



Wall Slab, porcelain, h 16 cm x b 41 cm, 2023

PAINTING ON A CERAMIC BACKGROUND

Sonja Top lives and works in a small side valley near Sankt Goar, Germany, in the middle of the Unesco world heritage site, in an old grain mill. Ten years ago she bought this historic building with her partner Ricus Sebes. They renovated the mill and converted it into a spacious pottery studio and a wonderfully atmospheric gallery.

In Holland she learned the basic craft skills of pottery and decided early on to use porcelain as her material. The white of the porcelain, the generous surfaces of the bowls and platters offer space for her decoration and painting, like the painting ground for chaos and order, so to speak, for calm versus unrest, for pastel-like coloured areas, lines and loud accents.

Fragments of lines mutate into planes, a differentiation of light/dark appears, tension arises from pairs of opposites such as large/small, changes of direction, free forms and ordered fields. Sometimes impressions in the soft, still leather-hard state of the porcelain show rhythm and order.

But this approach, these new fields of ceramic painting for SonjaTop, are created against the background of classic pictorial decoration skills.

In earlier works, which were mostly close to nature, pictorial, floral in character, she showed familiar, often vegetal, object-like, monochrome motifs reduced to lines.

Her change of location, the feel of the Gründel-

The works and development processes of

SONJA TOP

CHRISTOPH HASENBERG





Vessel, porcelain, 32 cm x 9 cm, 2023

bachtal, new impressions, inspiration, effect and impact of formative landscape experiences led Sonja onto the path to change in her work.

For her, painting on ceramic backgrounds took the place of traditional graphic decoration.

THE PROCESS OF VISIBLE MOVEMENT

Sonja's finished compositions, the totality of the filling, forming and ordering pictorial elements, appear static, at rest. But they are the result of a long process. In the beginning there are empty, white areas, free space, blank, raw porcelain. Something will happen on it and in it, the picture, the composition

Vessel, porcelain, 25 cm, 2023



begins, continues and finishes.

She can pre-imagine her pictures, try them out on paper, practice them, create compositions, create pictorial elements, discard them again, try something new. But her movement translates into realization and her hand is the means.

Movement is not only an aid to the creative process, movement creates visible, tangible forms of expression and perception and is elementary as a phenomenon. It is subjectively original, individual and not definable, but demonstrable and visible in the marks she makes. The rhythm of the picture's development can also be felt and one may also sense an inner movement, an inner emotion. Elsewhere I have written about the impact and inspiration of the landscape. Here an inner movement is shown, which finds its expression in action, in realization, in ceramic painting.

A range of pictorial elements emerges: changes in size, distance, brightness, colour, structure, direction, layer. Sometimes calm and lightness sets in. Then only a few masses and forms can be seen and the colours are pastel with only slight tonal contrasts.

Movement is always speed too: slow, brisk, or fast and everything in between. The tools change, the brush strokes change and the application of the porcelain engobes on the white surface is immediately visible as a mark of the differing speeds. Rapid movement tends to create restlessness and is often abrupt. Slow movement emanates calm, it requires

a certain regularity. In this way, forms develop on Sonja's platters and vessels in the process of drawing and painting, which have their origin, their idea in the inspiration of engaging with the situation in this locality, and from the earlier graphic decorations, painterly surfaces now develop that guide us to find the familiar and the unknown in our own perception and memory.

We can look forward to Sonja's artistic process, to new things and to new ceramic paintings from the Sonja Top studio.

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SONJA TOP

Born in 1969 Porz am Rhein (D). 1997-2002 ceramics training in Holland; 2005 set up her own studio and gallery in Dordrecht, NL; 2005-2013 working as a ceramist in her own ceramics studio, 2005-2022 participation in several workshops with renowned ceramists/artists (e.g. Maria Geszler-Garzuly, Thomas-Jan König, Henk Wolvers, Netty Janssens, Christoph Hasenberg) to further her skills in throwing, colour theory, graphic art, painting and mould making. In 2013 set up a ceramics studio and gallery in St. Goar, Germany.

Awards (selection)

2023 Finalist in the International Competition Yingge Ceramics Museum, New Taipei City, Taiwan; 2021 1st Prize International Ceramics Competition, Raeren, Belgium Ceramics Museum; 2018 1st Prize Ceramic Art Fair Andenne, Belgium; 2017 2nd Prize Cologne Ceramics Market, Germany; 2013 Jury Prize International Ceramics Competition, Raeren Ceramics Museum, Belgium

Exhibitions (selection)

2023 Galerie Tineke van Gils, Schipluiden, Holland, 2023 Keramikhaus Rheinsberg, Presentation of Year Cups 2023; 2023 Finalists' Exhibition, International Coffee Cup Competition, New Taipei City, Yingge Ceramics Museum, Taiwan; 2022 Prizewinners' Exhibition, International Ceramics Competition, Raeren, Belgium Ceramics Museum, Belgium; 2022 Rhineland-Palatinate State Prize, Wilhelm-Hack-Museum, Ludwigshafen, Germany, 2020 Landestrost Palace, Hanover, Germany, 2019 Keramikmuseum Westerwald, Höhr-Grenzhausen, The Storage Vessel, 2019 Keramikmuseum Westerwald, Höhr-Grenzhausen, The Cup; 2018 Vis-à-Vis - Saarland Meets Rhineland-Palatinate, Chamber of Skilled Trades, Koblenz; 2016 One More Cup, Chamber of Skilled Trades Hanover, 2015 More Clay Less Plastic, touring exhibition, Italy.

Free-Falling 1, porcelain, h 30 cm, w 9 cm, 2023

