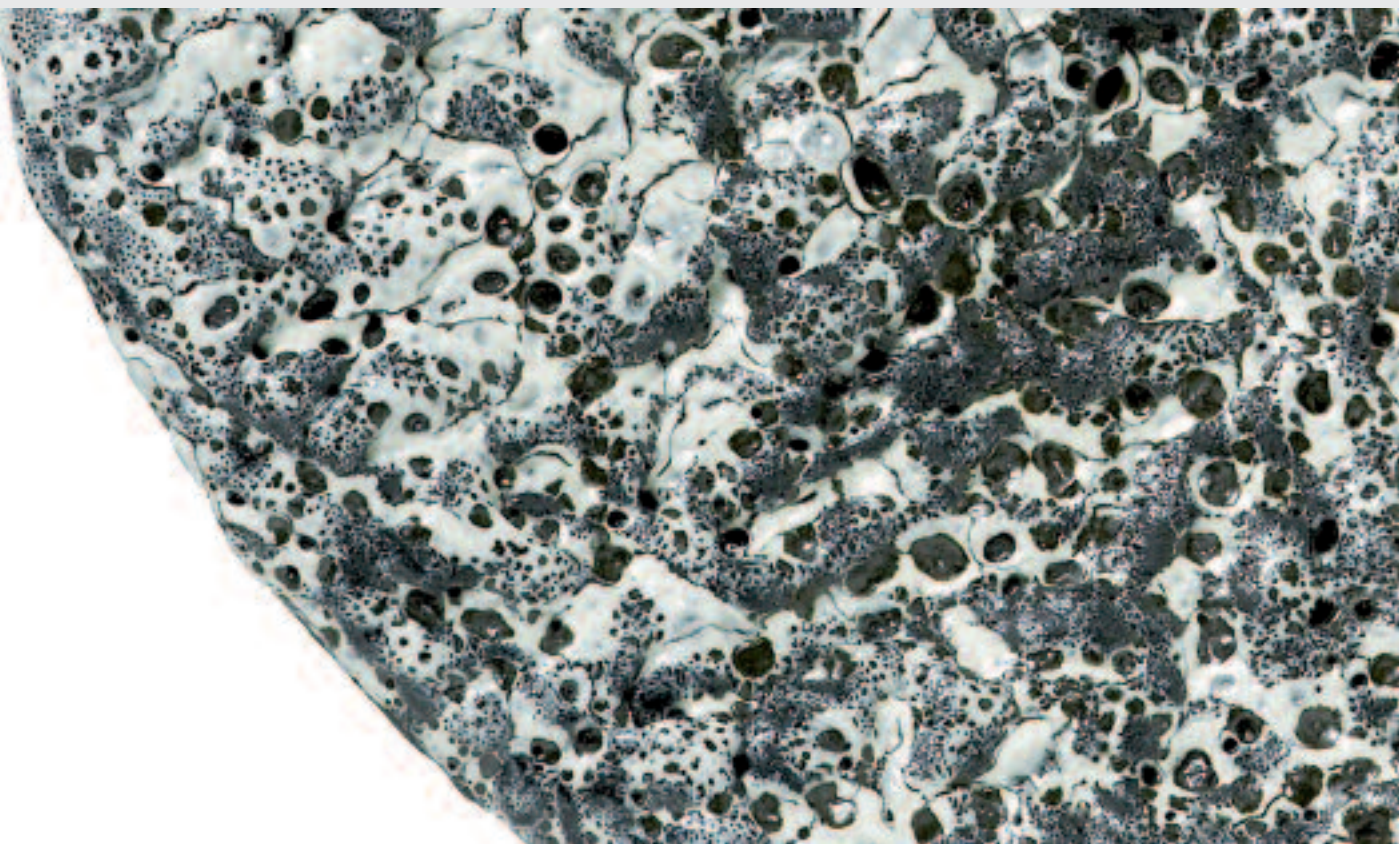




Lone Skov Madsen
Le Plat – The Platter

Article by Jorunn Veiteberg





THE FRENCH PHILOSOPHER ROLAND BARTHES CONCLUDES HIS *Mythologies* (1957) with a few thought-provoking ruminations on the process of interpreting things around us: "...we are always commuting between the object and the demystification of the object and we are in no position to reproduce its totality. For if we penetrate the object, perhaps we can set it free. At the same time, however we are destroying it. And if we permit it to retain its own weight, we are paying it the proper respect, perhaps, but at the same time, we are restoring its mystified nature."

