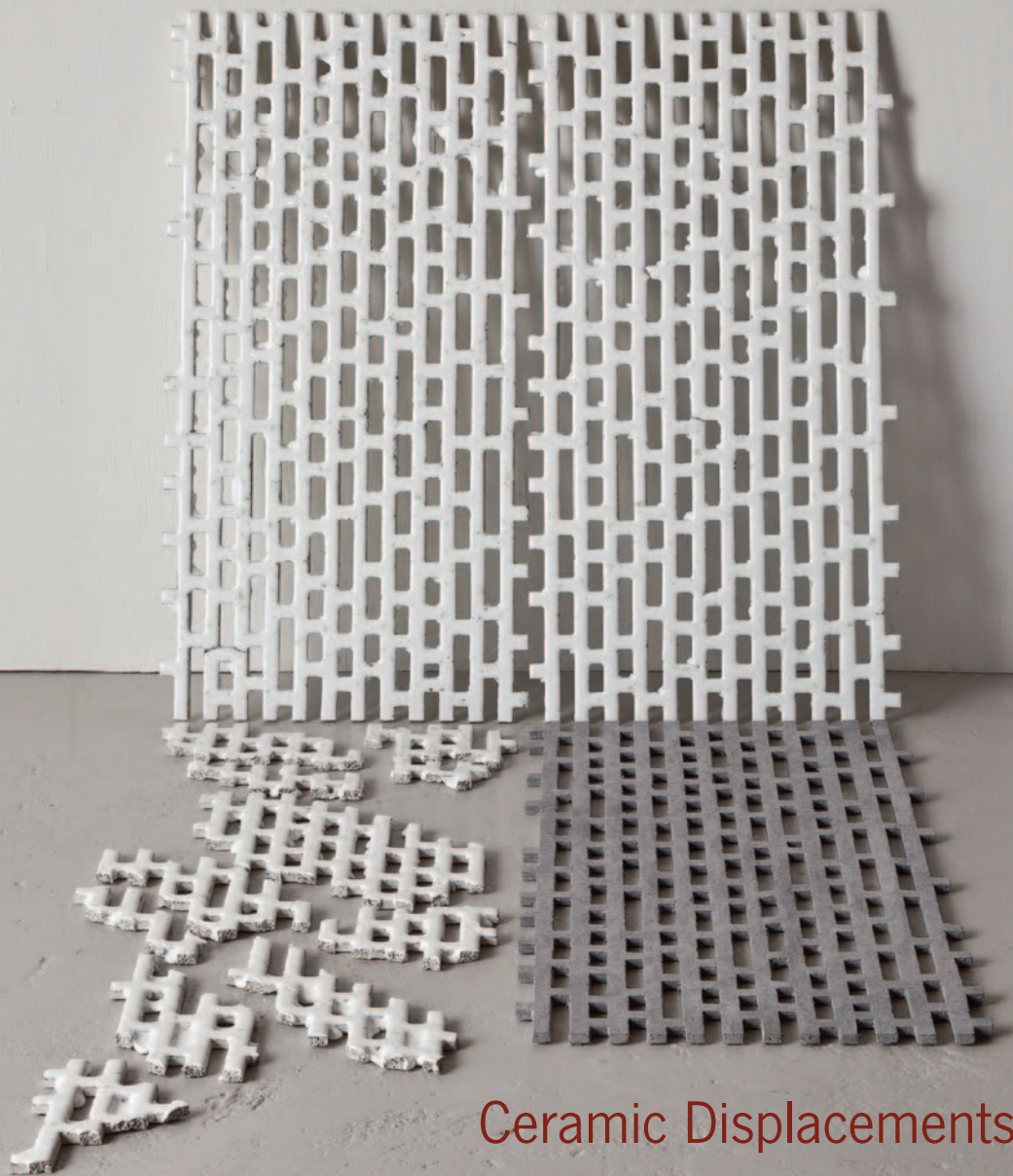


Anja Margrethe Bache



Ceramic Displacements

PONDEROUS, POWERFUL ELEMENTS IN CONCRETE – IRON lathes, perforated grates, UFO stepping stones that seemingly float above the ground, surfaces that alternate between glossy and matt and the elegant play of light and shadow that figure as a poetic, transforming element in the pieces . . .

