENCE & VANDALISM; HOWEVER, IN OUR INTERVIEW WITH THE FRENCH SCULPTOR HE MAKES IT CLEAR - IT'S MORE ABOUT MAKING STATEMENTS ABOUT HISTORY, LUXURY AND ULTIMATELY, VANITY.
Edited by Kirsten Matthew

DIRTY: WHERE DID YOU GROW UP?

LAURENT CRASTE: I was born and grew up in Orléans, France, a very old and historically rich city on the side of the Loire River. Even if it has been severely damaged by the American bombings during the WWII, it has still many ancient areas with medieval and renaissance buildings and churches. So, even if I didn't come from a very wealthy family, I grew up surrounded with ornate façade, works of art and statues. A part of my family was living in Versailles, and we used to visit them frequently. To tell you how classical art was a normal element of my environment: when we wanted to have a little walk with the family dog, we used to go to the nearby park: the park of the Versailles castle! Landscaped by Le Nôtre, and full of sculptures and objet d'art....It was just natural to me, little child, to traipse around in the gardens of Louis XIV! This easy access to culture for anyone, because of its omnipresence, is a very fascinating aspect of Europe.

D: ARE THERE ANY OTHER ARTISTS IN YOUR FAMILY?

LC: I am the only artist in the entire family. My parents were state employees, other members of my family are lawyers, dentists or engineers. A very normal, middle-class family, not particularly interested or expert in art, especially contemporary art they were highly suspicious of! On the other hand, as almost everybody in France, they were very conscious and proud of the glorious artistic past of their country. So my familial background was naturally, if not actively, receptive to art.

D: ARE YOU WORKING ON ANYTHING AT THE MOMENT?

LC: Right now, I'm working on the shipping of two of my video installations to the Expo Shangai 2010. It's a lot of work and organization, and this management aspect of an artist's carrier is not what I prefer to do, but it is essential. I'm also in the middle of an intensive teaching session at the college - this is a practice I feel very strongly about. I will return to my studio for some new creations later this spring, as I may participate to the Toronto International Art Fair next fall.





D: WHAT IS IT LIKE WORKING WITH PORCELAIN, COMPARED TO, LETS SAY CERAMIC?

LC: Your question is interesting, as it illustrates the very common confusion about ceramic and porcelain. In fact, porcelain is one of the three clay bodies – earthenware and stoneware are the two others - that are designated more generally as ceramic. So porcelain is ceramic, but indeed, porcelain is a particular kind of ceramic: purely white and vitrified after firing, it has always been surrounded by a special aura, because of its purity and translucence. The secret of its composition was kept during centuries by its discoverer – China, and it has been an object of fascination in the entire world and of an intense commercial traffic between the rich and mighty nobility of Europe and China’s imperial manufactures until the XVIII century, when its secret –kaolin – has finally been discovered in Germany in 1708. Then, European manufactures, run by and working for the nobility, developed in Europe, producing luxury objects of considerable values. For example, the Sèvres manufacture in France has been founded by Louis XV and his mistress, Mme de Pompadour, to provide the royal court with decorative objects in porcelain. This is because of these socio-economical and historical references that I use this special clay for my works. At the same time, this is a very delicate material that, compared to stoneware and earthenware, requires special cares to work with, especially meticulousness and precision, and these aspects suit my disposition perfectly.

D: WHAT ROLE DOES THE DECORATIVE OBJECT PLAY IN YOUR WORK?

LC: It is obviously fundamental in my practice, conceptually and physically. All my research centers on conceptual explorations of the multiple layers of meaning of decorative collectibles, in their sociological and historical dimensions, and also in their ideological and aesthetics ones. I consider the decorative object as a social indicator, a “sign bearer” (I quote here the French philosopher Abraham Moles). Considered alternately as instruments of political power, ideological vehicles, demonstrations of ostentatious luxury and economic power, or incarnations of emotions and experiences, the historical archetypes of decorative arts consummately provide me with useful material. I use them in different ways, through a process of violent deconstruction, or

tactics of pictorial subversion, or as screens for video projections, depending with which conceptual aspect I want to deal. However, in any case in my approach, the decorative object ultimately embodies human vanity.

D: WHEN DID THE IDEA FIRST COME TO YOU TO EXPLORE CAPTURING THE ATTACKING & DESTROYING OF THE DECORATIVE OBJECT?

LC: I have always been fascinated by the phenomenon of vandalism, especially the ransacking phases that accompany revolutionary insurrections, when the works of art are destroyed because they incarnate an ideology, or symbolize a specific social class. This has been the case of course during the French Revolution, but also during the Chinese Cultural Revolution during the 70's, when thousands of magnificent porcelains have been systematically destroyed, because they symbolized, in the eyes of Mao's Red Guards, the bourgeois culture and the imperial power. This is after reading about this subject a few years ago, and after many years working as a more traditional ceramist, that I had the idea of exploring iconoclasm as a theme for creation. If I can intellectually understand the ideological motivations of such actions, I am horrified by the destruction of masterpieces, incarnation of human genius and beauty. And at the same time I am also totally fascinated by the destructive impulse, the violent nihilistic action. My works attempt to express this ambiguity and, paradoxically, I managed to transform an act of destruction in an act of creation.





D: BECAUSE IN SOME CASES, THE RESULTS ARE ORGANIC, A SURPRISE, DO YOU MAKE MULTIPLES?

LC: Because all my pieces are hand-thrown (I don't use molds and the casting technique), I always work on a different, unique, object. But most of all, the action I subject them to is every time unique and the result is uncertain. So, it is absolutely impossible for me to reproduce a piece and make multiples. But what I can do is to act with the same kind of tool on the same type of object, and then the pieces will belong to the same conceptual «family», even if, formally, they will be inevitably different.

D: WHAT WILL YOU BE EXPLORING IN YOUR NEXT BODY OF WORK?

LC: I'm planning to work on large scale porcelain pieces. This is a technical challenge, but it will allow me to explore other intervention modes and to obtain new visual effects.

D: DO YOU WORK IN ANY OTHER MEDIUMS? WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR OTHER INTERESTS?

LC: I use video projections in some of my works, using ceramic objects as screens for animated decorative motifs. It allows me to explore more poetic aspects of the decorative object. I do all the filming and the editing myself, and this is a technique I really enjoy to practice. I also would like to work with engraving techniques in order to explore the representation of objects.

D: WHO / WHAT MAKES YOU FEEL INSPIRED?

LC: All forms of classical, official or academic art inspire me – as I take much pleasure in corrupting it!



D: HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR SENSE OF HUMOR?

LC: Strangely, I did not initially intend to give a humorous aspect to my pieces, but they very often ended up looking funny. I now totally assume that. In fact, humor adds a derisory side to my pieces that I really like. I would say that this humor is truly tragicomic.

D: IF YOU HAD NOT BEEN A VISUAL ARTST, YOU PROBABLY WOULD HAVE CHOSEN TO BECOME:

LC: A pianist. I have been playing the piano since I was a child, and classical music is very close to my heart.

D: WHAT'S THE LAST GOOD BOOK YOU READ?

LC: I've just finished reading Gore Vidal's historical novel «Julian», dealing with the life of the Roman emperor Julian the Apostate. A masterpiece.