These words make sense in an especially striking way when confronted with the kind of ceramics that Lone Skov Madsen is creating, especially because language falls short when it comes to any attempt to fully communicate those experiences for which her works open. How can we adequately describe the physical sensation it arouses when we stroke a rough and unrefined surface, or our perception of the material's heaviness and fragility at one and the same time?

Putting words on the kind of knowledge that radiates from the ceramist's pieces can be just as difficult – this is a knowledge acquired through experience and seated in the ceramist's body and hands. As viewers, we can sense the qualities in this form of work as an energy that emanates from the objects.

Lone Skov Madsen's pieces carry the traces of recapitulated action-patterns. All the time and care that has been laid right into the process of working with the individual objects cannot fail to elicit some emotional impact in the context of a society like ours, where time has come to be a rather scarce commodity. Even though the content of this type of ceramic work is not essentially narrative and even though it eludes language to a certain extent, the work propagates values and qualities that inspire our material and mental worlds to merge. What we have here is an art that makes us wiser about clay as a material and about ceramics as a medium, since it is largely this kind of investigation around which her artistic efforts revolve.

In its raw state, clay is an amorphous material without any special material value. In the hands of the ceramist, however, the formless comes to acquire form: out from chaos, structure and order are created. Many artists describe this as a dialogical process, where the material is anything but passive and dead: it possesses its own inherent will. And in the process of working with this material,

new ideas are spawned. But this is only one aspect of the material; it also carries its own history. This is especially true of clay, a material with which people all over the world have been working for thousands of years. Clay is anything but an innocent and unknown quantity. For this reason, it not only represents an artistic material but also stands as an artistic medium in itself, with everything this implies with respect to established conventions and rules.

Lone Skov Madsen's dialogue with the clay has materialised itself in a number of projects, but the unifying common denominator has for quite some time been the platter, in the form of circular shapes generally measuring about half a metre in diameter.

