

Iris Brendel

Biography: Born in Berlin
1933 to 1951 Buenos Aires, Argentina – teacher, languages
Since 1951 in Vienna
1959 Diploma at Academy for Applied Art (Prof. Obsieger)
Exhibitions: Vienna, Faenza, Cologne, New York, etc.

About my work:

I am a ceramics artist or ceramic pot artist. At one time I struggled to learn to use the potter's wheel at the Academy for Applied Art; and to date I have remained in this profession on the whole.

My heads and sculptures largely draw their energy from whatever is being turned on the potter's wheel that gives it shape. Lately, moreover, the EMPTY SPACE has also become important to me.

So I turn the majority of my basic shapes and then, making huge changes, put them together, what is technically known as "assembly". In addition I try to maintain the specific clay character for the "clay" material that can easily be made to look like papier-mâché, wood, stone or under circumstances like metal. I mainly fire the items at 1060 degrees (majolica baking), so not very hot. If I were to venture into the fascinating field of stoneware or porcelain, I would have to pay the increased power tariff. The low temperature is perhaps less precious than the higher temperature, but enables a greater range of colour in glazes. And as you can see, I often like it to be colourful.

Anyone who is not a ceramics artist often does not know: the colour of a clay in its natural state or that of a glaze often has nothing to do with how the things look after firing. Grey clay can become red, brownish white, whitish yellow.

I mostly use red-firing clays, smooth or fire clay. The latter has greater resistance and raw surfaces.

Each clay that dries or goes through the fire becomes smaller, "shrinks". Depending on the clay, this shrinking varies between a few percent and 20%. The latter is always surprising, since when working you have to allow for the huge loss in size. In the baking the shrinking is in fits and starts – just like the way children grow. There are always critical jumps in temperature. Moisture and air are the natural "Nemeses" of each firing, as was evident to me again recently, when the ears of my first Dr Freud, behind which it was obviously not yet quite dry, were a disaster when they went through the firing oven.

So every clay is different, and each glaze reacts beyond recognition and differently on each clay! A majolica clay collapses at temperatures at which a stoneware clay just feels right. To my knowledge there is not only one, and this is exactly what most people, who come into my workshop, want to have: they do not want a beautiful vase or a lovely wall plate, no, they want a "normal clay", or even better, a "completely normal clay". Yet I have not yet come across one like this, even less a "completely normal ceramics artist", since everyone that spends time with a material that is so difficult, so unreliable, so unyielding, so accident-prone and so unreasonable, cannot possibly be "completely normal". On this note, have a good time at the exhibition.

Iris Brendel Ceramics Workshop
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