

PRESS RELEASE

Of Clay and Silk



Marie-Laure Guerrier and In-Sook Son

18 September 2019 – 19 January 2020

This year, as the Parcours Céramique Carougeois celebrates its 30th anniversary, our museum, as a faithful partner of the event, has taken the decision to refresh its approach by establishing an aesthetic and technical dialogue between contemporary ceramics from the Far East, or inspired by Asia, and other materials and traditional arts. With the goal of bringing attention to outstanding pieces, this venture, which has resulted in the encounter of two artists, represents the inauguration at the Baur Foundation of a regular programme to highlight contemporary artistic practices with shared characteristics that unequivocally complement the history and spirit of the collections. It is well known that Alfred Baur, the founder of the museum, was just as partial to contemporary pieces as ancient ones provided that they met his unconditional requirement of artisanal excellence.

Exhibition curator: Laure Schwartz-Arenales, with the assistance of Audrey Jouany Deroire

Guest curator: Aurélie Samuel, Collections Director at the Musée Yves Saint-Laurent, Paris

Exhibition design, staging: Nicole Gérard, with Corinne Racaud

Two artists: an encounter

Marie-Laure Guerrier, a French ceramicist, and In-Sook Son, a Korean embroiderer, are the two contemporary creators that the Baur Foundation has chosen to bring together for a period of several months. The two artists did not know one another and nothing existed to suggest that this meeting, in which interest and fascination immediately prevail, might otherwise have occurred. Sharing “cultural” and chromatic affinities, the two artists also have in common a similar and rare manner in which they transfer materials – ceramic, textile and paint – between practices, as well as the desire to explore all the possibilities offered by their respective crafts. Vibrant, dynamic and enchanting, like silk rippling with the fluidity of air, the coverings of certain ceramic pieces thrown by the French artist Marie-Laure Guerrier are striking for their textile-like appearance: the elegant forms of cups and vases come to life in a succession of facets, pleats and indentations. Infused in these geographic metamorphoses is the poetry of exquisite landscapes, composed of thread, paint and lace together, which, from a technical standpoint, seem to push the boundaries of ceramic’s potential for expression.

To the sleek mellowness of the celadons, gleaming red and white glazes and moving “crystallised” stoneware of the ceramicist, the artistic universe of In-Sook Son responds majestically. Working with the traditional materials and colours of Korea, she creates “paintings of silk” of unsettling virtuosity. In order to continue reinventing this centuries-old craft, she turned down the prestigious title of “Living National Treasure”, allowing her to persist in bringing deep renewal to the profession whose path, beaten by her ancestors, she has followed since childhood. By diversifying the colours and thicknesses of the thread, and revisiting the technique and use of embroidery stitches, such is the subtlety of her rendering of depth that she succeeds in blurring the boundaries between the arts. Screens made from thread, marquetry composed of embroidery, *trompe-l’œil pojagi*, the works chosen by the Baur Foundation, of which many will be leaving Korea for the first time, transcend all our references and delight the eye. Advanced techniques, an abundance of creativity acquired through perseverance, and a constant spiritual attention paid to the beauty and significance of their work, these are the characteristics that unite, despite their very different contexts, these two great women artists.

Works and voices in counterpoint

Echoing the presentation of our permanent exhibition, the arrangement of the pieces in all four rooms strives to associate and highlight the dynamism of the works of the two artists, contingent on their volumes and dominant colours. The challenges of this exhibition, as complex as they are stimulating, are to avoid any form of forced or unfounded affinity, to bring out and harmonise two independent trajectories and deeply individual voices rooted in specific cultures, and to pay equal tribute to both artists.

Marie-Laure Guerrier
Artist, ceramicist

Robed in light

“In my work, there is form and there is glaze. Since the start, my study of glaze has been personal. It has been a ceaseless journey throughout the thirty-five years I have been working. I sit down at the table with technical sheets, a calculator, an accurate scale and cups filled with different powdered minerals, water and test shards on which I hope to create a new form of light with which to dress my pieces. I progressively learned that it is the material that begets the form and that the decision to use either stoneware or porcelain will lead to different artistic universes and that the soul of the resulting pieces will differ. For me, the choice of porcelain leads to great formal simplicity, though this in no way curbs their subtlety of expression. The eye identifies the lines that determine and limit the space of the piece. It could be said that the space is what exists outside the work and that the interior is the void, that this living wall of clay is like a frontier that contains the one and defines the other. Whether the pieces made are for practical use or purely for appreciation, they have a sense and make us less alone. Whether with or without glaze, porcelain takes us towards the light of the material. The glaze absorbs or reflects light, either giving prominence to or allaying a piece’s lines and ribbing.

Stoneware, in contrast, is all about force and power. It appeals to our more primitive nature, and this comes out in the work. It is not a question of form as that might be very delicate, it is the material itself that expresses itself and solicits a more archaic emotion in us – at least, that’s the impression I get”.

Fabrics and paintings of porcelain

“Of course, I have occasionally produced glazed panels since I became a potter, but they were never anything more than a pretext to work on glaze. What I produce now is completely different. I want to take the resistance and translucency of porcelain to their limit. These plaques are hardly a millimetre in thickness and demonstrate not only the capacity but also the personality of this extraordinary material. Its ambiguity, too, as you might see it instead as a form of textile, or paper on which its textures are written, knowing that I refuse to use paper porcelain and that I have perfected a technique in which the percentage of failures is greater than that of successes! These pieces exude a palpable – even sonorous – delicacy that opens up an immense graphical and pictorial sphere”.

