

10 December 2020

Monika Grabuschnigg

<https://kubaparis.com/violent-delights/>



The extreme contemporary presence of Monika Grabuschnigg's works derives mostly from the jarring juxtaposition of clay – an ancient material closely tied to notions of craftsmanship – and the aesthetics of a digital, virtual space. She pours or shapes the clay with bare hands, a spatula, or ordinary tools and then moulds it in shape in a complex blend of firing and glazing processes.

Grabuschnigg is not alone in her enthusiasm for this age-old material. Like a number of her contemporaries, she is drawn to it not least because of its relatively unencumbered position in art history: fewer past practitioners means fewer expectations, more freedom to follow your own path. As she has previously said, clay is unique in "its directness, the ecological aspect, and the challenge in handling it".

And yet her – in some cases huge, multi-part – ceramic objects have virtually nothing in common with utility ceramics; they rarely work as small pieces or serve as vessels. If anything, they are best understood figuratively: as both a picture support and surface endowed with its own, very painterly characteristics.

Grabuschnigg's exhibition in Lustenau features a reinstallation of "In Delirium I Wear My Body", a multi-part work originally conceived for the 45 cmb Studioraum at Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden: hanging in the smaller exhibition space is a trio of freely-suspended ceramic reliefs mounted on fine metal grids and bathed in surreal blue. Titled "Computing in between hollow clouds", "Tantalum melt, sourcing for I" and "Spellbound by uncertain algorithms" (all 2019), the three ceramic-wire bodies are not only optically situated between alchemical, mathematical and psychological constructions of reality: like abstract, liquefied, then coagulated forms, they float in the technoid ambience of a windowless exhibition space. Fleshy pink tones collide with cold blue, flow into each other like paints on canvas, merge in a three-dimensional, physically enterable image without ever leaving the surface.

Grabuschnigg's interest in the effects of the digital and virtual on the physical body and our self-perception is not the only thing at work here; with a high degree of formal autonomy, she also delves into contemporary forms of closeness and intimacy – a subject that is as universal as it is deeply personal, and therefore all the more touching.