

### **Ceramic metamorphoses**

- "Blind date" between Lone Skov Madsen's and Per Ahlmann's ceramic pieces

#### **The logic's kaleidoscope**

The frame has been set, the scene is Galleri Copenhagen Ceramics and the manuscript unfolds 10 dogmas for the ceramists "on stage", Lone Skov Madsen and Per Ahlmann, who, operating under the title, "Checkpoint", are showing entirely new pieces. What we have here, in fact, is a kind of "blind date" between the two ceramists, who in the context of a collaboration that preceded the production of the works, have defined 10 rules for their presentation – while neither of them knew beforehand what pieces the other was going to be bringing along to the exhibition. It's not until after the pieces are removed from the kiln and really first when they meet in the exhibition space that the crisscrossing maze of dialogues going on among them comes into being.

*"As of this writing, I do not yet know what Lone has made for the exhibition. But I imagine that the joy we share when it comes to forms placed alongside other forms will serve to render our meeting a dramatic affair, where the war for attention will be orchestrated in such a way that small sounds will become large ones in the pauses between the explosions,"* declares Per Ahlmann, prior to the exhibition.

The 10 dogmas refer to different ways of exhibiting ceramic pieces in space, including wall-mounted, placement on the floor, resting up against the wall, hanging from the ceiling, standing in the window sill, placement in the corner, on a shelf, on podiums in predefined dimensions or mounted on vertical wooden beams. Dogmas, which have – as a rule – been formulated on the basis of a wish to exploit the full potentials of the exhibition space but also function as a framework within which the two ceramists can unfold themselves in different ways and simultaneously link their works together in a meaningful and logical way.

*"We came to an agreement that we wanted to make use of the space optimally and put all the available surfaces to use. At the same time, we wanted to avoid being locked up by a common theme that would close off our creativity. Each of us had certain things we wanted to accomplish. The trick was, then, to converge while simultaneously being able to express ourselves individually,"* explains Lone Skov Madsen, prior to the exhibition.

In its "set-up", the exhibition accordingly fashions a kaleidoscope, which challenges and incites the ceramists to be constantly changing their perspectives within the creative process and similarly prods and prompts the viewer to switch angles of viewing on her/his way through the exhibition, inasmuch as the works present themselves in markedly different ways and are constantly transposing the perspective. In addition to this, each one of the presentation forms embodies an autonomous set of cultural references. For example, the shelf, which is ordinarily related to our domestic sphere but is employed here as a "frame" for presentation in the public gallery space.

Notwithstanding the 10 dogmas' logic, creativity has been given free rein. According to the artists, the dogmas, above all, have liberated a creative potential and have had a conducive effect on the artistic unfolding, since setting an obligatory task for themselves has served to give rise to new challenges. At the same time, the theoretical "set-up" has created space for the artists' individual expressions and in reality, has played a role in more clearly and more distinctly marking out the two ceramists' mutual differences and points of intersection, as far as technique, form and content are concerned.

#### **Lone Skov Madsen - form**

From Lone Skov Madsen's modeling hand teem forth soft amorphous growths: at once sculptural and patently tactile, with granulated surfaces of dense, small blobs of glaze. Ceramic growths that do not lend themselves to clearly being defined but set in motion manifold associations, ranging

from notions of natural accumulations of growth below the sea's surface or on the forest's floor to corals, mollusks, seaweed, parasites, mushrooms, tree stumps, lichen and algae. Organic growths of the sort that seldom garner great attention but which here disclose their anonymous beauty. Growths, shaped by the wind and weather, that gemmate in arbitrary directions and give rise to surprising and exquisite nature landscapes – landscapes that are experienced in slow change, all the while that the form is being fixed in the fired clay. Right here – in the tension between the organic, living, and the concrete, 'dead', between the round soft forms and the hard-fired clay, between the forms' sculptural strength and the surfaces' sensuous and almost corporeal character of glaze-applied "goose bumps" – Lone Skov Madsen's works distinguish themselves as being quiveringly strong.

*"When you go to view a ceramic exhibition, you're not allowed to touch the pieces. But people do it anyway and I'm fond of thinking that, by doing so, the viewer gains an extra experience. This is why I'm often working with points that lie on the surface or with small hollows, so that the viewer will obtain yet another association,"* recounts Lone Skov Madsen.

