



ETRURIA. LOW RELIEFS, HIGH COLOURS. Priscille Jotzu, workspace residency 2019 - CERCCO, HEAD Geneva

PREAMBLE:

The Workspace residency in the CERCCO, HEAD Geneva was for me the first opportunity to give time and space for the research *Facsimilé* to unfold. It was a very special time to me given the start of the residency in autumn 2019 being 7 months pregnant, and the end in April 2021 along the pandemic.

Facsimilé is the name of an applied material research that I am undertaking within the field of glass and ceramic since 2018, the project *Etruria* focused on Jasperware being the initial chapter of it. Prior to the residency, I was only prospecting and researching in books or online and it was a decisive task to finally get hands-on, put on an apron and being confronted with the materiality of the clay. The result sought and expected was an experimental exploration, highlighting the technicality involved in making the pieces.

Etruria. Low reliefs, high colours is a series of utilitarian and decorative vessels made of slipcasted unglazed porcelain with reliefs ornaments, revisiting the Jasperware heritage of Wedgwood regarding its peculiar mat dyed porcelain just as well its iconic low reliefs ornaments. The rich combination of shapes and patterns was inspired by the work of Italian Radical Design. The name *Etruria*, derived from the Etruscan civilisation, evokes indeed this Italian inspiration but also refers to an existing production site of Wedgwood in the UK.

VESSEL SHAPES AND MOULD MAKING:

The vessel shapes has been thought to be slipcasted with porcelain slip. The technician in the model workshop being not available at the beginning of the project, I had to create my initial shapes by hand and not with 3D computer modelling and milling as initially planned. Isabelle Schnederle was offering me to use a DYI machine that she previously developed to shape small prototypes with plaster thanks to stencils, which technics slightly differs from a plaster lathe.

Due to this constraint, I had to think my shapes in terms of symmetry, a little like a Rorschach test imagery. The models have been developed primarily with cut outs of paper sheets folded in the middle, later laser cut in the form of metal stencils to fit the DYI machine, finally made manually out of plaster through the concentric rotation of the stencils around a vertical axis .

The final shapes are constructed with vertical stacks of plaster pieces like totems. From the 6 choosen models, only 4 were finally slipcasted due to a lack of time: an amphora type vase, a balloon, a totem and a dumbbell-like shape.

From these positive plaster shapes I have made negative plaster moulds composed of 5 pieces: foot, casting ring and three times a 120° portion of the body. The plasters moulds then serves to slip cast the final porcelain pieces.

ORNAMENTATION:

Finally the vessels are ornamented on the outer surface with dyed porcelain. The main ornament focus was to get as close as possible to the low reliefs of Wedgwood. In order to do this, porcelain in the form of modelling clay was pressed into shallow plaster moulds and directly lifted up with a modelling-trowel-like tool and applied on the given surface with water and/or slip. Once again lacking of time I have developed 3 types of ornaments: cut-outs reliefs of 1-2mm of slip hardened on a plaster plate and later applied on the raw pieces with slip, watercolour like painting with a paintbrush and slip dripping or gum-like slip application depending on the consistency of the dyed porcelain.

The pieces were finally fired between 1210°C and 1260°C in one or two time without glaze or engobe on the outside. Several pieces were glazed in the inside to test to permeability to water.

JASPERWARE COLORS:

I developed a colour range inspired from the original colour palette of Josiah Wedgwood with about 50 different shades ranging from black, blue, green, yellow to lilac, pink, beige and brown. My base is a Mont-Blanc porcelain that Magdalena Gerber was proposing to me as being the purest white available in the workshop. The white base was allowing me to have very bright colours for the blue or yellow for example.

To develop these shades I was firstly trying to work on the classical colours of Jasperware: blue jasper, lilac jasper, sage-green jasper, yellow cane jasper and black jasper also called black basalt. A rare type of Jasperware called Rosso Antico which colour is close to terracotta was also part of my research but I didn't succeed to find a satisfying colour ton.

Even though the blue is originally a pale blue I have worked more with bright blue closer to Ultramarine blue with synthetic pigments but also with natural cobalt pigments. I worked also with a bright yellow that I particularly affectionate and also added some pink to the lilac shades.

PICTURES:

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RESEARCH HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

Since I can remember my interest in ceramics as dilettante I have always been captivated by the Wedgwood ceramics. Their colour combinations, their mat aspects and their peculiar low reliefs ornaments give them to my opinion a unique place in the history of ceramics.

