

CERAMICS - THE ART OF TOUCH.

Thermoactive transfer.

Dissertation carried out under the supervision of Professor Teresa Klaman.

Abstract

"sense of touch (...) dependent upon immediate contact, it must explore shapes inch by inch and step by step; it must laboriously build up some notion of total three-dimensional space"¹

The doctoral presentation I was preparing, both the artistic and the written part, is an outline of the aspects that interest and guide me in creative activities closely related to ceramics. I am curious about the phenomenon of ceramic matter as a medium of artistic expression. The clay, still "living", offers an opportunity to balance tradition with what is contemporary to us. This dissertation is the result of my research into the expressive form of ceramic sculpture as a potential to enliven the senses. Using a classical modelled ceramic form, which depends on touch and warmth from the beginning of its creation, I turn to direct sensation, an authentic experience. I look for a way to break the visual distance in favor of physical contact with the object. I direct attention to the sense of touch, pointing out the possibility of discovering the "second layer" of the object, its true, hidden meaning. Touchless contemplation can only focus on the outer surface of the shell.

In the works created for this dissertation, I aim to achieve two main goals: firstly, I want to give ceramics an additional artistic and ideological dimension by extending its aesthetic and decorative function to include additional functions related to multisensory perception and consolidate interactions between the viewer and the object. Secondly, I aim to engage the viewer by encouraging him/her to make direct contact with the object through touch and convince him/her to internalize this activity through the potential identification of his/her personal experience, memory, and emotional charge. The means to achieve these goals are the performativity of the firing process itself and the thermosensitive coating I used in my work. I define *performativity* here as a turn in ceramic making that is action-oriented and causal, particularly evident in the active performance of alternative, outdoor ceramic firings. Performativity of creation as a conscious register and choice of

¹ R. Arnheim, *Visual thinking*, Berkley / Los Angeles / London: Published by: University of California Press , second edition, 1997, p. 18

values carried then by chance, betting on the discovery, development, and creative revolutions.

The visual part of the doctoral thesis is a presentation of six large-scale spatial objects and three large-scale "ceramic illustrations", made of stoneware clay and gasfired using alternative techniques. The opaque thermo-sensitive coating I used is a starting point to engage the viewer. It is an impulse to revise perception and imagination; it brings to life an animated, complete picture of the whole. Intimate contact, direct dialogue, and transmission of human hands' warmth reveal what is usually hidden. At the same time, the act of creation is completed through creative interaction and cooperation with the viewer. The process interacts in time; the thermal energy retained in the clay structure for a more prolonged moment appears as a trace of integrated, external action on the form.

The written part of the dissertation consists of five chapters. In the first chapter, "Ceramics - Contexts", I recall the historical context of ceramics and local traditions, and I refer to the history of the western version of the raku technique and the inspiration of the American Paul Soldner's work. The second chapter, "Process - from idea to object," includes a description of the artistic dissertation, while the third chapter characterizes the operation of the thermosensitive layer. The fourth chapter, entitled "The Art of Touch", in its three subchapters, focuses on exploring the world of ceramics today. I cite examples of selected artists, inspirations, contexts, metaphors and experiments. In my doctoral presentation, I encourage people to cross the ban on touching sculptures. I try to justify the advisability of widening the cognitive spectrum of ceramic matter; I also mention the performative aspect of ceramic and its interactive reception mnemonic properties. I supplement the text with a philosophical and cultural layer in the area of my interest. I refer to a highly significant multistage process, an inseparable element of technology related to ceramics, which combines established rules with the beauty of accidental and spontaneous action, intuitive ideas, curiosity and discovery.

Alicja Buławka - Fankidejska