

NEW CERAMICS

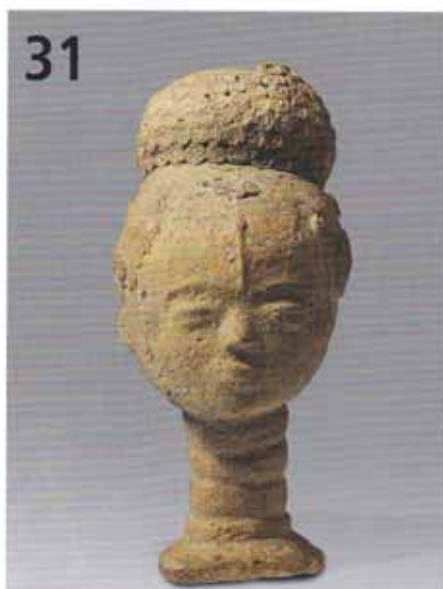
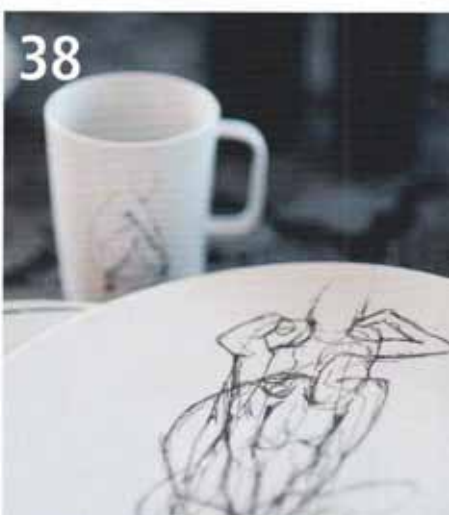
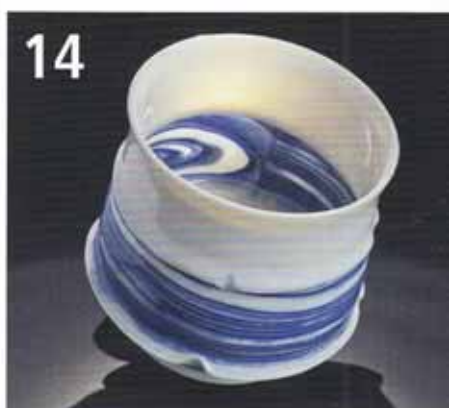
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Cover:
Yoshitomo Nara
Miss Forest, 2010
p. 8ff
photo - Yoshitomo Nara

TINEKE VAN GILS

No Limits on the Wheel

BY
YNA VAN DER MEULEN

When your hands know exactly what to do ... when porcelain immediately seems to sense that it must become a vase ... then the wheel is a stage for the dance between you and the clay. What remains is the moment, the wonder, the joy.



FREEDOM

It is a pure delight to watch Tineke van Gils when she is working on the potter's wheel. Whether it is on a big stage during ceramics seminars she organises in the Netherlands, or in the intimacy of her spacious and bright studio, she throws pots with a natural ease and a radiating calmness. The results look equally natural: porcelain which stayed true to its origins, solidified in its dance on the wheel, creamy white bowls, teapots and vases, each movement still visible, each touch cherished forever.

"When I worked on the wheel for the first time, I knew – this is it! I have always been creative making things, but my hands are made for the potter's wheel. This is my talent, I only needed to discover it. My skills are constantly developing because I want to reveal all the clay's secrets on the wheel. Some may consider that clay on the wheel is limited to the shape of a container, but real masters show what they are worth while working with limitations. The wheel may have its limits, but on the wheel I am completely free."

STRENGTH

Almost thirty years ago, she worked on a big order that taught her a lot on the essence of making pots. During two long weekends, she threw a thousand vases of two kilos each. "After the first two hundred vases I thought I knew them totally. After four hundred I understood that I knew them far less than I thought. It was only after six hundred that I really got the vase. I knew it through and through; we were a perfect match. From that moment I could throw this vase effortlessly, blindfolded and behind my back. That is the moment that real enjoyment, the dance with clay, begins."

And so, for years, Tineke van Gils threw plates, bowls, teapots and vases, constantly

"But the wheel is my passion. Once my hands got acquainted with this porcelain I felt like coming home. To meet the challenge, I had to go through my own learning process."

