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CONTEMPORARY CERAMICS: THREE PERSPECTIVES

ART MULTIPLIED: EDITIONS BY CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS

The twentieth century witnessed the emergence of new artistic disciplines like installation art, photography, performance and video. The artist's multiple, now a form of expression in its own right, was representative of an ultimate utopia in which art and its market were democratized. Still, a few rules applied: artists had to cover their tracks by repurposing an everyday object, giving it new life, often with humour; and the work had to be reproduced in at least fifty copies, using non-traditional materials and techniques. Introduced by Marcel Duchamp in 1935 with his *Rotoreliefs*, the multiple calls into question the singular status of a work of art. In the 1960s and 1970s, Yoko Ono, a member of the Fluxus movement, and Claes Oldenburg and Andy Warhol, associated with Pop Art, took this approach, as did Joseph Beuys, creator of some 520 multiples. More recently, the Canadian collective General Idea and British artist Damien Hirst have also worked in multiples.

■ GENERAL IDEA

This group (AA Branson, Felix Partz, Jorge Zontal), active from 1969 to 1994, was focussed on understanding pop culture and interested in the symbiotic interactions between the artist, the museum, the media and the public. Its members questioned the status of the object and integrated criticism of the art market into their creative process. They introduced the idea of "boutique culture" by producing low-cost multiples that side-stepped gallery sales to expand their consumer market. *Test Pattern: T.V. Dinner Plate* accompanies the installation *Test Pattern: T.V. Dinner Plate from the Miss General Idea Pavillion* exhibited at SPIRAL (Wacoal Art Center) in Tokyo in 1988. It was produced in Nagoya, a leading Japanese centre for

ceramics and porcelain, in two limited editions based on a hand-painted porcelain prototype. The first edition totalled 238, with eighteen signed artist's proofs. The plate's pattern alludes to the test pattern used in pre-digital television: a fixed image consisting of a universal series of brightly coloured bands that appeared when a station was not broadcasting a programme. General Idea took an image from mass culture and infused it with new meaning, probing our daily relationship with the media and consumption habits.

■ DAMIEN HIRST

This enfant terrible of the art world is both the most prominent and most controversial artist of his generation. Everyday objects appeal to him and his sources of inspiration draw on the intimate relationship between life and death, as well as the various value systems that govern our lives, whether art, religion, wealth or science. Throughout his career, Hirst has stood out for his sense of entrepreneurship, which prompts him to explore printmaking and multiples, such as the *Home Sweet Home* plate. When this plate was designed, the ashtray and the cigarette became recurrent topics in Hirst's work, symbols of a reflection on smoking, life and death: between 1995 and 1997, the artist created four fibreglass sculptures representing oversized ashtrays, including *Party Time*, presented at his first one-man show at the Gagosian Gallery in New York in 1996. Our plate, designed for this gallery, creates the illusion through silkscreen print of an ashtray filled with cigarette butts: 1,500 signed and numbered copies were produced by the New York firm Swid Powell Design, which specializes in editions of objects designed by highly reputed postmodern designers and architects such as Michael Graves and Ettore Sottsass.

These works are part of a recent gift that the Museum gratefully received from Susan Watterson. Ms.

Watterson, long married to Roald Nasgaard, the eminent art historian and former chief curator of the AGO from 1978 to 1992, likes to describe herself as having played a peripheral role in the world of art, but her involvement has been no less important in many respects: as media arts officer with the Canada Council for the Arts, director of Art Metropole in Toronto and co-director of Galerie Lallouz-Watterson in Montreal, she has supported the projects of numerous artists. A friend of Gerhard Richter and Lawrence Weiner, she is also a discerning collector whose interests range from eighteenth-century English drawings to conceptually inspired decorative objects. DIANE CHARBONNEAU AND STÉPHANE AQUIN

SHARY BOYLE: PORCELAIN AND THE FEMINIST GAZE

A dual preoccupation with form and concept lies at the heart of the practice of Toronto-based multidisciplinary artist Shary Boyle. Since 2003, Boyle has been reinterpreting the porcelain figurine, a traditional form of so-called decorative ceramics that she expands through her choice of subject – the female body and its treatment – by adopting a feminist point of view. Freely blending periods and genres, the artist draws inspiration from diverse sources, including vintage American illustration, European folklore, popular music and historical fashion. She combines personal observation with a poetic imagination to reveal the vulnerability of women.

Boyle visited Germany, in 2005, to research the history and tradition of Saxon porcelain figurines and to study the work of Johann Joachim Kändler, sculptor and master modeller in Meissen in the eighteenth century. Kändler's imagination and talent, the impeccable modelling of his animal and human figures – shepherds,



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hunters, commedia dell'arte characters and monkey musicians – elevated the porcelain figurine to an art form in its own right.