In the summer 2018, I saw several mat blue glass vases in the Kunstgewerbemuseum Berlin that I was mistaking for Jasperware pieces. I was indeed thinking back of the pieces discovered at the Ariana Museum of Geneva in 2015. A closer look at the caption and the pieces themselves proved me wrong. From an outer look, the resemblance is striking, but on the one hand, it is sandblasted glass with 'enamel' applications, on the other hand it is an unglazed dyed porcelain with low relief frieze.

This discovery was so intriguing to me that I started a desk research, and being fascinated about all these news learnings, I very quickly decided to initiate an applied research in the field of glass and ceramic to even get closer to the topic itself.

I choose the name, *Facsimilé. Contemporary exploration of reliefs, surfacing and engraving technics on ceramic and glass*, referring to the term 'facsimile', originating from the Latin 'fac simile'; make similar, which refers to an entity that is the exact copy of an other entity. This name was also refering to a specific vase encountered during my first studies, the Portland Vase.

The Portland Vase is a Roman cameo glass vase, most probably dated to AD 1 and AD 25, which has a tremendous and rich history. It is a masterpiece of Roman cameo glass and has inspired many glass and porcelain makers since the beginning of the 18th century, notoriously Josiah Wedgwood.

My research aims to learn about glass and ceramic materiality, specificities and surfacing, in particular due to their striking visual resemblance at work in the Portland vase and its numerous copies, in order to uncover specific know-how, technics and production processes. I want to explore the contemporaneity of the used technics back then, by reviving and revisiting them, playing with ancient aesthetic and manual methods, notably with the help of new technologies such as robotic engraving, lasering and carving technics.

I would like to undergo this research on the long run and *Etruria* is the first chapter of it.





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PREVIOUS PAGE AND PAGE CAPTION:

1_ Original Portland vase, end of 1st century BC, British Museum, London / 2_ Copie of the Portland vase in Jasperware, around 1790, Josiah Wedgwood, Victoria and Albert Museum, London / 3_ Replica of the Portland vase in glass, 1876, John Northwood, Corning Museum of Glass, New York / 4_ Vases in opaque mat blue glass with 'enamel biscuit' application, 1825, Atelier of Friedrich Egemann, Polevsko - Blottendorf region, Kunstgewerbemuseum, Berlin / 5_ Vases in Jasperware, late 20th century, The Wedgwood Collection of Adele & Alan Barnett.



OUTLOOK:

