



ANN VAN HOEY

The Reinvention of the Pottery Bowl

Henk Van Nieuwenhove

For at least a year now, the name of the Belgian ceramist Ann Van Hoey has been cropping up with great regularity among those selected to exhibit in international competitions. It appears logical to deduce from this that after 30 years in the confines of her studio, innumerable placements and workshops, this 52 year-old lady has decided to go public with her work, which appeals to international juries, her colleagues and observers alike, fascinating and captivating them. Incidentally, Ann Van Hoey is a trained mathematician and has graduated in industrial engineering. As you will see later, I mention this here not only for the sake of completeness.

In a craft like ceramics, which is several thousand years old, it is very difficult to be innovative from a purely structural standpoint. At exhibitions, it is often possible to gain the impression that human and artistic endeavours have removed this artistic genre further and further from its origins: the pottery bowl. The primary component of Ann Van Hoey's most praised work, the installation *Étude Géométrique* is nothing other than a pottery bowl. A very subtle pottery bowl, admittedly, made of extremely thin slabs of clay that lend the whole a sense of remarkable elegance, but still: it is a pottery bowl. Consciously, not the slightest decoration or slip painting have been used – clay is colour, as she says herself – so that a pottery bowl can be what it always has been: a pottery bowl. Inspired by origami, the Japanese art of folding paper, the artist has thus set to work on this earthenware hemisphere. But because folding clay gets in the way of the delicate thinness she tries to achieve, she cuts triangular sections out of the hemisphere – first four, then three, then two, then one, so that the circumference of the rim explodes, and on the basis of volume, the circle explores its geometric and aesthetic relationship to the square, the triangle, the straight line and the point, culminating in the sensuous, female form of a drop of liquid. Ann

Van Hoey cuts clay, she makes incisions in the perfect form of the pottery bowl. During the Artist's Show at Ceramica Multiplex in Varazdin (Croatia), she was showed the assembled ceramists a video of how she set to work on a hemisphere with a pair of scissors, and at that moment a collective shudder went through the auditorium like in a horror film.

In Varazdin, where the subject was Nature as an Adventure, Ann Van Hoey won a bronze medal with her work "Growing". Again, a pottery bowl is the starting point, again, the clay is cut. But this time, nothing is removed from the hemispherical form. It is simply folded so that the complete line of the circle is retained, interrupted only by the incisions, which become shorter and shorter, as if the hemisphere wanted to return to the form from which – technically speaking – it originated, like a bud that grows and finally opens fully.

Now, *Growing White* has also been made, in white earthenware, and at the 6th International Ceramics Biennale in Kapfeberg in Austria, Growth Red will be on view – made of red earthenware, as you will already have guessed. After the Biennale in Kapfeberg, the same work is going on show in Germany at the Keramikmuseum Westerwald in Höhr-Grenzhausen. Finally, from 6 November, a double exhibition is taking place, with Anne Mercedes, at Hélène Porée's gallery in Paris, under the title of "Ordre et Chaos".

The next logical step is "Folded", showing the deepest possible incisions without removing any material, which leads to an almost sculptural end result and a severe but pleasing line. With "Folded" and "Étude Géométrique", Ann Van Hoey was a finalist in Karlsruhe at the Europe Award for Contemporary Crafts 2009 from the World Crafts Council.

"Étude Géométrique" can now boast some impressive successes: Bronze Medal at the 5th World Ceramic Biennale in Icheon (South Korea), the renowned Belgian Henry Van Velde Award,



ILLUSTRATIONS -

top - *"Etude Géométrique"* - 17 x 30 x 30 cm
red earthenware

right t. to b. - *"Growing White"* + *"Moments of Growth Red"*
white + red earthenware, 15 x 30 x 30 cm

and selections for the 6th Cheongju International Craft Competition 2009 (South Korea), as well as the XXIème Biennale Internationale de Céramique Contemporaine de Vallauris 2008 (France).

This work was also on show in the double exhibition with Gustavo Pérez at Galerie Puls in Brussels.

CUPS: THE ROZET SERIES

With all this violence, there is a risk that we may forget that Ann Van Hoey's success story began when she was selected for Design Vlaanderen with her "Rozet Series". These are functional items, if you like, cups and suchlike. Her starting point is basic spatial figures like cubes, cones and spheres, and she uses her origami technique on thin slabs of porcelain, with which she used to work even then. If we read the attached artist's statement she made at that time, we understand immediately that "Etude Géométrique" did not fall from heaven:

"For the entered pieces, the starting point is the hemisphere. In this way, new, strong forms can be achieved, which still bear within themselves the basis of the sphere, through which in a sense the hemisphere is given four sides and takes a step towards the cube. This brings about a kind of marriage between two irreconcilable forms: on the one hand the straight edges of the cube and on the other the sphere, which by definition excludes any notion of straightness. The whole culminates in a rim that becomes a circle again."

Ann Van Hoey has been successful in this discipline too. Last year, the Rozet Series was much applauded at the World Cup exhibition in Frank Steyaert's gallery in Gent (Belgium). At the Concours International 2009 in Carouge (Switzerland), where the contestants were





ILLUSTRATIONS -

top l. to r.

left

- "Rozet" - porcelain - h 8 x 8 x 8 cm

- "Rozet" - porcelain - h 8 x 8 x 8 cm

challenged to make a cup and saucer, she was selected with the fanciful piece, "Thé Dansant", a cup in a ball gown on a circular dance floor... In the "Rozet Series" too, it is geometry that determines the simplicity and elegance of the form: a cup with triangular feet has a rectangular saucer, the corners of which are cut and folded to form overlapping triangles. And here too, the thinness of the slabs plays a crucial role. Because the porcelain is translucent, the cups have a surprising brilliance that delights the eye.

Henk Van Nieuwenhove is a journalist, who writes for "Kwintessens", the magazine of "Design Flanders".

Exhibition of Ann Van Hoey
November 6 - 28, 2009
at Galerie Hélène Porée, 1 rue de l'Odeon, 76006 Paris
www.galerie-helene-poree.com

Ann Van Hoey was born in Mechelen, Belgium in 1956. After graduating from the University of Antwerp in Applied Economic Sciences, she was trained as a potter at the Institute for Arts and Crafts in her home town of Mechelen. In 2000 she began to attend master classes, with people like Tjok Dessauvage, Patrick Picarelle, Victor Greenaway, Ian Gregory, Sacha Wardell, Patty Wouters, Giovanni Cimati, Anima Roos, Richard Godfrey, Don Davis, Netty Janssens, Ian Curry, Antoine Drouillaux, Noboru Kubo and others.

In the past two years her work has been rewarded with several international prizes such as a bronze medal at the 5th World Ceramic Biennale in Korea. Exhibitions in Brussels and Paris. A few months a year she lives and works in the South of France, not far from Vallauris.

ANN VAN HOEY

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