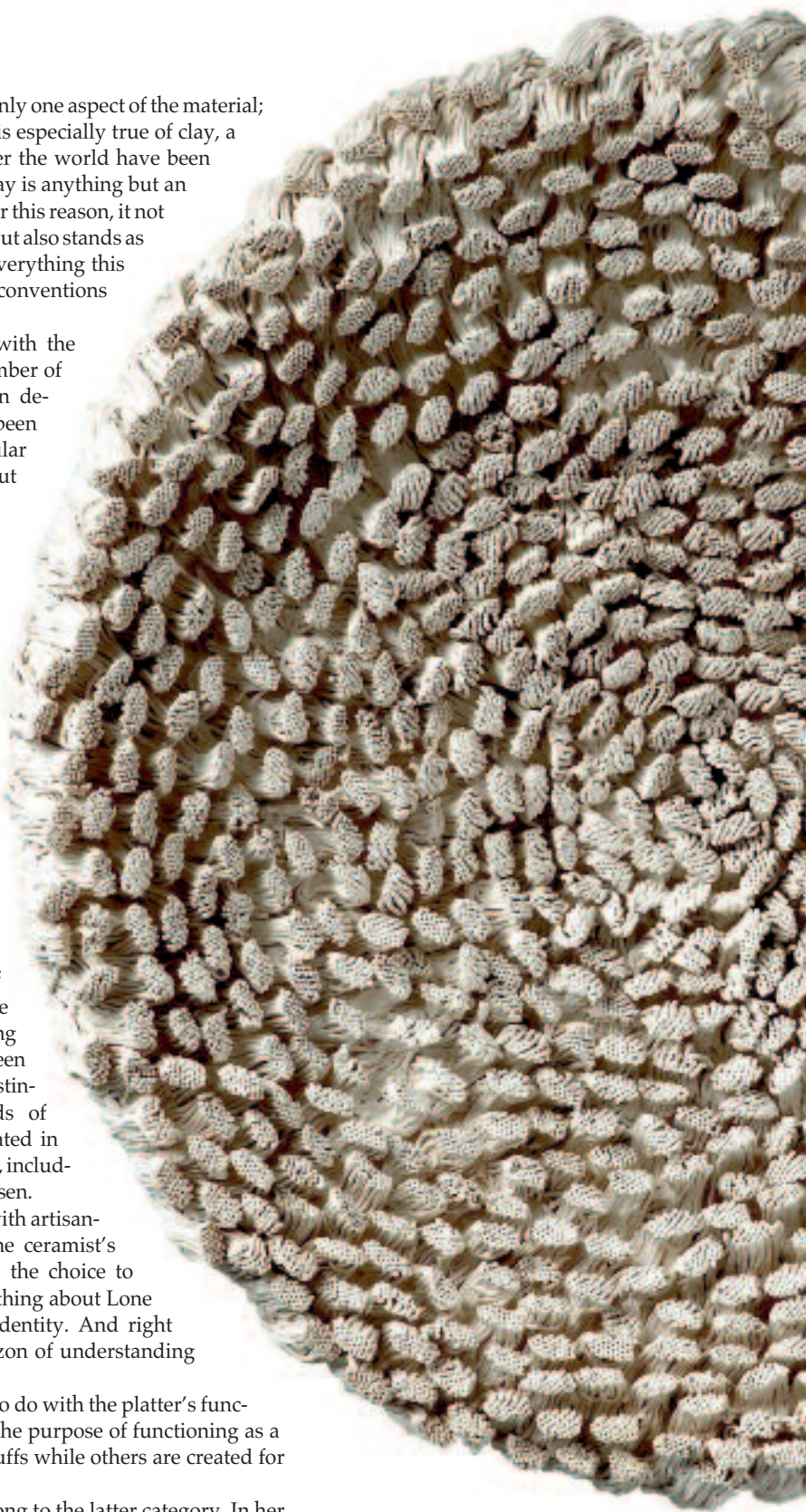
With its simple and neutral form, the platter presents itself as an expedient point of departure for conducting investigations of the clay as a plastic material. The platter does not stand in the way of the further re-working of the surface, even if it does serve to simultaneously articulate and delimit this re-working. Nonetheless, the choice of a known object-form like the platter is not merely an indifferent act. As is the case with all cultural objects, the platter serves as the bearer of different forms of meaning.