In the Danish artist Anja Margrethe Bache's beautiful ceramic installations, contrasts take place on

Article by Pia Wirnfeldt

several levels. The impression is at once monumental and poetic, structured and sensual, architectonic and abstract, physical and metaphysical. Her point of departure is the site-specific in that the placement of the pieces, with their accompanying rhythms and progressions, comment the architectonic framework in which they are presented. Contrary to custom she works in concrete, a material that, in an artistic ceramics context



Facing page: Resting Hole Displacement 2.

Above: Round Grouping with Directional Specifications 3.

Below: Installed Facing Forward and to the Side 1.

has not enjoyed much attention until now. Through research and countless experiments with firing, she investigates which qualities (materiality, colour and texture) reveal themselves when one of the worlds' most used construction materials, concrete, is processed with ceramics techniques such as glazing.

In Bache's works of art, research and art, insights and forms of expression, are brilliantly brought together. This unorthodox approach to ceramic material is directly connected to her interdisciplinary background. She has degrees in Fine Arts from The Royal Danish Art Academy in the Walls and Space department and a Phd in architecture from Aarhus School of Architecture. Her latest degree is in civil engineering from the Technical University of Denmark. One's immediate experience of these works with their autonomous sense of aesthetics and beauty is that of a particularly distinctive artistic statement. Yet according to the artist herself they are to be regarded as a link in a larger material and technical investigation. On many levels, her method can thus be compared with those of the Renaissance masters who, with their basis in sound scientific methodology, created sublime works of art.

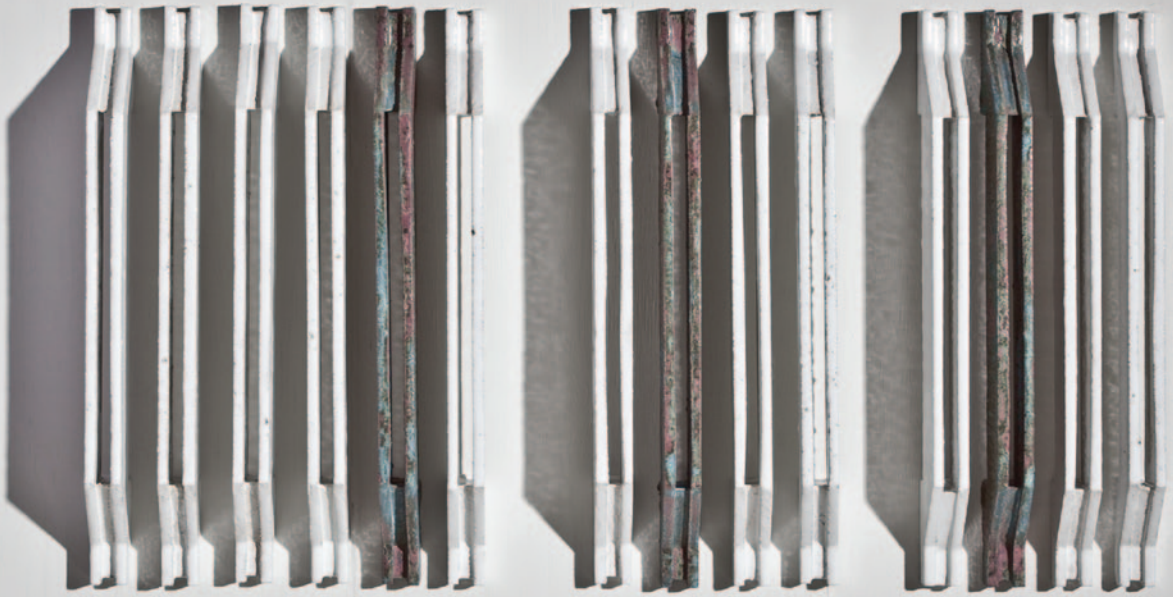
DISPLACEMENTS: AN EXHIBITION AT THE MUSEUM OF INTERNATIONAL CERAMIC ART IN DENMARK