Obedience to the material

“In any kind of art, there is a sort of obedience to the material involved. As one’s understanding of the material grows, a path becomes apparent. Of course, in ceramics, in throwing in particular, overall the actions and technique used by each artist seem the same. Because essentially, when all other considerations are ignored, it all boils down to variations on a cylinder. You can spend your whole life making variations on a cylinder! It is both extravagant and unfathomable. It is probably some kind of distilled form of life, like that of monks, who murmur and chew on the same psalms and mantras day and night, or of those women whom I have met in certain factories, who spend their lives doing nothing but painting decorative gold netting on dishes and plates with impeccable brushwork. They showed me their handiwork with an evident sense of pride and satisfaction.

As soon as the subjects of discussion are throwing and glazing, thoughts turn to the great models created in China, Korea and Japan between the eighth and thirteenth centuries. My belief is that we just have to accept these models as influences and use them as springboards, or as points of support to which we can return should we lose our way . . . As similar as they may seem, different ceramic bodies are unable to be alike, unable to express the same sensitivity because of the obedience to the material I referred to above, which ushers each potter along its own path. The relationship between an artist and a material is one of reciprocity. Creative work is of course the outcome of a period, a society and an aesthetic, amongst other things – influences that are hard to shake off. But an artist can refuse to be a slave to them or to allow himself or herself to be

manipulated by them. That's what I try to do. And, for some short while now, I have allowed myself to embrace different approaches".

In Sook Son
Artist, embroiderer

Reaching for the sun

"I was born in a village by the sea into a renowned family of embroiderers who instilled this passion in me. I loved my mother very much and it was while watching her embroider that the idea came to me to give this art closely linked with women's finery a breath of fresh air. At the age of ten, I was fascinated by the beauty I saw materialise at her fingertips. She used to say to me: 'In the twenty-first century, there will be a sort of culture war and you will have to fight to safeguard this heritage'. I decided to follow her advice while also attempting to anticipate her hopes.

My sources of inspiration are permeated with day-to-day life. This environment is the setting for most of my thoughts. I am accustomed to trying to divide up the sun's rays from dawn until dusk, and I believe that this perspective has influenced me in my quest for a range of colours that transcends chromatic standardisation. I have always been careful with regard to everything that goes on around me, attempting to embrace and experience everything in my field of vision. Using the medium of *silgrim*, 'painting with thread', I would like to extol my artistic universe and pay tribute to my mother".

Silgrim, the art of painting with a needle

"To begin with, I worked on the traditional motifs of Korean embroidery and on paintings classified as 'national treasures'. Most of my early works were of paintings by artists at the official national academy of Hwawon painters. For example, I made an embroidery version of the famous painting *Miindo* (Beauty) by the artist Sin Yun-bok (1758–post 1813), called *Hyewon*. I always try to give more depth to the original painting by recreating the delicacy of the movement of the body through subtle amalgams of coloured thread, and I use real hair in order to bring out the depth of the portrait. I then created pieces based on photographs of traditional Korean themes like the four seasons, for which I also took inspiration from the colourful decoration of wooden buildings (*dancheong*),

especially temples, using thread instead of paint.

To achieve greater power of expression, I invented a new technique based on the fusion of different traditional techniques used in Korean embroidery and a more aesthetic approach. This allowed me to broaden the possibilities offered by this craft by developing a new model founded on the technique of 'painting with thread' (*silgrim*). The abstract works that I produced are like paintings on silk, the outcomes of research that goes beyond the simple choice of form, thread and colour. This creative process led me to wonder about the meaning of art and to understand that *silgrim* works could be considered as artworks in their own right, and that they are thus elevated above the status of craftsmanship".

"Embroidery inlays"

"For several years I have worked on a very demanding challenge with a number of people of different professional background. Our goal is to produce a piece of furniture that is entirely embroidered. Together we work with the shared goal of giving items of furniture a new and attractive look and infusing them with a soul. Working on them, we experience the presence of those people who wished to create a unique object, something that generates strong emotion. Some of the artisans with whom I work on the composition and decoration of this furniture have been awarded the title of Living National Treasures, but I have refused it as I am afraid I shall feel constrained by the weight of tradition. 'National treasures' are in fact 'guardians of tradition', whereas I strive to go beyond and free myself from this constriction".

USEFUL INFORMATION

De terre et de soie ***Marie-Laure Guerrier et In-Sook Son***

Dates	18 September 2019 – 19 January 2020
Address	Fondation Baur, Musée des Arts d'Extrême-Orient Rue Munier-Romilly 8 1206 Geneva – Switzerland Tel.: +41 22 704 32 82 Website: www.fondation-baur.ch Email: musee@fondationbaur.ch
Opening times	Open from Tuesday to Sunday from 2pm to 6pm (closed Monday), until 8pm when guided visits are held (see below)
Tickets	Full: CHF 15.- Unemployed, handicapped and students: CHF 10.-
Press contact	Baur Foundation, Museum of Far Eastern Arts Audrey Jouany Deroire Tel: +41 22 704 32 82 Email: musee@fondationbaur.ch
Catalogue	<i>De terre et de soie, Of clay and silk, Marie-Laure Guerrier – In-Sook Son</i> , ed. by L. Schwartz-Arenales, Baur Foundation, Cinq Continents, Geneva, Milan, 2019.
Cultural mediation	Anne-Sophie Kreis, mediation@fondationbaur.ch
Public guided visits:	Wednesdays, 6.30pm: 2 nd and 16 October 2019, 6 and 20 November 2019 4 December 2019 15 January 2020
Private guided visits:	Reservation required, musee@fondationbaur.ch