





CERAMICS WITH SOUL

Caroline Schulz Vieira

In the West, there is a clear divide between fine art and craft. It's a perennial debate and a hugely divisive one. In the East, art and craft have traditionally been seen as very much the same thing and little, if any, distinction is made.

In Japan, especially, ceramics are loved and collected as everyday art objects and their makers revered. Ceramics are what connects us to our most ancient history - it is so much part of our culture that it's easy to overlook, or dismiss. Ceramics are unique among the arts and crafts in that it is so diverse. A painting is a painting, a piece of sculpture is a piece of sculpture, but a piece of ceramic can be many things at once. It functions as a canvas; it can be a sculpture, it can be a humble bowl, or a floor tile. This plurality is what makes it such an exciting medium, and a confounding one. It can be both beautiful and utilitarian.

As with any art form, the maker's skill is what lifts it from the mundane, to the sublime. And one such skilled ceramicist is Caroline Schulz Vieira, who practises her art, and teaches, from her gorgeous



studio in Parkview, Johannesburg. Her studio is surprising in its orderliness, and there is no hint of the chaos that engulfs most artists' studios. It is a reflection of the artist's mind. Orderly, disciplined and impeccably tidy. She needs order to thrive and create.

Caroline was born in Santiago, Chile and immigrated to South Africa with her parents when she was nine years old. After matriculating from the German School in Pretoria, she completed a BA degree in Art History and German at Wits. Three years later, Caroline

about the artist

Ceramics is possibly the only art form that can be interacted with on an intimately personal level. It can be appreciated purely as non-utilitarian art, or serve as beautiful receptacles for nourishment, or made into jewellery. Oscar Wilde once quipped that "art is quite useless", but perhaps he was quite wrong. Art is indeed useful and can serve to beautify the simplest of daily habits, like eating a bowl of soup, or drinking a soothing cup of tea. This is the art practised by Caroline Schulz Vieira.

returned to her homeland, where she studied ceramics with Elsa Pfenniger. On her return to South Africa, she spent seven years at the Kim Sacks School of Ceramics in Johannesburg, which included a two-year apprenticeship. She co-wrote the book "Pottery for Little People" in 2006.

In 1997 she established her own teaching studio and is today a sought-after teacher.

Her work explores the vessel as both physical container and empty space. Starkly beautiful, her ceramics have a sensual, tactile quality and what can be at first perceived as earthy roughness, on closer inspection reveal a virtuosity of technique enlivened by stunning glaze effects. Delicate carving, faceting and incised lines are used with incredible restraint and skill. Light and shadow play on surfaces and add interest to interiors. Glazes are used with restraint, and serve to enhance the sculptural qualities of her

work by adding another dimension, that of reflected light, and are never mere decoration. She mixes her glazes to her own formulations arrived at by study, research and testing over a lifetime of dedication - it is part art, part alchemy.

Architectural qualities in some of her work reference the urban landscape, as well as ancient African and South American constructions. Other pieces are carved with facets that allow light and shadow to create each piece anew depending upon the angle it is viewed from. Finely carved surfaces remind of terraced mountainsides, while glazes add a reflective quality to enhance the surface or interior further. Subtly, she sculpts with light. But the inverse is also true. She sculpts with shadow as well. As humans, we embody both light and darkness, and these exquisite vessels can be seen as analogous to the human soul, revealing and

concealing in a never-ending dance of light and dark, smooth and rough.

Moody black basalt, ethereal white and cream, dusky shades of natural earth, and glaze effects akin to ink-wash painting lure the observer in for closer inspection. That is when the world of Caroline Schulz Vieira is revealed, and her spell is cast. The viewer invariably will feel the need to touch, to interact on an intimately personal level with these objects born of earth and flame. The ultimate joy is that these works of art can be used - indeed they are meant to be. A humble meal or simple flower will find itself greatly enhanced by the use of a beautiful vessel and therein lies their truest value and greatest meaning.

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