

# In Studio with Gry Ringset

Gry shares her love of nature and plant fibres with her mother and her grandmother, who both wove "åkler". In the following interview she tells us what that is and how she integrates plant fibres in her ceramics.

by Evelyne Schoenmann

**G**ry, you live in the very north of Norway. Does the harsh climate and the landscape influence your work?

I have always felt very close to nature and I have always enjoyed studying natural textures. The dimension of nature that appeals to my senses gives me inspiration.

*You not only attended art school but you also studied architecture in Oslo. Did you want to change jobs?*

No, while I was doing research into the development of materials at art school, the art school and school of architecture

you are invited to participate. Kaolin gallery in Stockholm exhibited the project Biotope because of its experimental quality. Biotope was the result of an experiment with materials and includes a video installation interacts with two groups of objects; I wanted to share with the visitors the experience of nature, texture and touch. Apart from that, the National Museum of Decorative Arts and Design in Trondheim is outstanding. It has a collection of craft work and it also has good exhibitions of contemporary ceramics and crafts. It was an honour for me to execute and show the project Klangbilder ("Acoustic Patterns").

space. This variation of the project was developed in cooperation with VIB (verksted for improvisert bevegelse – "Workshop for Improvised Movement"). The installation hung freely in the gallery and interacted with various sounds and movements that were partly improvised and choreographed. The project was inspired by the very earliest ritual ceramics bearing meaning, where small sculptures or cave paintings, for instance were part of ritual acts. Today, parallels can be drawn to relational aesthetics, where the encounter between the public, the dancers and the artists creates a holistic experience.



cooperated and the school of architecture provided the scientific skills and the research training.

*You have participated in numerous exhibitions. Is it very easy to exhibit ceramics in northern Europe?*

No, I wouldn't put it like that. We have a lot of talented professional craftspeople and only a few forums dedicated exclusively to craft. Juries select participants for most exhibitions, unless of course

*In 2012/2013 the group VIB put on dance performances around your Klangbilder installation. Can you tell us something about this experimental project?*

It was developed together with Gudrun Sanden and her Eurythmietheater, which is inspired by Joseph Beuys's ideas about social sculpture and the fragility in the encounter between humans and nature. After the premiere on the stage I wanted to transfer the installation to another dimension of relationships in the gallery

*That sounds absolutely fascinating, Gry! Now we can't wait to learn more about your working methods and your love of plant fibres.*

I was never that interested in clay itself, but much more in the possibilities it offers. As an inquisitive student, I experimented with mixing all kinds of strange things with clay and then firing it. For my M.A. piece, I used glass fibres and porcelain, which I later found unsatisfactory because glass fibres are a health hazard

and as a material it only offered a limited expressive potential. On an extended trip to Japan, where I studied paper making by hand, I met a number of skilled paper makers. They gave me new ideas for further experiments with fibres and clay. We have a long tradition in textiles here in Norway, especially with woven textiles, for which traditionally plant fibres have always been used. My paternal grandmother grew her own flax, from which she wove bed linen and towels. My mother and her mother both wove "åkler", traditional decorative wall hangings. So for me, throughout my youth it was natural to spin yarn from plant fibres. This coincidence of the Japanese and the Norwegian use of materials was the background to my experiments with plant fibres and porcelain.

The fibres of every plant are of different lengths and thicknesses and produce a different expressive effect with the texture. The fibres are collected, soaked, dried and stored. When they are to be used, they are soaked, boiled and broken. The prepared fibres are then mixed in to the porcelain, then a thin layer of

I have terminated the firing because the piece begins to distort then.

For projects involving large flat planes, such as the installation Sound Patterns with surfaces measuring 2.40 mtr x 0.60 mtr and a thickness of 5 mm, the fibres are like reinforcing, helping to avoid cracking during drying and strengthening the piece during the first stage of firing. When the fibres have burned out, an impression of them remains in the porcelain. Working with plant fibres turns traditional working methods with clay upside down. The first firing is always at the highest temperature, any second firings are at a lower temperature.

My fondness for plant fibres is connected with the technical potential, expressiveness and also not least with a view to sustainability. Plant fibres are a CO<sub>2</sub> neutral resource.

*In 2016, you took part in a group exhibition in the oldest private gallery in Oslo, Kunstnerforbundet ("Artists' Association"). The title of the exhibition was Pottery is Back. We would like to know what this provocative title means?*

guardians of tradition, craft itself today moves wholly in the field of fine art and is distinguished by experiment as a fundamental cultural feature. The exhibition provoked a lot of discussion, and it was pointed out, for example, that "pottery never left". Gjertrud Steinsvåg said that the project was based on observation and that the values and qualities of craft were right up to date. Instead of expounding the problems of ceramics and pottery, the artists in the exhibition pointed to contemporary values in society.

*So you discussed the old but still topical theme of Art versus Craft and interpreted it in a very interesting way. And what are your plans for the immediate future?*

The next exhibition I am taking part in is the 36th Concurso Internacional de Ceràmica de l'Alcora (CICA 2016) this summer. Apart from that, I am working on new projects for my next solo exhibition. I find exhibiting in Europe very exciting and I hope further opportunities will arise in future.



fibre porcelain is drained on a screen. The sheet of fibre porcelain is laid on a plaster bat until it is half dry and can then be shaped like soft paper. Highly absorbent natural fibres are dipped in the porcelain. The jug is built up layer for layer from fibre porcelain, threads and possibly from ready fired porcelain elements. The inside of the form is coated with bat wash, for example, so that it can be removed from the jug after firing. The jug is then fired to vitrification point, when in this case

Gjertrud Steinsvåg was the curator of the exhibition, Pottery is Back, in January and February this year. According to Joakim Borda-Pedeira, the show was an impassioned plea to bring aesthetic objects back into everyday life and to bridge the distinction between craft, applied art and design. The selection was characterised by an unsophisticated aesthetic of earth tones and the texture of the ceramics. Borda-Pedeira added that while handicrafts are the

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Evelyne Schoenmann's next interview is with **Antonella Cimatti, Italy**. Evelyne Schoenmann is a ceramist. She lives and works in Basel, Switzerland and Liguria, Italy.  
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