The Lute Player evokes a work by Kändler from about 1765 entitled *Hearing*, one of a group of allegorical figurines representing the five senses. In this piece, Boyle pursues the subject of sexuality as homage to the female folk musicians who have inspired her, depicting a nude woman with long hair covering her face (in the manner of classic male rock 'n' roll affectation) playing the electric guitar seated on a tree trunk (a variant of another recurring decorative element found in Kändler's work). The flowers are also a nod to the German master, as is her use of polychrome and colour – dark tones between large surfaces left a lustrous white – to highlight certain parts of the body or decorative elements. DIANE CHARBONNEAU

LAURENT CRASTE: OBJECTS AS PURVEYORS OF MEANING

Montreal artist Laurent Craste skilfully combines craftsmanship with conceptual exploration. His approach is characterized by the appropriation of archetypes drawn from the repertoire of the major French porcelain makers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, Craste distorts the form and iconography of these archetypes, altering, deforming and even destroying them. Ultimately, he questions the status of the decorative object by linking its aesthetic and socio-political past to its present incarnation. *Laurent Craste: Trans-form/pose/figure* presents fifteen works by the artist in the Design Lab until March 30, 2014. Two of the works will enter the Museum's collection: *Dépouille aux fleurs « Bleu de Delft »* and *La fin d'une potiche I*.

How did you come to choose porcelain as your medium of expression?

Initially, I practised as a ceramicist for over a decade. During this period, I worked with all kinds of clays and focussed on producing functional objects. I gradually found myself increasingly drawn to decorative objects, making new and original models of them. And then I saw clearly that my real interest was the art object itself, no longer as the subject for new formal research but for its semantic richness and its socio-political, aesthetic and emotive dimensions.

Can you explain to us the anthropomorphic and even zoomorphic characteristics of your works?

Basically, the classic shape of a vase is naturally anthropomorphic – indeed, to describe it we use the vocabulary of the human body: foot, belly, shoulder, neck, lip... I use and amplify these characteristics so that the vases – inert objects – shift in our perception to become subjects, victims of violent actions, arousing in us a feeling of empathy. As for the zoomorphism, it appears in those of my creations that evoke the hides of game animals, in which the vases seem to be exhibited like hunting trophies.

One of the aspects of your oeuvre is that you express your ideas through tragi-comedy. Could you explain how you do it?

Fundamentally, my concepts are quite serious, even dramatic: the art object as a symptom of social tensions or a purveyor of political ideology, its connection to fetishism or idolatry and the fate of the ornament in the recent history of the decorative arts and design. These are themes that could be off-putting. By giving my works a surrealist look, I add a humorous dimension that, together with a highly crafted finish, enables the viewer to "tame" my works.

Over time, you have turned porcelain into a subject in its own right in installations, photos and videos. Why?

Art objects made of porcelain have had an incomparable historical and conceptual value: as an object of rampant trading between East and West, intense technological study in Europe and frenzied collecting in the eighteenth century; as a tool of political propaganda in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; and still today, as an assertion of social and economic standing or an expression of an emotional tie... it has multiple layers of signification. The exploration of these levels of meaning lies at the heart of my multidisciplinary practice as an artist. INTERVIEW BY DIANE CHARBONNEAU

LAURENT CRASTE: TRANS-FORM/POSE/FIGURE UNTIL MARCH 30, 2014

DESIGN LAB

LILIANE AND DAVID M. STEWART PAVILION – LEVEL 2
FREE ADMISSION AT ALL TIMES

- General Idea (1968-1994), Jorge Zontal (1944-1994), Felix Partz (1945-1994), AA Bronson (born in 1946), *Test Pattern: TV Dinner Plate*, 1988, porcelain. Produced by Spiral (Wacoal Art Center), Tokyo, for Gagosian Gallery, New York. MMFA, gift of Susan Watterson
- Damien Hirst (born in 1965), *Home Sweet Home*, 1996. Screen print on porcelain, 1496/1500, made by Swid Powell, New York, for Gagosian Gallery, New York. MMFA, gift of Susan Watterson
- Shary Boyle (born in 1972), *The Lute Player*, 2010. Glazed porcelain, lustre, glass beads, 1/2. MMFA, purchase, Deirdre M. Stevenson Fund and the Canada Council for the Arts' Acquisition Assistance Program
- Laurent Craste (born in 1968), *Dépouille aux fleurs « Bleu de Delft »*, 2012. Porcelain, decals, gold, nails, 1/5, 40 x 38 x 14 cm. In process of acquisition
- Laurent Craste (born in 1968), *La fin d'une potiche I*, 2012. Porcelain, nylon rope, pedestal table, 1/5, vase: 40 x 23.5 x 29 cm. Pedestal table: 101 x 32 x 32 cm. In process of acquisition