In the autumn of 2011 The Museum of International Ceramic Art in Denmark asked Bache and the Danish ceramist Lene Roehrig Kjær to participate in an exhibition under the title *Ceramic Displacements*. Though their approaches to their work with ceramic

materials are quite different, the two artists share a common interest in searching and expanding new ceramics spaces as well as a wish for expressing themselves artistically with tile and concrete, materials traditionally used in the building trade.

The meeting between the two was at once contemporary, challenging and productive. With thorough measurements and analysis of the museums' architecture as their starting point they created a series of physical 'displacements' in the form of novel ceramics spaces or 'rooms' and installations. These 'rooms' insightfully reflected the museums' elegant, New Historic manor from 1857, including the geometric layout of the museums inventory, floor plan and its progression of rooms. Innovative tensions, energies, relationships and approaches to experiencing the architecture of the museum came out of these spatial displacements. In other words the exhibition made a strong case for presenting what occurs when an existing framework is displaced; that not only the physical but also the social and intellectual conditions are transformed. Seen in the light of The International Museum of Ceramic Arts' current expansion plans which include the challenges of creating a dialogue between the old and new architecture of the building, these insights have naturally made an exciting contribution.





Above: *Suspended Tact 2.*

Below: *Stacking Requires Order 3.*

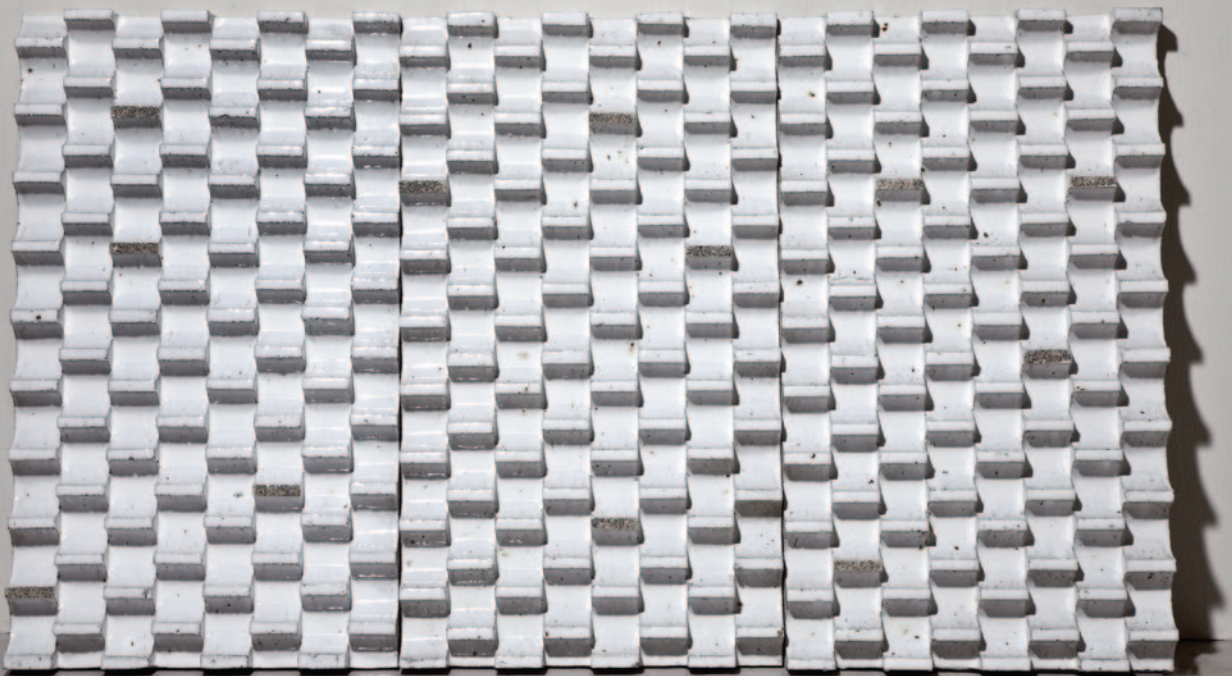
THE POTENTIAL OF DISPLACEMENTS

The title *Displacements*, however, is not only a reference to the ceramic installations in the exhibition but simultaneously points to a central element of Baches artistic project. But what is it that defines and characterises a displacement and wherein does its potential lie?