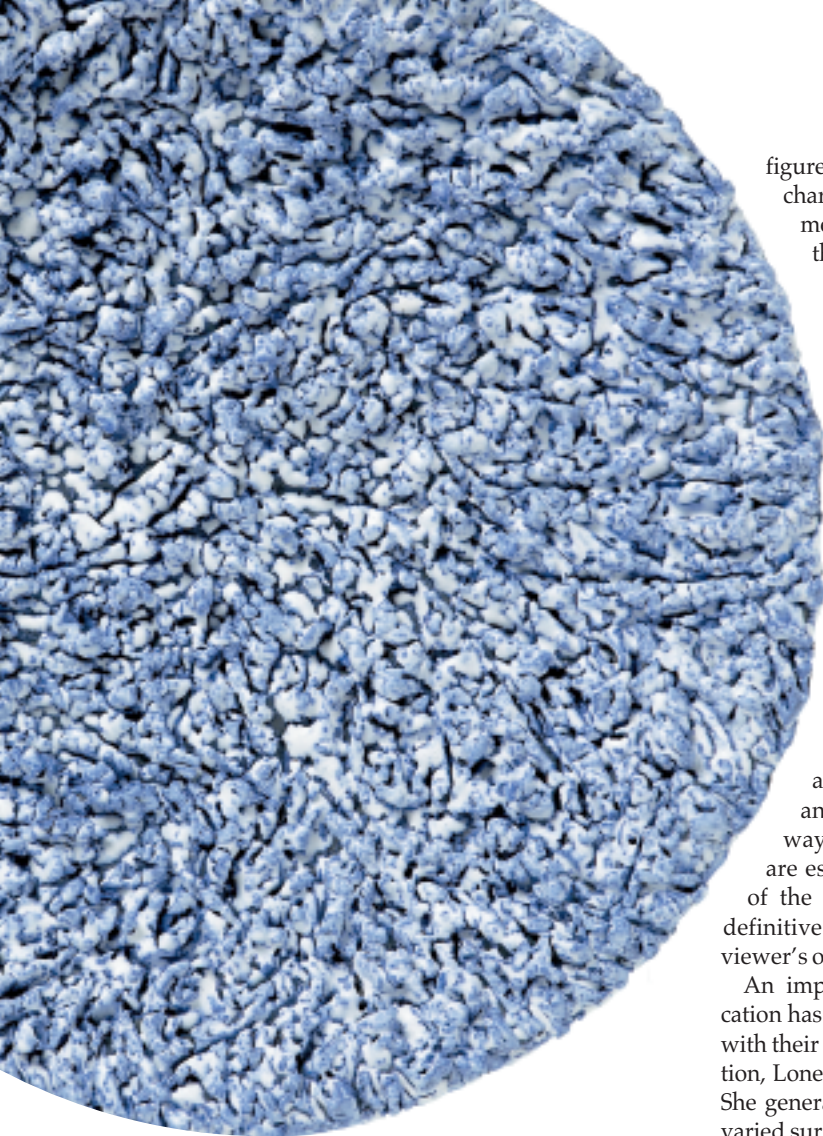
Alongside those meanings that attach themselves to the material of which platters are made, to those techniques employed in their making and to the decoration that has been applied to their surfaces, we can distinguish among three distinct kinds of meaning that are potentially activated in the meeting with all kinds of platters, including those created by Lone Skov Madsen.

We certainly conjoin the platter with artisan-created handcraft; it belongs to the ceramist's steady repertoire. For this reason, the choice to work with the platter tells us something about Lone Skov Madsen's background and identity. And right here, a reference frame and a horizon of understanding are established for the viewer.

The second type of meaning has to do with the platter's function. Some platters are created for the purpose of functioning as a supporting base for various foodstuffs while others are created for fulfilling an aesthetic function.

Lone Skov Madsen's platters belong to the latter category. In her pieces, there is no room for apples or oranges because the platters are already 'filled'. Ornaments in the form of relief-like sculptures and different glazes cover the platters' surfaces and invite a visual





immersion. Their ideal placement is accordingly on the wall surface, so that we can meet the works frontally, and at eye-level.

With this observation, I have already foreshadowed the third type of meaning that attaches itself to the platter, namely that which revolves around what the platter communicates.

Hanging on the wall, Lone Skov Madsen's platters are detached from being bound to any kind of utility function and they open up for other kinds of associations. Some of the structures in the platters, on first glance, might call certain kinds of natural phenomena to mind: these structures appear as images of peculiar landscape forms – or as fragmentary segments of existing geo-morphological structural occurrences. But at the same time, they can also be read as abstract patterns.

Upon closer inspection, the workings in the structure invariably reveal themselves as being either compliant with some geometric order or as the upshot of a more freely formulated ornamentation, where the platter's circular form constitutes the unifying principal

figure. In and of itself, the circular form is a rather charged figure, which can serve as a visual metaphor for circulatory processes and for all that which perpetually re-generates itself.

However, the curving form, in its movement out from the wall, also leads the thoughts toward a similar communication-sign: the parabolic reflector.

As paraboloids, the platters are simultaneously receivers and transmitters of messages. Although the artist has filled the platters with her own signs, there are always new ones entering the scene along the way. Something unanticipated can supervene in the firing process. With this, the process opens up the work for a potentially new narrative.

