

Nina Hole

"I'm not seeking any perfection or beauty in a traditional classic sense. At the same time I'm trying to penetrate the form, to make it transparent in order to maybe reach an inner structure or a hidden pattern."

By Layla Khani

You're intriguing ideas have taken you all around the world, but when did you realize you wanted to select clay as a medium for expressing your art?

From my first touch of clay, I knew that it was my material. But although I was certain about this, I did not want to restrict myself and so I made a detour through painting and graphic art before I was able to return to clay. This happened when I went to the USA in 1970.

Can you tell us a little about your techniques and the materials you use?

My techniques included "fire sculpture", or Monumental Firing, and the materials are Ceramic fibre, grog stoneware clay and hard bricks. The fire sculpture is a kiln and a sculpture combined. The sculpture is built on a base of firebricks, which also serve as firing boxes for the sculpture kiln. For this purpose I have developed a simple module system



1 'Two Taarns'

2006, Appalachian State University, NC USA.

2 'Two Taarns'

2006, Appalachian State University, NC USA.

made out of slabs, as a building block system. The blocks are made from J shaped slabs, about the size of a small fire brick, with one leg longer than the other. The blocks are then stacked one on top of the other, with open ends altering.

By utilizing this same idea of block stacking, as in placing kiln furniture on top of each other, I have been able to stack the module system in a structure up to four meters high. The actual building blocks create an open weave double wall which allows for fast drying and quick firing. After construction of the sculpture, the structure is then wrapped in the fiber blanket and fired with wood. This can take two-three days depending on the situation.

The peak of the process occurs when we let the blanket fall in front of the audience at top temperature. In this way, everyone shares what a truly impressive sight it is to witness so much controlled energy. At the same time, the fall of the blanket is an integral part of the process of cooling the sculpture down to its final stage. The audience sees the whole cooling process, the change of light and color, with their own eyes.

For me, witnessing this outburst of energy and taking control over such a huge mass and its radiation is an overwhelming experience. It has turned into a "performance" that has now been staged in many places all over the world. Lots of different people have participated, and some have taken on the idea themselves, both in Denmark and many other places abroad.



One of the most important parts of the project are the assistants and all the people involved. It's a new group every time, with only my regular assistant, Ann-Charlotte Ohlsson, there to ensure the continuity.

What inspires you?

One of my many sources of inspiration is Gaudi's "La Sagrada Familia". I was overwhelmed by his vision, by the project and by the fact that he decided to hang his construction upside down in order to engineer such a wonder. My reaction was: How would a woman have built it?

3 'Red Transformer'

2004, Minneapolis

4 'Red Transformer'

2004, Minneapolis

How do you describe your fire sculpture works?

NH: Simply put: fire sculptures are build site specific; part sculpture, part kiln and part performance. The process has always been the most important aspect from sketch to finished work.

Your fire sculptures are absolutely mesmerizing. How did you come up with such an original idea?

NH: For me, my art is a journey, a voyage in development, and that is why I have to follow my own way, and often only understand the urges I have had in retrospect. It is not possible for me to copy existing ideas because that does not bring any insight and I believe that I am here to grow as an artist.

It seems the site fire sculptures are very demanding and involve a huge number of people – it must be really exciting to be in the audience of one of your firing sites! But how do you plan for all this and deal with the scales and technical aspects of the project? For me it is important that the pieces can stand purely as sculptures. I actually set myself rules for these pieces - they are like dogma. I find them helpful in that there are restrictions. One rule is that the works can be fired. But the most important part is that they are sculptures that people can enjoy as just that, because

not everyone can be there for the building and firing. On occasions I have placed information boards about the process of their creation, including a little description and who built them. Then it becomes a memory of the event.

Do you welcome happy accidents in the processes of making your sculptures?

In my way of working accidents or problems occur all the time, and I accept that fact and I try to solve the issues and get the best out of the situations – sometimes it even leads to new inventions! With each new project I incorporate the new ideas and experience from former projects and in this way my work is an on-going development.

Working in many countries with a new set of assistants, new materials and new environments has taught me to be flexible and to be grateful for the support and insight given to me by all the participants.

Would you tell us about your sculpture objects?
They enjoy different scale in comparison to the fire sculptures.

