

SARA CARONE

A 12-year-old girl decides to sculpt the face of a classmate in clay. When she reaches the eyes she has no doubt as to how to proceed – while leafing through a book on sculpture she reads that eyes don't necessarily have to be fashioned with pupils. She follows the counsel but later feels that she pilfered the solution and isn't really the author of the piece. Not being a cheat, she decides right away to give up on a career in sculpture. If not for that naive guilt feeling, we would have enjoyed the talent of the great ceramic artist Sara Carone a lot earlier. However, Carone is not in a hurry.



BACKGROUND: CERAMIC PIECES (DETAIL). PHOTO: ALEXANDRA MARIANI INSET: SARA CARONE IN HER STUDIO. PHOTO: PIO FIGUEIROA

FACING PAGE: ADDING DETAIL TO A CERAMIC WORK. PHOTO: ALEXANDRA MARIANI

While she waited a long time before feeling confident enough to go back to sculpture, professional recognition for her ceramic career came quickly, and since 1990 Carone has exhibited in Japan, Toronto, Lisbon and São Paulo. At a time when most ceramic artists overdo glazing and colours – ‘masking’ the clay with a thick glaze – Carone bares her material and adorns it with subtle graphic elements that sometimes seem ironic but are always beautiful.

Carone hasn't stopped since resuming her artistic activities. She took classes in the technique of wheel throwing from Master Lelé and studied with Megumi Yuasa. She bought a wheel and placed it in her living room. She needed a kiln to fire her pieces and the least expensive was designed for Raku ware, the Japanese lead-glazed earthenware invented for the tea ceremony. Thus, economic considerations led her to adopt a technique that in Japan is regarded as the exclusive province of master-makers. While surprise is a key element in all forms of Raku ware, it is a surprise par excellence. Slight changes in the oxides, in the firing time of the arrangement of the items inside the kiln determine wide variations in results.

'In ceramics it is the firing that gives an object its ultimate shape. The less one knows, the less one controls the firing and therefore the bigger the surprise', says Carone. 'From the beginning I tried to concentrate more on my misses than on my hits. Mistakes are enlightening. I never intended to turn out an utterly perfect, uniform piece. That would be facile – the formulas are in books. I'm concerned with the quality of the pieces I make. I try to reach a point of equilibrium, to attain lightness'.¹

Carone seeks balance in the shapes she chooses because they are 'pure, beautiful and precise, wrought by man throughout millennia'. Vessels, dishes and pots end up being the physical basis and the pretext for her painstaking Raku craftsmanship. Months and even years may pass between the shaping and the firing of one of Carone's pieces.

Carone has set up a studio at the back of her home. To get there, visitors have to cross her living room, where the face of her former classmate rests half-hidden on a table. On the way, one can observe Sara's family and a tangle of flowering plants in the garden. Although her studio is noisy – in addition to creating, she also teaches – it is still possible to prick up one's ears to listen to the silence and the quiet joy of her pieces. ■■■■

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1. Sara Carone, conversation with the author, 1996.

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BACKGROUND:
VIEW OF THE STUDIO'S SINK
AND SURROUNDS.
PHOTO: PIO FIGUEIROA

FACING PAGE, TOP TO BOTTOM:
CERAMIC PIECES (DETAIL).
WORKING AT THE WHEEL.
SMOKE TOWARDS THE END OF
THE RAKU BURNING PROCESS.
PHOTOS: ALEXANDRA MARIANI

