



Daphné Corregan

THEMATIC VARIATIONS OF THE RAKU TECHNIQUE

Unable to access her preferred firing technique while an artist-in-residence in China, Daphné Corregan explored alternative ways to make her work that gave approximately the same results as with raku. Text by Etty Walda.

DAPHNE Corregan, who was born in Pennsylvania in 1954 and now resides in the south of France, had two important expositions towards the end of the 2009. In the Netherlands she exhibit from 28 November through 31 December at Galerie Terra Delft, and in France at the École d'Art du Beauvais, Espace Culturel Françoise Mitterand through 12 December. For several years, her work has been a confluence of very different natures which express the story of their meeting, rather than their succession, by superimposed multiple layers and strata. In this way the ceramic form grapples with the sculpted form, questioning the object's place in space. The work asks us to take a journey through a surprising alliance of empirical and archetypal forms. 'Her work is decorative in the best sense of the term. In the sense that a decorative art should be, above all, an art of aesthetic memory, an art of intentional repetition and patient process, an art of the motif and of proliferation.' (Frédéric Bodet, 2001)

On finishing her training in Aix-en-Provence, Corregan adopted raku as her most important firing technique. An artist-in-residency in China and participation in the French division of the Museum for Modern Art in Fuping

in 2005, motivated her to take the process in another direction. 'In China there was no raku kiln and no raku clay, so I had to think differently. I started hesitantly with stoneware, researching all sorts of possibilities in form and surface treatment. Two heads emerged which I joined together. Each head was then treated in a different way. It is this way of working, and this idea, that I have been developing more fully in the past few years.'

Corregan also sought and found the potential to create her decorations so that they would give approximately the same results as with raku. 'At first I started to work with white engobe. Once satisfied with the result, I began to develop these surfaces. I experimented with a black-fired layer under the white engobe. The smoke firing occurred afterwards in the kiln itself. Another layer of white engobe was applied followed by another firing, which caused the white and black to merge. And finally I achieved the result I'd hoped for – the black seeped through just a fraction, making the white less distinct. By drawing through the white, I was able to intensify the lines through the black.' Corregan has further refined this technique. 'Nowadays I notch the patterns through the white engobe, sometimes scraping away the white and the black all the way to the



red clay. When I intend to do this, I always use a beautiful red clay that contrasts nicely with the vivid white.’ Despite Corregan’s knowledge of these new techniques, she has never really abandoned raku. ‘Some colours, and a certain quality, can simply never be achieved in another way, and they remain necessary for my work. With raku, I take the work out of the kiln at 1020°C and continue firing in metal containers. This is followed by a concentrated test process to reach the exact desired temperature. I call this procedure “postfiring”.’ Since the beginning of her career Corregan has always been strongly influenced by fabrics and folk clothing. She likes the contrasts of a complicated pattern or surface



texture in relation to a simple, or even clumsy form. The two are matched together and help each other to exist and become something new. These investigations have led to her combining different firing techniques, for instance a black-fired surface juxtaposed with a gracefully engraved pattern of a peony. The flower motifs soften the intensity, or perhaps the seriousness, of the suspected subject, resulting in a strengthening of the feminine and traditional aspect of the flowers by the deep black metal tints. Over time Corregan has begun to build more with rolls than with flat sheets, searching for a rougher, more veined surface. Nothing more is smoothed out with tools, but the surfaces are all treated and worked by hand. The result is an appearance with much greater vitality.

The expressive work *Listen* is the point of departure for a series in the exposition at Galerie Terra Delft. In spite of its relatively small size (50 x 19 x 37.5 cm) – quite different from the work that will be shown in Beauvais – the language of form is strong and powerful. The pierced skin and the contrasts between the yellowish-green and the white/grey/black of the outside surface, fuse to create an elegant whole, despite the robust form.

‘Even though the space in Delft is smaller, and the context completely different, my approach is the same, says Corregan. ‘I ask the work to engage in a dialogue and to show what has stirred me to make it. I know this may sound pretentious, but that’s what it’s about: sharing and provoking emotions that I myself feel when responding to work that moves me. I can be moved just as much by a ceramic bowl or an article of clothing as by Penone, Serra, Guston, Picasso, Miro, a flat sculpture by Chillada or a prehistoric site. I share by stealing from them, and I provoke by injecting the stolen goods with my own sense of humour or state of mind.’

Some works, such as *Weights*, are somewhat older, but they are still forms that possess an enduring quality which engages the viewer. New work can also be seen, such as *Tête à Tête*, born of the idea of connecting heads. ‘In this instance it is actually about connecting hairstyles but, of course, that is only obvious to me.’

The exposition in Beauvais, France consisted mainly of large works inspired by the way of working that Corregan had discovered in China: literally connecting two head forms, each a metre tall and heavily decorated with primitive symbols and more controlled circles. And here she was primarily inspired by aboriginal body art, such as that of the Selk’nam in Argentina and the Omo in Ethiopia. These heads are placed facing each other, or lying on their sides. The space in Beauvais is high and vaulted. So to make the most of this space Corregan wanted to have her two abstract torsos, each about 1.80 m long, placed on the floor where the arms, separated from the body, engage the heads in dialogue. And then there were two sets of buttocks connected to each other, which looked at first like dumb-bells. ‘There was a lack of propriety in situating them playfully next to the other pieces, but it immediately indicated how I think,’ says Corregan.

In medieval cartography, distances were indicated in terms of hours or days of walking, not kilometres. One can then measure all the importance of imprecision, of “roughly”, which obliged each person to translate the indications of the journey into his own walking capacity. Similarly, the pieces made by Daphné Corregan are an invitation to translate into our own language, that is to say into our own space, this distance which separates us and unites us to the object.

Etty Walda (translated by Jenny Denman)

