

CLAUDI CASANOVAS

*Deep
down in
the Earth*



"Les pomones", 2015, Keramis, Centre de la Céramique, La Louvière, Belgien

by
CATERINA ROMA

Artist of massive abstract forms, the works by Claudi Casanovas are profound, visceral and telling. Being one of today's most well-known ceramics artists worldwide, he does not need much introduction, but listening to himself talking about his work, along with some little stories and reflections, enriches what his work so powerful transmits.

Lush vegetation on top of old volcanos surrounds his studio - volcanos that are inactive but not extinct, a precision that seems quite relevant in this context. No wonder the artist is a medium for expressing nature, a statement especially true for potters, but exact for Casanovas.

Nearby, the town where he grew up in a family of artists, being his grandfather, a renowned sculptor of the Art Nouveau period. This town, Olot, is actually well known for its traditional painting school, which had his peak during the second half of the 20th century.

It was an atmosphere artistically stimulating for a talented boy, but somewhat old-fashioned

for a seeker. That being so, the first plastic impression of abstract, anti-establishment art of our potter today had to be unforeseen... and rather hilarious. A group of those conservative painters organized a mockery exhibition against the avantgarde Catalan movement Dau al set (the seventh face of the dice) affiliated to surrealism. But what was supposed to ridicule that type of art opened the eyes of the young Claudi Casanovas, who needed no more to understand that art could deeply express beyond realism. Very soon he knew he wanted clay to be his medium, and from then on, his artistic expression has almost always been on the field of abstract ceramics. Casanovas quit art school after a few months and learned in the old style, working with different masters. The cooperative Coure, which he founded with other artists following the model of the English Associations, became his university, in a collective learning process with six other potters. They shared a gallery in Olot, fairs, clients, exhibitions... a project that enriched them all for quite a while (1977-1987).

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"Codolar18", 2015. Stoneware, sanding after firing, ø 130 x 105 cm. Single firing in gas kiln at 1,280°C





"El dia de la sega", 1991. Mural. Stoneware, neriage and sandblasting, ø 150 cm. Single firing in gas kiln at 1,280°C with local reduction and salting.

Amfora, 1985. Grogged clay, stoneware, volcanic sands, copper wire, glaze and sandblasting. ø 33 x 120 cm



Those were invigorating and tumultuous times, with the Francoism coming to an end, and new influences for those who could read between the lines of the Establishment. Those were also times when Japan was an icon in the Western ceramics trends. With the Courte team they organized what they called "Japan Summers" in 1985 and 1986, with workshops lead by Japanese potters. They were a big success, and those conferences strongly touched many Spanish potters' artistic view, who still clung to the local traditional style. One of the Japanese guests was Rioji Koie, who from then on became Casanova's artistic soulmate. They had a common sensitivity, which allowed the Catalan potter to go beyond his own limits, discover new creative fields and push freedom much further, to translate it then into his own very Mediterranean language.

Despite appearances, Claudi Casanovas is actually quite attached to traditional ceramics, and his creativity has deep roots in his homeland. He uses these traditional resources to create new work, or as he himself states, he is led by the same force that has pushed all artists through history. To express that concept, he resorts to the eloquent metaphor of the winding staircase: there's only one search, but the artist approaches it at many different levels all through his life. Therefore, he sees no contradiction between traditional and contemporary art, because the relevant here is not the work itself but what's behind, what moves the artist to create, to express, and become a medium of Nature and God, whatever that means. At risk of sounding esoteric, he conceives the artist as a channel to pieces



"Tamariu", 1996, Stoneware, grogged clay, neriage and sandblasting
 ø 122 x 92 cm. Single firing in gas kiln at 1,250°C

"Gerra", 1990 Grogged clay, stoneware neriage, glass powder and sandblasting. ø 71 x 77 cm. Single firing in diesel gas kiln at 1,280°C

that want to manifest, as if God would use his creatures to make himself conscious.

Meeting Anita Bessons was another major step in Casanovas' artistic career. After the opening with Lucie Rie's artworks, he was the first artist to have a show. And since that spring of 1988, the relationship with the art dealer gave wings to Casanovas to grow both in size and depth, and in 1992 he won the first prize at the Mino Ceramic Competition (Japan) with "El dia de la sega".

His path of endless experimentation led him to his very personal technique of working as a sculptor of frozen clay. Big blocks were frozen in industrial freezers, dropped from a height of at least three meters and shaped, once fired, with a hammer and a chisel, working from the cracks caused by the blow. The zenith of this skill came with the "Memorial to the Fallen", a monument to remember the victims of the Spanish Civil War, built during three years with 15 tonnes of clay.

A massive structure that needed cranes to move it and drop it. Casanovas has always resorted to industrial machinery and equipment to create, with the idea that contemporary tools are to





"Als vençuts", 2003 - 2006. 200 x 200 x 200 cm (approx.)

CLAUDI CASANOVAS

was born in Catalonia in 1956. He studied theatre in Barcelona and later on trained as a ceramist with different masters. He was a member of the Coure Potters' Cooperative from 1978 until 1987, and in 1992 he won the first of many international prizes: First Prize at the III International Ceramics Competition in Mino, Japan. His artwork has been displayed in major exhibitions and museum collections worldwide, including The Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg, the Victoria & Albert Museum in London and the National Gallery of Australia.

be used in order to create contemporary art. But his work is not only about massive forms, innovative techniques or abstract art. There's also quite a narrative behind the substance. His latest work, which was exhibited in Barcelona during the IAC Congress on September 2016, is a series of large pieces with which the artist reflects about the four phases of the moon, the nigredo, the shadow, and, why not, the dark night of the soul of the artist himself.

They are a complex approach to death and darkness, starting from archaic mythologies of feminine moon deities from all over the world, and revolving around the "nigra sum sed formosa" ("I am black, but comely"), the text from Song of Songs on the black virgins. A collection of black spheres that transmits this concept of being the obscurity that everything is born from. Claudi Casanovas always follows very personal artistic research and creates with his very unique artistic voice. This has taken him on unexpected paths, were only the very brave ones venture, in experimental research, going beyond borders. A book about Claudi Casanovas' detailed career and work has just been published, with an English edition: Claudi Casanovas - Ceramics 1975-2015.

It includes a thorough compilation of images of Casanovas' work year by year, accompanied by his own writings, an introduction by Michel Moglia and a long conversation with the journalist Eva Vázquez. For more information please visit www.ursulallibres.com

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