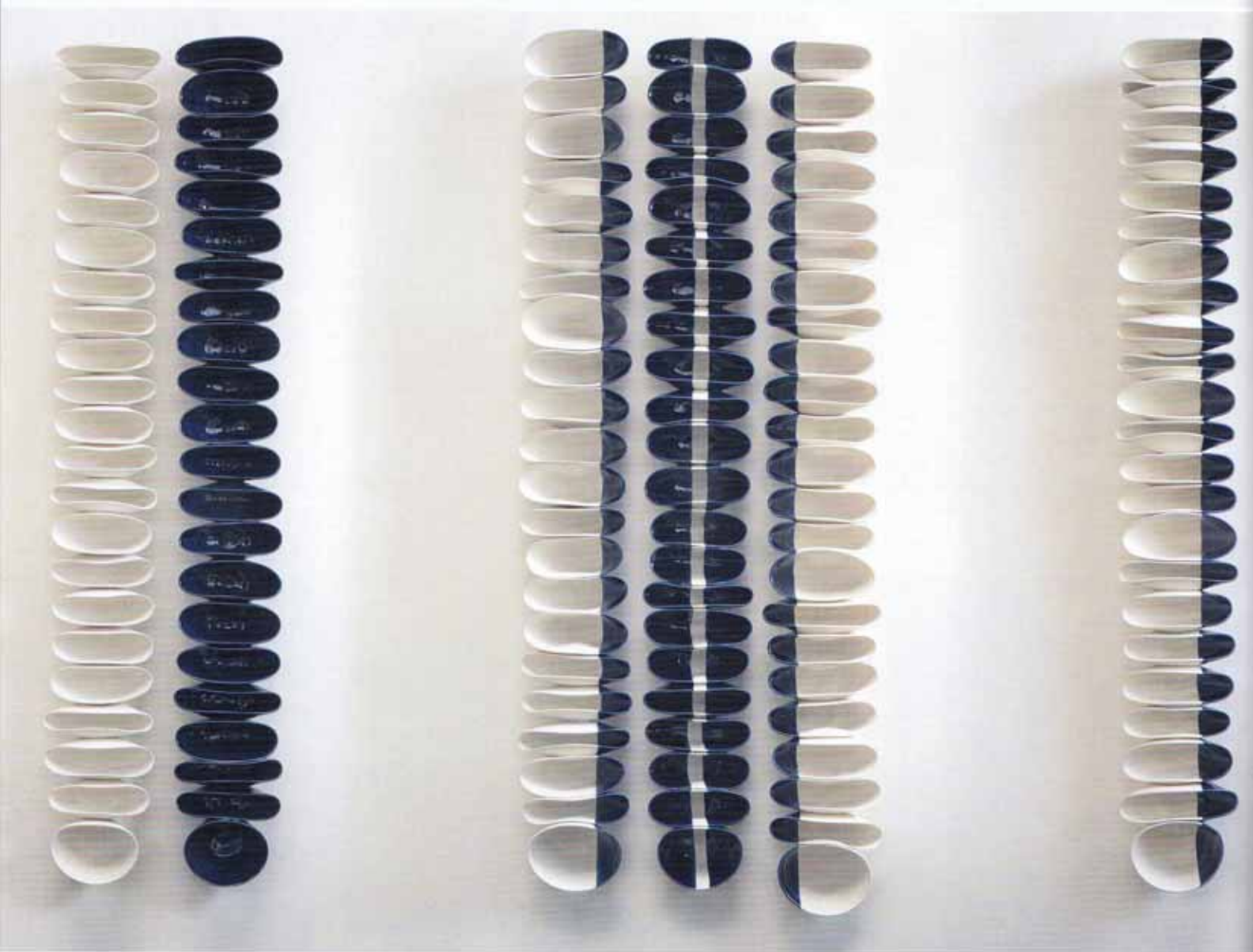
perfecting her technique, her hands becoming more and more skilled. Gradually, she reduced the number of steps in the process on the wheel until only the essence remained. A simplicity which is clearly shown in her work, lively shapes, the traces of every touch still visible. Then, one day, a question arose: "Is this it? Do I create tableware because I

Ebb and flood, marbled porcelain, h 28 cm, 2017 *photo Kees Hageman*



choose to do so or because I am not able to make anything else?" So, she started to experiment with conical, non-functional forms spinning on a point which later developed into spinning tops, heads, female torsos and more. The whole process of shaping and assembling took place on the wheel. All this resonated in her functional ware that too became more organic in shape. She never stopped experimenting: "But no matter what I do, even when

Waves, porcelain installation,
wall object, I 110 cm, 2018
photo Tineke van Gils



I use thinly rolled slabs of clay, it happens on the wheel, here is where my strength lies."

SHADOWS

While working as an artist-in-residence in China, the Chinese organiser offered her a solo exhibition in Shanghai for which she had to create one hundred different teapots in her unique style. For five weeks in 2010 in the porcelain city of Dehua she did nothing but make teapots from the local Dehua porcelain, the real blanc de Chine, the grande dame of all porcelain clays. It is well known that this rather non-plastic clay is almost impossible to work with on the wheel. That is why objects are primarily cast in Dehua. "But the wheel is my passion. Once my hands got acquainted with this porcelain I felt like coming home. To meet the challenge, I had to go through my own learning process. In the first few days I made eight teapot bellies early in the morning and tried to finish them bit by bit during the rest of the day. This practice turned into long days of repairing. I felt like an acrobat who is running around to keep eight plates in the air. I understood that this porcelain, which dries

extremely fast, would not change, so I had to change instead. I started to do it one teapot at a time, like climbing a mountain step by step. The fifteen to twenty minutes in which this porcelain was workable suddenly turned out to be enough to create the entire teapot without a problem."