### **Per Ahlmann - space**

For the Checkpoint exhibition, Per Ahlmann created a series of uncompromising monumental sculptures; several of them were clad in sharply pungent and even almost shameless glaze colors and with a great degree of fantasy and variety in the forms. The salient characteristic of Ahlmann's idiom is an elegant tension between the sculptures' soft and hard lines, where the interaction between organic and mechanical form elements engenders associations in many directions. Frequently, the works make their appearance as almost architectural constructions, inside of which the material's workable potentials are fully unfolded and convey an inherent awareness about the clay's essentially plastic substance contra the fired ceramic's hardness and solidity. The experience of Ahlmann's complex sculptures is, in terms of both form and surface, a sensual journey, where new associations constantly provide fuel for the imagination. Corporeal forms merge with architectonic constructions, the irrational alternates with the rational and our consciousness must often relinquish its place and give way to intuition and pure sensing. The references point in many directions, nothing is clearly defined – everything seems to appear in perpetual change. Nevertheless, each work stands forth as an autonomous sculpture, resting in its own space, and yet is coherently interconnected, at the same time, with the other works.

*"I feel that a sculpture has succeeded when it is autonomous. The sculpture appears to be a rendering of something you ought to recognize but is entirely abstract. That the sculpture can evoke this sensation is something that could be called a quality, and this is based, among other things, on a form of veracity and naturalness that has to be present in the juxtaposition and the transitions between the sculpture's constituent elements,"* is how Ahlmann puts it.

### **Ceramic metamorphoses**

Both of the exhibitors, Per Ahlmann and Lone Skov Madsen, express themselves with a great degree of artistic autonomy in their ceramics. Whereas Ahlmann is working in a decidedly architectonic manner and on a large scale, Lone Skov Madsen is working, to a greater extent, with textures on the surface while, her background in craftsmanship is also often spotlighted, typically, in both her plates and her vessels. While Ahlmann often enwraps his sculptures in richly colored, glossy and very sensual glazes, Lone Skov Madsen expresses herself primarily in subdued Nordic colors – in monochrome and black-and-white glazes – with the exception of a number of her new works, where certain colors are introduced.

However, in their current rendezvous at the Checkpoint exhibition, the mutual affinities between Lone Skov Madsen and Per Ahlmann are simultaneously being clarified, among these being their common absorption in form itself and even more specifically, their shared predilection for the

organic and more amorphous forms. In addition to this, what is also being highlighted is their common ability to communicate a tantalizing transition between the object's state of lull and its state of being in motion: this emancipating – for both the mind and the imagination – no-man's land situated between a before and an after, between definition and abstraction, where the work opens itself up to the viewer's own interpretation. The feat of securing the tension and the intensity in the fired clay, right there where the ceramic art work seesaws back and forth on the borderline between abstraction and figuration, between form and formlessness, between logic and chaos, between reason and sensory perception, is a rare quality that both of them have mastered.

The very reading of Ahlmann's and Skov Madsen's sculptures is a dynamic experience, where neither the eye nor the consciousness can find rest before a new picture, a new association or a new thought supervenes and expands our consciousness. A state that can be described by the Greek word, "metamorphosis", in the sense of an ongoing change, transformation, conversion or remodeling.<sup>i</sup>

In the eye's scanning and probing of Lone Skov Madsen's and Per Ahlmann's aesthetically stimulating sculptures, our sense of reason and our imagination are being seduced. Is it possible that we are, in reality, playing witness to what could be called a ceramic metamorphosis – that is to say, a condition in which the sculpture's form is constantly undergoing remodeling – where everything has been suggested but nothing has been defined? My own experience of these powerful ceramic statements prompts me to feel like a passenger on board a ship, where reason and sensation, by turns, take over the helm. But what a fantastic journey towards the next Checkpoint!

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<sup>i</sup> The metamorphosis-concept, which is employed both in the natural sciences and in humanistic pursuits, is actually used within the discipline of zoology to describe the transformation that takes place when a tadpole turns into a frog or when a pupa turns into an insect.  
Source: [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org), 2013.