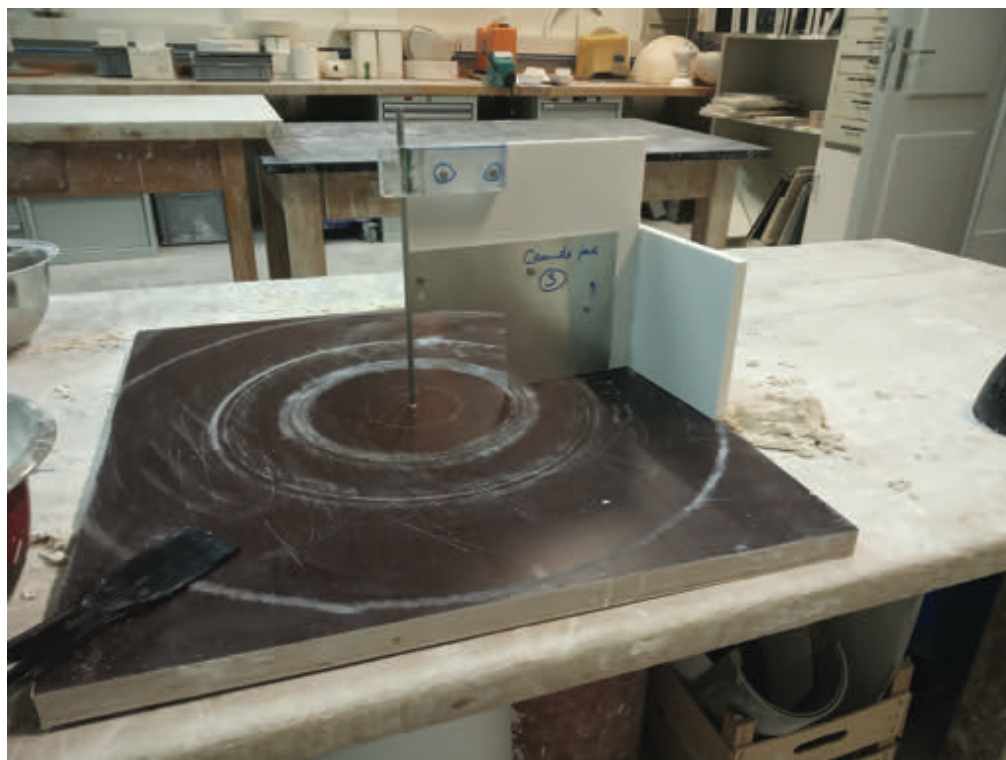
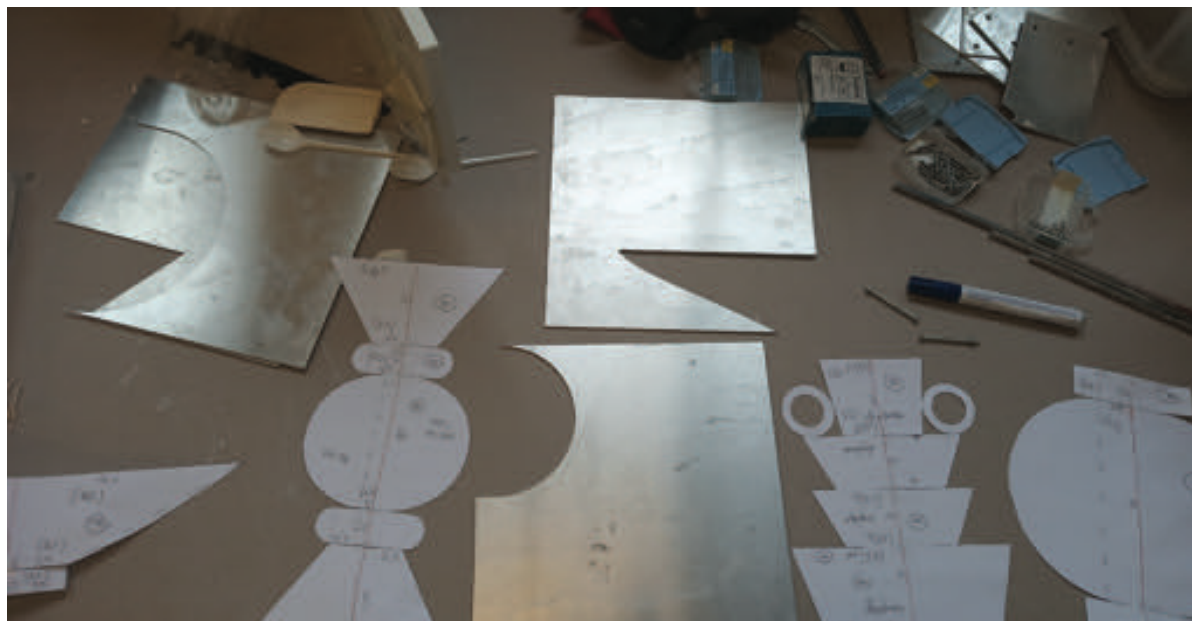
Working with the Mont-Blanc porcelain was a big challenge due to its viscosity and gravity properties. If I managed to set the right parameters to get the wall thickness regular and that the pieces holds together without falling in itself on demoulding, controlling the bubbles, the homogeneity of the cast thickness overall or the dripping marks wasn't possible in the short time.

Making the moulds by pouring liquid plaster have also proved very difficult on my own due to a too strong gravity pressure on the lower part of the mould shroud, that would eventually always leak without having 2 two other hands applying an opposing pressure while pouring the liquid above, and would results anyway in too thick mould walls in the end. I eventually ended up creating plastic stencils which I fixed on the profil of the shape while shaping the mould itself from bottom to top with liquid plaster applied first as a crust overall, later covered by plaster that has reached its solidification point. This process was meant to fit the shape as closely as possible without excess material that would make the mould too heavy to handle.

I had a great time creating the colours range of dyed porcelain with natural and synthetic pigments. An overdose of cobalt blue was prooving wonderful, giving a shimmering glow to the normaly mat porcelain. Working on the terracotta shade with iron oxide and other brown-like natural earth pigments that Isabelle Schnederle indicated me was also very interesting even though I am still looking for the perfect caramel-like brown colour.

Being confronted with all the 'wild' parameters of life and clay during this residency was in general a good learning process to let loose of certain expectations, appreciate the work done and the lessons learned and last but not least embrace the immediacy of the moment. Magdalena Gerber and Isabelle Schnederle have been very generous, supportive and understanding in this regard and I am very thankful for that. Aline Morvan and Christian Gonzenbach were also of good advise for the moulds making.

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