

Antonella Cimatti
Between Art Research
& Technology

Article by Rolando Giovannini



Fiori-frutta (Flowers-fruit). 2007. Collection of majolica vases with ceramic litho transfers. 30 x 30 cm.
Commissioned by the GestCooper Consortium, Turin



Positive and Negative. 2003. Vitrified vases from the Raku Dolce series. 32 x 17 cm. Photography: Foto Ellesse, Faenza, Italy

THE CITY OF FAENZA IS NOTED IN THE WORLD FOR being one of the motherlands of ceramics. In particular, it embraces more than a millennium of terracotta, first engobed, and then glazed with a typical surface treatment containing tin.

But the city, above all at the beginning of the 1900s, was characterised for combining aspects of creativity with those of technological research of materials and processes. In reality, thanks to the enlightened mind of Gaetano Ballardini, who not only founded a museum (1908) that quickly became international, also implemented a School of Art and Craft (1916) where the pupils – few at the beginning – learnt and experimented with different techniques.

It could be said that the particularity of the Faentino 'style' not only resides in the extremely high quality of its rich polychromatic decoration well evident in its superlative maiolica production, but also, above all, in its attention to detail regarding production, its perfection of processes and the careful attention that is paid to the ways in which things are done.

Antonella Cimatti, having been trained at Faenza's Istituto Statale d'Arte per la Ceramica (State Art Institute for Ceramics), and having been both a pupil of Carlo Zauli and of l'Accademia di Belle Arti (Academy of Arts) in Bologna, fits perfectly into this criterion. Not only is she creative, clever in management and skilled at colour combination, she is also precise and dynamic in her free-hand decoration, never losing sight of the importance of series production, while paying close attention to contemporary trends regarding concept and design.

This is her way of working, where conceptualisation and theory are fleshed out well before the clay is even entrusted to her hands, or for that matter to interpretation or to whim. Due to this, the experimentations that characterised her post-modern flavoured work at the beginning of the '80s were welcomed into the artistic movement of the 'Nuova Ceramica' (New Ceramics), a group of artists curated by art critics Franco Solmi and Marilena Pasquali (1982-1984, having also had shows in the Tokyo Department Stores of Seibu) and the movement 'A Tempo e A Fuoco' (In Rhythm and In Fire), curated by Vittorio Fagone (1983-85).

During this period, with her series *Le Preciose* (The Precious Ones), she furthered her work in industry production, in particular for the manufacturer, Flavia Ceramics (Bitossi), in Montelupo Fiorentino. Periods of study and teaching in Japan at Toki-Shi, in France at Limoges, in England at Portsmouth and in Belgium at Turnhout, served to broaden her awareness of a variety of materials, from porcelain to jewellery. In *Raku Dolce* of 2003, she produced an unpublished series of vases with a black and white motif, research that merited winning First Prize at the competition, *Il Vaso Officinale* (The Official Vase), in Collegno, Turin.

Like any artist belonging to the Faentino culture, which is dedicated to utility, her attention orients itself toward renewing the forms and design of the artisan. A sort of mix between artist and artisan, she moves toward a new language altogether where the work becomes – as if innately so – an object of the times, concrete. And this is where her collaboration



Le Crespine (Goblets). 2005. Installation porcelain paperclay bisqueware. 1250°C. 120 x 120 cm. Photography: Raffaele Tassinari, Faenza, Italy.

with two top quality botteghe (studios) in Faenza, those of Antonio Liverani and Laura Silvagni, was born. The former association being of a limited edition series of objects decorated with a floral motif. During his presentation at the Flora Magna Collection in 1997, the Director of the International Ceramics Museum of Faenza, Gian Carlo Bojani, said, "Now we are able to see in which direction those fleshy pinks are going, those swollen expanses: they have become rose vases, or are they vase roses? The forms of the vases work well with these floral designs: they are so well integrated that the vase is almost swallowed by its decoration. The surface treatment is strong with respect to its support, it devours it, it



Le Crespine (Goblets) detail. 2007. Installation. porcelain paperclay bisqueware 1250°C. 150 x 120cm. Objects were displayed while being projected onto with digital images of photos of the objects themselves.



Fiori-frutta (Flowers-fruit). 2007. Collection of maiolica vases with ceramic litho transfers. 30 x 30 cm. Commissioned by the GestCooper Consortium, Turin. Photography Raffaele Tassinari, Faenza, Italy.



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transforms it; it is the fruit of an inspired mind. The form hasn't been wasted in its narration, but has been transformed into something else entirely, it speaks of surfaces and shapes. They are vivid, these petrified roses of Antonella Cimatti's."

Today, she uses photorealistic transfers (ceramic litho) of images taken from the natural world. The effect is that of wrapping the object with a sort of flow between form and decoration. While instead, since 2005, with Laura Silvani – a Faentina artist well known for her maiolica surface decoration – Cimatti has created motifs that have been inspired by undulating fabric: a precious, soft, pregnant and voluptuous garment in maiolica;- either coming from some unknown fashion trend or from the strength of tradition. The object's true second skin, or better yet, its melting of visual space, is a sort of deceptive accomplice, eluding the audience.

Along the same lines, she has created a series of *double-face* objects painted with the brush's tip. The design, although most evident externally, is continued on the hidden underside of the base, allowing the object to assume a double function and sense of versatility.

Also in 2005, she created *Crespine* (Goblets) in porcelain paperclay bisqueware. Some of them have been glazed, and have been used in experiments using triple fired gold lustre. They present themselves like ample goblets in ceramic filigree, a type of interwoven lace of overlapping spirals in precious porcelain "thread". It is an art of addition, not of subtraction, as is not uncommonly done in the making of

ceramics and, above all, in the original renaissance crespines, where the perforations were created by piercing and cutting out shapes from the existing closed forms.

The procedure is complex; apart from the anticipation of the freehanded formations created on concave or convex refractory supports, a high temperature firing is necessary and then subsequently the assembly on hand-blown glass bases, which have been designed and commissioned in Tuscany specially by the artist, Antonella Cimatti.

These pieces, having been selected by the ADI (Italian Design Association), for the exhibition *Ultratavola, Abitare il Tempo* (The Ultimate Table, to Inhabit Time), in Verona and for the exhibition *Artigianato Artistico Italiano* (Italian Artistic Artisans), in St. Petersburg, Russia, have also been recently awarded with the Silver Prize at The 4th World Ceramic Biennale 2007, Korea.

Agile, unique objects that live in light and tactility, that speak of supreme whiteness and imperceptible vibrations, exactly like the *modus vivendi et modus operandi* (the way that you live and the way that you work) of the author, Antonella Cimatti.

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