When I sculpt in clay I am seeking to re-establish



5 'Isloté'

2007, Xalapa, Mexico

6 'Isloté'

2007, Xalapa, Mexico



a basic simplicity in form, and am drawn towards a raw, imperfect, archaic expression. I'm not seeking any perfection or beauty in a traditional classic sense. At the same time I'm trying to penetrate the form, to make it transparent in order to maybe reach an inner structure or a hidden pattern.

My often-used theme, the house, is both about investigating and exploring the basic, material structure, but also about a metaphoric, personalized expression of the "I" or maybe even of "God" - as a house?

What advice would you give other artists who are interested in public art and would like to have similar experiences? What do they need to know and what is the best way to start?

This is difficult question. I do understand that many wish to try and work with public art, but new ideas take time and are often difficult to accomplish alone. So I'd suggest trying to form a group and to learn to work more for the whole than one's self as this can sometimes be very fruitful. But again, everyone has to follow one's own process. Copying others will not do.



7 'Islote'
2007, Xalapa, Mexico

8 'Islote',
2007, Xalapa, Mexico



You've been to Brazil recently, were you working on a project there?

My project in Brazil was a very special and exiting challenge, since I knew that the Portuguese language would be a potential difficulty. I invited Renata Cassiano from Mexico to join Ann-Charlotte Ohlsson and me, and we worked with about 20 Brazilians from the University of São João Del Rei and around Minas Gerais. We built and fired a sculpture as part of a celebration for a CONTAG (National Confederation of Agricultural Workers of Brazil) conference. Together we made a sculpture that almost burst from the fire, and I think all the energy and power of the people there that influenced the outcome of the Fire Sculpture in such a wonderful way.

Have you got any more projects ahead of you? What is your next challenge?

My next sculpture will most likely be in Hickory, North Carolina in 2011. I'm not exactly sure about the time of year yet, but I believe it will be in the fall. I'm particularly looking forward to this because Kim



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Ellington, a potter who produces traditional wood-fire pottery, has organized the project together with the town of Hickory. For me to work with people that come from the old tradition of wood-fired kilns, called Groundhog kilns, will no doubt be an experience to remember.

Nina, thanks very much for talking to me today and good luck for all of your future projects!

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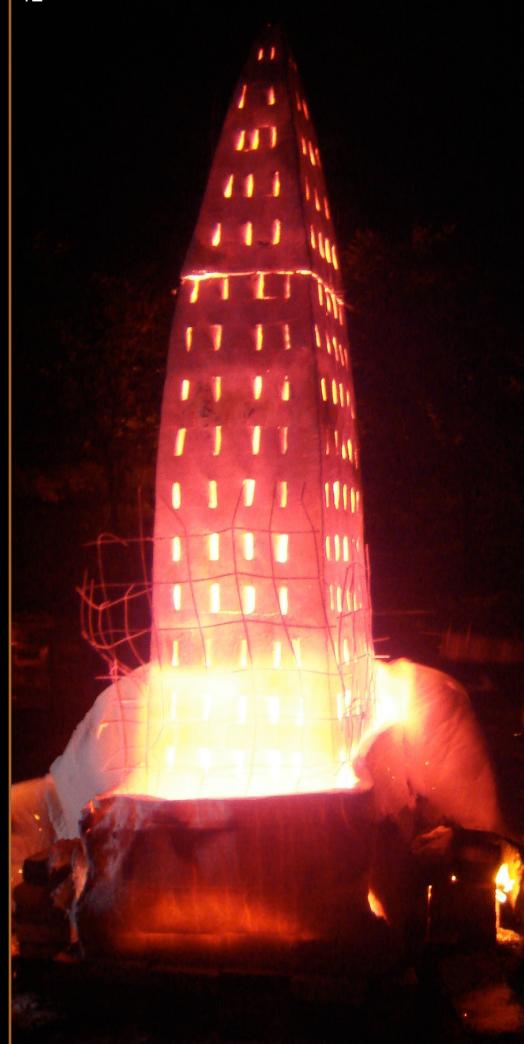
9 – 11 'Fire sculpture'

2010, Brazil
Universery of Sao Joao Del Rei

12 – 13 'Fire sculpture'

2009, Korea
Adventures of the Fire in Icheon
The International Ceramic Workshop in Connection to "The World Ceramic Biennial"

12



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