To move an object or focus from one point to another creates a displacement. Displacements have, as such, roots in what is and simultaneously opens up for the possible. A displacement is a dynamic process bringing on new conditions and experiences

in the physical and perceptual realms. In displacements lies the potential for sharpening one's focus and reaching new insights.

"Nothing is true once and for all, everything is rendered mobile." This formulated by the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze in the 1980s as a call to change out the monocular frame of reference with a dynamic one. Deleuze did not only describe the terms of realisation, but also those of art in that he perceived displacements and transformations as an all-pervading condition – one which art is particularly good at conveying. In this sense, Deleuze ties art and chaos together positively. Chaos is seen here



as an event in the form or the pictorial space that destroys an established system, a predictable shape, meaning, *cliché* or identity. In relation to art, chaos is, in other words, perceived in a positive light and understood as an element of disruption that makes it possible for art to express transformation as a ubiquitous condition of life.

Referring to art Deleuze singles out, amongst others, Francis Bacon as a painter that consciously let chaos loose in his works. Thus Deleuze adopts from Bacon the concept of the 'Diagram' which describes the moment in the process of painting where destruction or disruption begins to take place. This disruption could be in the form of a random brush stroke, an erasure or an accidental mark. In other words, it may be the moment where the artist welcomes chaos and opens oneself and the work up to the greatest danger. For, paradoxically, within chaos Deleuze sees liberation; that it is the intrusion of chaos as such that enables the artist to create a pure expression of sensation.

FROM DISPLACEMENT TOWARDS MEANING

The positive chaos theory of Deleuze and his idea of the 'Diagram' can be used in more ways than one as a frame of reference for experiencing the art of Bache. Her works are often built up in modules of glazed concrete that are placed after exact systems of measurement. Through repetition these systemised exacting placements create an order of sorts while at the same time a sudden displacement of one module or a random glob of thick glaze often defines its form. An exciting dialogue between predictability and randomness and between logic and intuition, order and chaos ensues from these.

Displacement and its potential for phenomenological and perceptual realisations is a conscious priority for Bache who not only works on technical innovations and masters the aesthetics but also has something on her mind. As she expresses it, displacements are most apparent within an existing system. Her works communicate systems, patterns and rhythms. Yet by including a sudden staggering or thick random droppings of glaze simultaneously she introduces a slice of chaos. It is within these challenges to our expectations that displacement occurs and opens us up to new possibilities and sensations.

So it seems that a break with norms and expectations is in many ways the artistic motivation behind Bache's works. She almost always works within an existing framework, be it a museum's architectural space, lines, rhythms or forms and through the strength of her ceramic installations, physical



Above: *Stacking Requires Order 1.*
Below: *Anja Margrethe Bache.*

displacements are revealed from surprisingly new angles. She continues persistently in researching the ceramic adaption of concrete and this she does in order to break up our expectations of concrete as an inferior material and open our eyes to its distinctive materiality and textural beauty.

In short, displacements are a central method of Bache's artistic project. Just as Deleuze uses the term 'Diagram' to tie art and chaos together, Anja Margrethe Bache uses these displacements as an important catalyst for new insights. But first and foremost these ceramic installations give the spontaneous viewer a sensual, down to earth experience of beauty that can best be described as 'concrete poetry'.



Pia Wirnfeldt is the Museum Curator at The Museum of International Ceramic Art in Denmark. All photos by Ole Akhøj (www.oleakhoej.dk). Translation by Linda Weiss Drescher.