

# CARME BALADA

## INTUITIVE BEAUTY

Caterina Roma



*“We in our own human imperfections are repelled by the perfect, since everything is apparent from the start and there is no suggestion of the infinite. Beauty must have some room, must be associated with freedom. Freedom, indeed, is beauty. The love of the irregular is a sign of the basic quest for freedom.”*

*Soetsu Yanagi: The Unknown Craftsman*

In his Book of Tea, Okakura Kakuzo states that “True beauty could be discovered only by one who mentally completed the incomplete”, and this is what Carme Balada seems to do when working. She goes deeper into the primitive and transcendent meaning of an apparently trivial piece: the tea bowl. The simplest of forms, the first that humanity produced to suit its needs of a container for water and food, the bowl is the origin of all forms, an intimate object with a highly symbolic power. And that’s what seduces her.

Carme’s bowls express her personal interpretation of the richness and sensibility of Japanese and African traditional ceramics, combined with a careful design, a purity of forms greatly influenced by the Scandinavian style. She seeks a harmonious balance between tradition and modernity, recreating her own heritage and including foreign influences. As an artist, she doesn’t forget that roots are what make trees strong.

Balada rediscovered her own craft travelling around ceramics centres in Japan, and was especially attracted by Ryoji Koie’s works and artistic qualities. There she was captivated by the concept of the chawan – the tea ceremony bowl: usually a distorted piece, with uneven rim and dun colour, this type of bowl has a vitality that expresses an incomparable beauty.

**Carme’s bowls express her personal interpretation of the richness and sensibility of Japanese and African traditional ceramics, combined with a careful design, a purity of forms greatly influenced by the Scandinavian style.**

opposite page **Skin**, stoneware, textured, h 28 cm

right functional pieces, stoneware, various dimensions, small sake and coffee bowls

below functional pieces, stoneware, various dimensions, black, white and blue glaze

*Photos - Eloi Bonjoch*

In fact, as Carme relates, the chawan is a philosophy in itself. It contains the concepts of wabi (poverty, simplicity), sabi (loneliness, absence) and shibui (rough, unfinished), essential referents for the Japanese arts, in which ceramics plays a distinguished role. These aesthetic principles that Balada incorporates in her contemporary approach to ceramics go back to antique Korea and reached its zenith in Japan during the sixteenth century, with the development of the wabi-cha tea ceremony. In that time, great emphasis was laid on a specific type of tea bowl for the ceremony, one which had to be simple, humble, and have a profound tactile quality. For many years, Balada has been working to give form to the contemporary western expression of the Japanese tea bowl, and she has found true beauty divested of involvement, magnificence in unevenness, splendour in simplicity, brightness in roughness and perfection in disproportion.

For this eclectic artist, the bowl is a reflection of the personality, a very intuitive kind of piece, a wordless reflection about oneself. It is an abstract piece and an everyday object at the same time. Hands are the skilful transmitters of feelings, and they express through technical knowledge, which she conceives as a way of understanding art and life from a perspective very close to the Zen principles of rigour, discipline and aesthetics. Carme works mainly with earthenware and fireclay, and experiments with mishima, sgraffito, neriage, textures, copper and ash





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glazes, tenmoku and metal oxides additions, combining hand built forms with throwing.

Her outstanding contribution is to show the greatness of little things and a very profound approach to utilitarianism: the combination of art and everyday life, which allows going in more depth into life through beauty, because art conceived in this way is a close representation of life. Her main goal is to create yaki objects, pieces that integrate utility, meaning and originality.

Her studio is the old salt-cod warehouse of her parent's business, a cosy spot in a narrow street, beside the lively market of Santa Caterina, in Barcelona's old part of town. The minimalism of the place suggests that austerity can be a means of inspiration, closely related to the material she models: earth. A humble attitude that gives her ceramics an unfinished but sophisticated look, that doesn't explain but suggests, avoiding obviousness. No wonder that one of her bibles is Tanizaki's *In Praise of Shadows*, because she also seems to have discovered intuitively the "beauty in shadows" and to "guide shadows towards beauty's ends". Naked objects made with intuition as a basic means, a non-rational vehicle to get to a natural simplicity.

Nature awakens her creative spirit and works as a source of inspiration. Her ceramic surfaces are like a microscopic look at all kinds of natural textures. Touch comes first. She is also attracted by textiles, and that is noticeable in her use of repetitive patterns that recall weaves, in their deeper irregularity. And together with



top functional pieces, stoneware, various dimensions, sgraffito *Photo - Eloi Bonjoch*

left **Petrified forest**, installation, 21 pieces, stoneware, textured, glaze: white matt, h 170 cm

opposite page **deep blue**, small installation, porcelain textured, 20 pieces, 50 x 50cm, *Photo - Aitor Estevez*



the predomination of polished matt finish and natural colours, aging is a wonderful outcome.

But in spite of her fascination for Japanese and Korean ceramics, Carme insist on the importance of her own culture and tradition. The foundation of Japanese ceramic tradition is the repetition of certain models, and she just blows away that groundwork and gives free reign to her imagination.

That is especially true in her large-scale vases of coiled earthenware, which she builds in a completely ancient and artisan process. In these pieces made for gardens and terraces her heritage is undeniable: simple but refined shapes that humanize and naturalize open spaces, with textured glazes and colours that intensify the Mediterranean atmosphere where they are placed, with the tonalities of the sun, the golden sand and the white houses near the sea. Her latest project is placed in Can Bisa gardens, a civic centre in Vilassar de Mar (Barcelona): a group of 20 pieces 1.70 m in height that transport the observer to a remote petrified forest or to some old Greek site. Each of these slender forms has a different finish, texture or glaze application, that crackle and subtly change, showing the passage of time.

**Caterina Roma** is ceramist and graduate in literary theory and comparative literature. She lives in Barcelona, Spain.

**Carme Balada del Romero** was born in Barcelona in 1957. She studied ceramics at Masana school (Barcelona), and for a few years she experimented in ceramic techniques with artists like the well-known Catalan ceramist Claudia Casanovas or the Indian Wally Hawes, and studied art and design in Saint Lluç Artistic Circle. She travelled twice to Japan and was deeply touch by the magic of Ryoji Koie artworks. Balada has had exhibitions around the world, some of the most relevant are Terres blaves (Barcelona, 2011), Hofgallerie (Heidelberg, Germany 2005), Selected at prize Art Fad 2004, and exhibition of selection (Barcelona, 2004), Arco de los cuchilleros gallery (Madrid, 2003), Contemporary ceramics in Korea (Seoul, 2001) and Tokonoma gallery (Geneva, 2000). She has imparted ceramics in Elisava school of design, ESARQ and the Museum of Ceramics, all in Barcelona, as well as in her own studio, where she gives regular workshops about the chawan (Japanese tea bowl). She has also large-scale installation in public spaces, like Vilassar de Mar and El Prat del Llobregat.

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When forming a piece out of clay, which is earth, the result is a symbol of the Earth. Natural invocations are always present in my work, both in shapes and textures. They are like the marks of natural processes (growth, erosion, regeneration, movement, vibration) and surround the pieces like a skin or bark. Nature is also my referent regarding colours: whites that refer to a glacier wall, ochre and browns, or the infinite blacks that one can perceive in a basalt cliff.

Carme Balada

