



Wim Borst:

Geometric Harmony

by Nesrin During



"525 Connections Series, 12," 16 in. (41 cm) in length, slab-built and press molded stoneware, with the area between the two objects glazed matt blue, fired in an electric kiln to 2300°F (1260°C) in oxidation \$1125 (€900).

Dutch ceramics artist Wim Borst constructs slab-built stoneware vessels. These vessels, though, are definitely nonutilitarian. One can call them studies of geometric forms—cubes, cylinders and circles.

From the start, Borst has persistently worked within these geometric boundaries; cutting, dividing, shifting, stacking and reassembling these basic forms. His work is about creating new optical compositions from the cut elements. Inspired by architecture, form and space are at the core of his work.

He started out with cubes and objects with rectangular or hexagonal bases. He cut and divided the basic shape, then joined them again in different ways. On the outer walls of these geometric objects, lines divided the surface visually. Later on, he started using Plexiglas for the purpose of visual divisions. He glued layers of Plexiglas between

layers of clay. Borst's angular pieces were covered with a thin layer of matt glaze. At the corners and edges, the glaze was wiped away creating visual contrast.

From 1998 on, the angular shapes gave way to rounded geometrical forms. Cylinders, ovals and circles appeared. He also started making two separate geometric forms that related to each other, which could be presented in several different ways, creating interesting third space, an interaction between the two objects. These works too, bear close relationship to architecture. Borst now and then still works with pairs.

Next, Borst moved on to make interesting double-walled pieces. He made a cylinder within a cylinder, but placed the inner cylinder askew so that the piece looked as if part of the cylinder had a much

thicker wall than the rest. Or he made a cone in a cylinder; again the cone does not come all the way to the bottom of the cylinder, but stops just before, so that the eye is led to the empty space. In this way, Borst encourages his public to participate in his work.

The inner and outer walls of these double-walled vessels used to meet at the rim with clean straight lines and sharp edges. However, in his recent “Shoulders” series, the two walls come together rounded and become a single continuous line, giving the impression of solid mass.

Borst was born in Gouda, in 1946. Besides taking some lessons from good ceramists, he is an autodidact. He started working with clay at a late age and has created his own path.

In 1998, Borst stayed and worked for a few months at the European Ceramic Workcentre in s’Hertogenbosch, Netherlands. There he developed a clay with additions of flax, molochite and organic



PHOTOS: WIM BORST

Borst is seen here working in the windowed space where he creates his forms. In the foreground is a view of his glaze, spray and kiln area.

“538 Circles Series, 7,” 16 in. (40 cm) in length, slab built, press molded strips, with blue matt glaze on top of strips, fired in an electric kiln to 2300°F (1260°C) in oxidation, \$1625 (€1300)



CAFFEINATED TEXTURE

With the curved slab works, Borst started to color his slabs with oxides and stains, creating a palette of grays. To this, he added organic materials. He experimented with broken beans, rice and other matter, and settled with coffee beans. Nowadays, he adds crushed coffee beans into his prepared, colored slabs. He lets the coffee bean slabs sit a while before using them, so that the beans are soft enough to be cut with the slab. After the bisque firing, the burned-out bits of beans create an interesting texture. Color and surface interact and enhance the form. These new, massive pieces have a strong, rocky presence created by the voids left by the coffee beans. The slabs with the oxides, stains and the crushed coffee beans are kept under plastic for four to five weeks; any longer and the coffee beans begin to rot, and the slab becomes unusable.

The matured slabs are then cut to desired form and size, and left to harden on his molds. He makes his own molds from wood or paper, and uses all sizes of plastic PVC pipes. The cylinder forms are made by using plastic pipes as molds. In between the PVC pipe and the clay slab, he lays a thin sheet of aircraft plywood, so the clay slab does not rest on the plastic. In this way, two different slabs are cut and shaped over two different molds. When hard enough Borst joins them very carefully with slip. A cylinder is formed; then the cylinder is cut at the bottom at a slanted angle, so the shape tips over. A bottom slab is added, and the piece is left to dry very slowly. The finished work is bisqued slowly, to 1760°F (960°C) in an electric kiln.

After bisque firing, the pieces are sanded. For his colored clays with organic matter, he sands wet with diamond pads coarse to fine; a long process. When the desired clay surface and texture are achieved, he washes the pieces with water. Several of these pieces do get some glaze, especially inside, to create a contrast. The glazes are either sprayed or brushed on, and the pieces are fired to 2300°F (1260°C) in an electric kiln.

materials, which he still uses. In addition to his clay, his method of working changed. He stopped sketching his pieces and started working more freely with the help of improvised molds.

While working, he uses a digital camera to record the process. He works on one piece at a time and makes a systematic diary in which he records the number of hours spent, materials, processes and numbers of each piece. He makes each form only once and each subsequent



"514 Inside Series, 2," 8 in. (21 cm) in height, slab built and press molded, with black glossy glaze and matt glaze, fired in an electric kiln to 2300°F (1260°C) in oxidation, by Wim Borst, Haarlem, Netherlands.

piece is related to the one before it. He is in control at all stages of the work, from rolling out the clay to mixing the oxides to sanding the work. After all that, he discards a lot.

Borst's work is stark and conceptual, with a restrained elegance and poise. It is continually in a state of evolution; refining and perfecting the geometric forms. In his latest work, circles diverge into squares. The stony, gray surface and the larger volumes are simpler in line and purer in form. It is as though he is busy recreating geometry.

Wim Borst is represented by Galerie Eewal in Amsterdam and Leeuwarden, Netherlands (see www.galerie-eewal.nl). To see more works by Wim Borst visit www.wimborst-ceramics.nl.