

Patty Wouters

Patty Wouters is a Flemish ceramicist who has chosen an investigation of archetypal visual forms, sculptural elements and murals to express her ideas. For the last decade her work has gravitated away from domestic ware to conceptually based pieces often produced in 'series'. The titles such as *Moving Circles*, *Swinging Bowls*, *Swinging Urn* refer to movement, action or interaction and reflect Wouters's response to events in her personal life as well as to society at large. She has travelled extensively east and west to Japan, Korea, India, Indonesia as well as America through the world of ceramics, both to study museum collections of ethnographic and archaeological ceramics and to participate in symposiums and workshops. She says of her work:

Ancient vessels radiate a universal spirit. It is this kind of spirit I want to express in my work. My pots carry signs and symbols and tell stories about existence, relationships and communication, about origin and evolution. My intention is to allude to events and things that happen to humans in their private lives or in a broader social context. After all everything seems to be in motion and somehow connected.

Wouters's high energy has enabled her to juggle successfully not only a career in ceramics with fulfilling her family commitments, but also to pioneer and run an arts centre called *Atelier Cirkel* in Brasschaat on the outskirts of Antwerp. Growing up as the ninth of ten children equipped her with a strong sense of drive and determination to make things happen – her enthusiasm and positivity is almost tangible. The family was artistic – her father conducted a choir and played the violin; her mother drew. Wouters remembers herself as a ten-year-old making constructions with sand and mud when the local motorway was being built. Later, after a year spent at art school in Antwerp, she took part in an exchange programme to Pennsylvania, America where



(Top right) Portrait of Patty Wouters.

Photograph by Jane Forrester.

(Right) *Floating in Blue*, ht: 8 cm (3 1/4 in.), dia: 40 cm (15 3/4 in.).

Photograph by Karin Deems.



NAKED CLAY

she was formally introduced to clay and attended pottery classes. She found herself captivated with clay as a material but upon returning to art school realised she would have to study graphic arts (there was no ceramics department). She learnt the art of ceramics through evening classes.

The climate of idealism in the 1970s gave her a strong sense of social commitment towards education and for several years after leaving college she taught in schools. Later, she did a social work degree and became involved in social cultural work. She saw ceramics as a bridge between art and craft:

(Opposite) *Swinging Vases*, ht: 35/45 cm (13 1/2/17 1/2 in.).

Photograph by Katrijn Daems.

(Below) Detail of wall panel *Hard - Park*;

100 x 100 cm (39 1/2 x 39 1/2 in.).

Photograph by Katrijn Daems.

When you make pottery it can serve as a piece of art but you can also use it. From this perspective ceramics is a more democratic art discipline – is it art? Is it craft? That's what attracted me. I found the art scene too exclusive and wanted to find an art form more accessible to people. It's a personal attitude but has consequences in life.

Later, in the late 1980s and early 1990s she sought a new direction in her work (which had been mainly domestic ware), and began attending international workshops led by ceramicists such as David Roberts, Takeshi Yanuda and Antonia Salmon. She was inspired by the pure forms of Roberts and the meditative qualities of Salmon's sculptural ceramics. Wouters realised she needed to make a choice between the hard labour of production pottery and the development of more individual pieces based on ideas. The photo of a pit-fired pot in a book by Kenneth Clark captivated her and she started experimenting with low