Tineke throws pots at a fast pace, direct and as thin as possible. "Trimming is correcting, something I try to avoid because it erases the signature, the spontaneous traces of

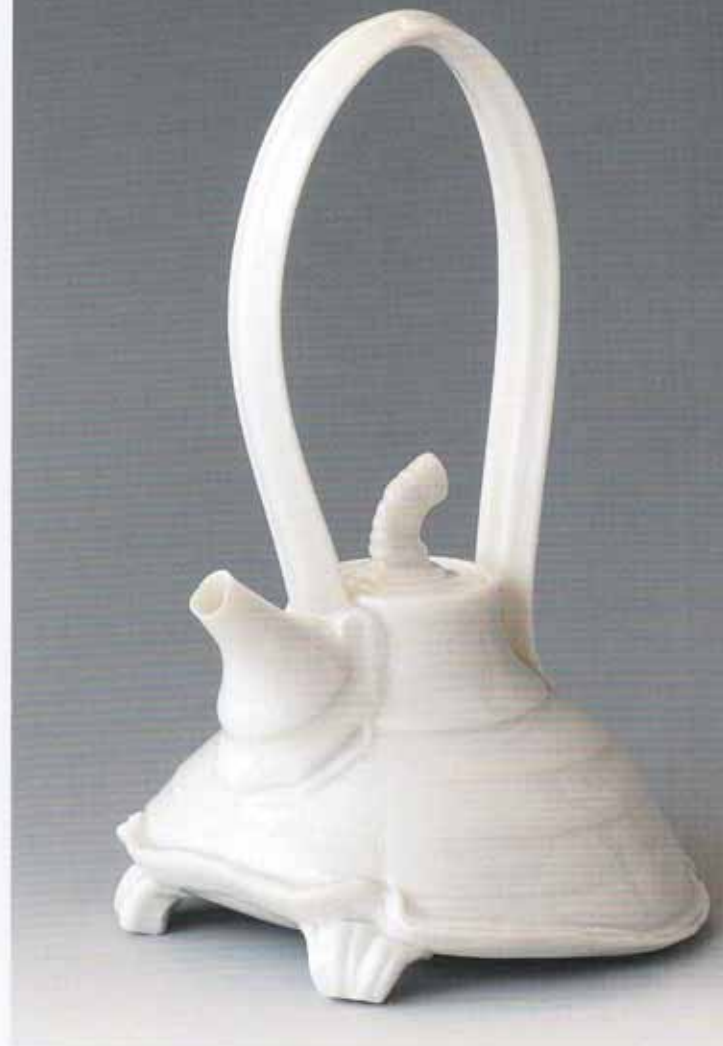
the first touch of the clay." It was in Dehua that she grasped how important those traces really are. She found parallels with Jan Schoonhoven's work: "I was creating black and white. Working with pure white is playing with light, but light is only striking when there is shadow next to it. Traces and wrinkles emphasise the light. Through the movement of my fingers and my tools I was guiding the shadows." This play of light and shadow has become characteristic of her work.

JOY

At the end of the nineties, during a period of grave illness, Tineke asked herself what she would most like to make realising the limitations of time. Her thoughts turned to things which may seem meaningless from a daily perspective but become meaningful when given undivided attention, like weeding your garden, for example, when you know it will all grow back again. For the joy of throwing on the wheel she made hundreds of little bowls with undivided attention, bowls never to be used. She chose to work with porcelain - in her opinion the most beautiful material - of which she had kept a quarter of a ton in storage for the moment she would be ready for it. Not to interrupt the throwing process she did not place the wet bowls on shelves but instead dropped them on the floor where they piled up around her feet. "For me they were signposts, like the piles of stones you find in the mountains, left behind by hikers." Recently she started this again, challenged by new ideas about ranking. "It is my meditation to work with clay. For me it is all about mastering the material while remaining playful as a child."

YNA VAN DER MEULEN

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Tango, Teapot, Dehua ware, h 21 cm, 2013 photo Tineke van Gils

Tineke van Gils, born in 1953, started a studio in Amsterdam in 1984 where she worked as a production potter making plates and bowls for over fifty restaurants simultaneously and thousands of half-finished pots for fellow artists. She has no formal training but is self taught. In 1994 she married a farmer and moved to his dairy farm near to Delft. There she began to experiment on the potter's wheel, no longer restricting herself to functional forms only, although the teapot remained favourite. Works are exhibited throughout the Netherlands and abroad, including Japan, China, Berlin and recently at the Cerbera Gallery in Kansas City. She got invitations to exhibit and to demonstrate teapots in Shanghai in 2009 and to create a hundred unique teapots in Dehua 2010 for a solo exhibition in Dehua and Shanghai. In 2011 the city of Delft invited her as artist in residence to create blue-and-white porcelain in Jingdezhen. Works were nominated or awarded in Jingdezhen 2011, Croatia 2012, The Netherlands 2015, Italy 2017 and France 2017. Among many articles, that in *Ceramics Science & Art*, Hunan China 2011 deserves a special mention. She gives classes and organises seminars and exhibitions.

STATEMENTS

- It is all about mastering the material while remaining playful as a child
- Light is only striking when there is shadow next to it

TINEKE VAN GILS

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