

The body of the soul

Sculptural forms made of stoneware and porcelain dissolve, faces disappear, enamel colours fuse to a glowing rain; Myung-Joo Kim's (ceramic) universe defies the rational and invites us instead to drift away into the unfamiliar, into the mystery of being. By modelling the clay sensitively with her fingers and the palms of her hands, she captures that which is beyond our grasp, the human soul and its pain. In this, however, she constantly strives after truth by developing her own methods and allowing the compound and glaze to merge, both controlled and uncontrolled. We can all sense that there is a soul, but we cannot grasp what it is. How can one fathom something that is not actually perceptible, reveal something that is indescribable? Even though painting and sculpture has made repeated attempts, a preoccupation with the soul has rather been the domain of musicians and poets. Their art manages without outlines, without anything that can be identified or recognized, just like time. Moving much as in a dream, Myung-Joo Kim dares to venture forth into this field. To that which is formless she gives a material and often even baroque form, she captures the inner movement, the excitement that motivates us, the animal that lives within us, and nature, too, becomes perceptible when her trees begin to resemble human bodies. The soul, the animistic, and the animalistic can all be thought together in Asian cultures. The soul belongs to what is transcendent and mysterious. It is not the ceramicist's objective to paint or give shape to this inconceivable, mystical, and elusive something, but only to create a sense of its existence. Myung-Joo lends it a physical form for us to be able to see and feel it in its permanently interdependent relationship with the body. Mere suggestions of human figures emerge from the clay, and the colourful glaze blends on a vibrant white ground, vaguely reminiscent of moods, blood, tears... in any case, one can sense them. There is a nonpresence about these organic figures, which seem to have passed through pain and suffering, but without having lost their humanity. Even though the eyes almost disappear in the whorls of these small misshapen objects, one nevertheless gains the impression of something that is looking. A transformation begins to take place. A curve, a tilt are reminiscent of a back, a shoulder. At times it seems one can recognize numerous small heads in the glaze, heads which nevertheless remain elusive. The artist also creates small, fragile figures that wander about alone. As with Louise Bourgeois, who has depicted equally tortured bodies, no psychoanalysis takes place here either. Myung-Joo consciously distances herself from any expression of feelings. The portrayal of despair, fear, grief, abandonment, and loneliness lends these figures a great purity of intention. In the depiction of a head that is about to approach another head, to gently merge with it, lies profoundest humanity; one in which love, even in the failure of being, never wholly fades away.



Myung-Joo Kim was born in Korea in 1973. At the age of eighteen she begins to study ceramic sculpture at the Hong-ik University in Seoul. In addition to studying traditional techniques, she is encouraged to seek her own form of expression. To support herself she creates computer-based images, but for her own artwork she prefers to work with pencils. It is easier for her to go from a drawn to a three-dimensional form and it is closer to that which she feels, to her restlessness and her feelings. To this day, her sculptures are developed from drawings. In 2001, for personal reasons, she moves to Paris, where she spends several years creating poetical figures. With their animal bodies, human heads, and plantlike hair, these form an unusual synthesis of European culture and Asian animism. The time in Paris is an important stage on the way to a dream universe, in which she develops her own ideas. In 2018, after a residency grant in Shigaraki, Japan, she begins to study towards a Master of Arts degree at the École nationale supérieure des Arts visuels in Brussels. During this time, she develops her artistic expression further to finally become a truly great artist, one who has mastered her medium and methods to perfection and allows herself to be inspired by her own dreams. In 2013, she is honoured with the Prix Ariana (awarded by the Musée de l'Ariana) at the Parcours Céramique Carougeois and the museum subsequently acquires one of her sculptures. The artist once again lives and works in Korea, where she continues to refine her work. Without a doubt, Myung-Joo Kim's universe occupies a unique place in contemporary ceramics.

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