Finally, as viewers and interpreters we come to the 'signals' that stream forth from the platters, signals that reach us in a way that is particular to each of us, according to our own cache of experiences and our starting points of reference. In this way, layer upon layer of different meanings are established which, according to the nature of the matter, cannot be fastened to anything definitive but will always remain open to the viewer's own decoding.

An important aspect of the platters' communication has to do with the qualities that are bound up with their identity as aesthetic objects. In this connection, Lone Skov Madsen's artistic means are central. She generally works in series and the complex and varied surface structures are often produced with the agency of certain implements that she has developed for this purpose.

The many strands that fashion patterns in the white platter objects, for example, have been created with the help of a metallic wire netting. The strands are arranged as interminable quantities of recumbent and standing tufts and swirling vortexes. In themselves, the strands are thin and delicate and accordingly strike up a dramatic contrast with the thick and coarse bottom surfaces to which they are fastened.

On some of the other platters, the bottom is black while the strands are coated with a thick layer of white glaze. In this thick glaze, tiny pockets of air come into being and in turn, they expose parts of the underlying structure. What emerges here is an interplay of light and shadow effects. And this entails that we never perceive the platters as either wholly white or wholly black: they are always on their way toward the one or the other extreme. The same thing can be said about the platters where she has made use of dark-coloured surface glazes: in these platters, black, white and bluish nuances take turns dominating the overall sensory impression.

A more conceptual approach characterises the ceramic projects Lone Skov Madsen has been creating in collaboration with visual artist Kaj Nyborg. They are operating under the joint name, *Splat*.

As a precursor to their contribution to the *Strata* exhibition in Stockholm, presented in 2005, *Splat* showed their works at the *Mellem Rum* [In-between Spaces] exhibition in Copenhagen's Galleri Nørby in 2002. The same surface structures with which the platters have been endowed recur here, but now they appear on glazed tiles.

In a non-hierarchical manner, the glazed tiles formed a detached object, which extended from the floor to the ceiling inside the room. The work's title – *Splat 01 Tile site-specific sculptural hybrid* – was not innocent of planting an ironic kick in the pants to the hierarchical classifications that normally exist among the various disciplines. It pointed toward a praxis that bids defiance to conventional compartmentalisation and aspires instead to find its own artistic pathways. Room-divider, wall, site-specific decoration, glazed tiles or sculpture? *Splat* covers the gamut, and the formats can fluctuate from the monumental to the model-level and the miniature.

This was corroborated in *Splat's* second contribution to the *Mellem Rum* exhibition: *Tile as Landscape*, which was a multiple, conceived as a companion to *Tile site-specific sculptural hybrid*. On top of a mirrored surface, a single glazed tile was placed in a box-like form which was only open on one side. The framing provided the work with the character of a sculptural object. The mirror is often employed in artworks as a reference to the classical discussion about art's relationship to reality.

Tile as Landscape raises interesting questions about the relationship between handicraft and visual art and about the differences between them. Whereas handicraft can consist of articles that are what they are – for example, glazed tiles for use – visual art is essentially characterised by the function of representing or depicting objects and things. But what happens when art avails itself of 'ready-mades' and specifically those which can be said to have appropriated an article generated by handicraft, as in the present example? *Splat's* object contains both the object itself (the glazed tile) and its reproduction (the mirror image). Once again, we are being confronted with an object in possession of an intensely hybrid character. But maybe this is the best bid on where handicraft is situated. In many ways, Lone Skov Madsen has taken up a central position in Danish ceramics.

She belongs to the core of ceramists presently operating as an exhibition cooperative under the name New Danish Ceramics. She was one of the



three initiating promoters working to set up the Udstillingssted for Ny Keramik [The Exhibition Room for New Ceramics] which for the four years of its existence during 1996-2000 was Copenhagen's most exciting ceramics gallery. The new currents she and her colleagues contributed to the Danish scene resulted in bringing forth a wider girth and an expanded sense of openness around people's attitudes about what ceramics can be.

In Lone Skov Madsen's work, there is no opposition between utility-ceramics and art-ceramics and, as the presentation of her own works evinces, there is no opposition between the immersion in the material and a conceptual approach.

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