

In the spring 2007 Larksboks in USA is going to publish an art book; "Masters of Porcelain". As a featured artist in this book I was asked to write an essay about my "creative life"

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Reflections

In Norway we hardly have any ceramic tradition. Ceramics and Ceramic Art is mainly a post second world war phenomenon. We focused on Scandinavian Design in the forties and fifties,

But some of us started to use clay for art purposes. I did my first solo exhibition in Oslo in 1966. The exhibition caused relatively strong reactions in media. One of the art critiques took the headline for her article from one of the pieces in the exhibition: "The break through". Today it is hard to understand that the works represented a breakthrough, or that they represented anything creative or inventive at all. I prefer to call them innovative because they were based on already accepted mainstream ideas in the art world, a style. I prefer a stringent definition of the word "create". There is a difference in meaning between the words invention and innovation. For me the word "create" is closer to invention than to innovation. Regarded in this way the works were rather conservative, even if they represented something new both for me, the art critiques and the audience at that time.

I often say that I was one of the first ceramic artists in this country that climbed down from the wheel, - and one of the few that climbed up again. The first years of my career I made sculpture and wall pieces, In spite of my success, I realized that I had to find an alternative that was more in harmony with my feelings, and not so clearly dictated by the trends. In this time, late seventies and in the beginning of the eighties, I studied brush painting, using the brush in the same way as it is used in calligraphy. It was like learning to play an instrument, and at the same time use this instrument to create compositions. It didn't work out especially well the first years. Everything became stiff and strained and reminded me of things I had seen before. I hate to say this, but one evening after a couple of glasses of wine I decided to try once more before I gave it up. Suddenly things loosened up, it started to work. It is not my intention to romanticize, but the wine combined with the thoughts of giving it up helped me to relax and "don't give a dammed" about what came out of the brush. I understood things in a new way. The expression I had been seeking for just came. Brush painting became me. Since this moment I have functioned like a jazz musician, an improviser. I like to think that an artist has impatience in his mind that always forces him look for new solutions in his creative project.

A bowl is a bowl. A canvas is a canvas. In all cultures through all times it has been the background for visual expressions that is representative for a culture or a group. This is the main reason why we can say that this pot is made by the Mimbres, or this painting is made by Munch. It is may be old fashioned, but I believe a little bit in personal expressions too. We don't need to tell what the expression is about; it should explain itself in the same way as a novel does. There are good novels and bad novels. And, -"you will never get more (art) out of the horn than you are putting into it".

I decided to use the most traditional object in ceramic art as a canvas. I am insisting that a bowl may be considered art in the same way as a sculpture. My challenge was to create

artistic expressions combining me, the bowl and the brush.(and that no existing industrial technology should be able to copy the results without big modifications). The brush is also loaded with traditions. For some years I was training water colour painting on paper. That is the cheapest way, because you need lots of background to develop confidence with your instruments, almost everything ended up in the trash can. At the same time I studied the characteristics of the brushes, the clay and the painting medium, how everything, including myself, worked together in more authentic situations. This is why porcelain became my material. It is white, it is neutral, no pushing material effects etc. You don't get anything for free. I left the traditional modernism. I don't know where I am now, on my own I hope

I get inspired by looking for paths that other people for different reasons never have walked before. There may be interesting things to discover even when the goal is a bowl. A way of developing creativity is to seek inspiration and information from neighbour professions, like fine art, textile art, etc. It may also be information from another culture, like the expressionists did when they "studied", "exotic", "folk art". An alternative is to look into the high-tech world convert the knowledge you find there. To combine two or more of these strategies creates new possibilities out of things that have been overlooked before. You convert their knowledge, their way of thinking, their traditions, their techniques, into your own work, and make it reflect your way of thinking about things.

The next step was to study the translucency in porcelain, - still using the brush as the main tool. I started a systematic search for ways of painting that gave me full possibilities of improvisation, a way of working that was so simple that everybody could do it. Because then you have to know what to use it for. It is not the technical skills that are impressive anymore. The funny thing is that if you find a method like that, you feel very stupid, because you start thinking about why people, or yourself, haven't thought about it before. The method may be described in a book in scientific terms, or in a couple of lines in a text like this: You take a piece of dry clay, and then you paint a dot on it with shellac. When the shellac is dry, take a sponge and some water and wash away clay from the surface. The dot will become a relief, and the shellac fires away in the kiln. It is like saying: This is a piano, -and this is how you produce a sound. The totally white bowls that illustrate this text is made in this way. It is the light that creates them. A reasonable title would be "more than nothingness" But I am careful putting titles to things.

The watercolour painting on paper had developed a need for colours, special colours, and I started of thinking of ways to find such colours and ways of using them. The logical conclusion was water-soluble colours. In our case that, at least, must mean soluble things based on metals. So I had to do some research.

This research was published in the book "Water Colour on Porcelain" (Norwegian University Press 1989). The book is out of print, but it should be possible to find it in some university libraries.

For finding ways of using the colours I took a look into textiles, the batik technique, and converted this to porcelain. I used shellac instead of wax. The reasons are quite simple: Shellac works nicely with the brush, it fires away, and I got the possibility to combine relief and colour doing improvisations.

Two bowls that illustrates the different ways are exhibited in The Museum of Modern Ceramic in Gifu, Japan. The white one is published in a book "Selected Works from Museum of Modern Ceramic Art, Gifu"

Now I am mainly working in these two different ways, either separately or in combination.

One of my latest projects is to set strict limitations to the weight of things. The work should be possible to send it wherever in the world as a letter with the lowest estimated stamp value. It is normally impossible to make and handle sheets of slip cast porcelain big enough and thin enough to fulfil this goal in a reasonable way. I ended up making sheets that are 29x29x0.2 cm. I have called them "secrets". The artistic secret is what you see, or don't see, when the light is changing. The technical secret is to mix liquid acrylic into the casting clay. In this way you may make thin clay sheets as big as you want. This sheet can be rolled up like paper even when the clay is dry. So you may ask yourself why I am making all these efforts for so little. The answer is quite simple; it is because it is fun.

Technique has a rather low status in our part of the art world. It is unfair, we all know why. But it is technology, combined with hearts and thoughts, which create all developments and changes in the artistic expressions. It doesn't matter whether the tool is a computer, a brush or a pencil. When oil-painting was invented it had big consequences for how visual stories were told. The big invention was to put oils in the pigments instead of eggs. There is a spiral between ideas and technology that we have to be more aware of even in the arts. Ideas create the need for tools, and tools create the need for ideas. If an idea demands new tools, we start thinking about the characteristics of the new tool we have to develop. On the opposite, if we have a tool, we often seek for the limitations of the tool used with the idea. If you more or less accept the tools and the ideas as they are, you can't do anything but innovation, new variations. Even in dance it is like that, and it has nothing to do whether we are talking about high-tech or low-tech. We have to be humble, and we have to go for "what moves me" even if it is not trendy.