

**Artists:**

**Arina Ailincai** (Romunija / Romania), **Ivan Albreht** (Srbija, ZDA / Serbia, USA), **Leah Anderson** (Švica, ZDA / Switzerland, USA), **Claudia Biehne** (Nemčija / Germany), **Gratia Brown** (ZDA / USA), **Patrick Crulis** (Francija / France), **Dragica Čadež** (Slovenija / Slovenia), **Matthew Dercole** (ZDA / USA), **Rhiannon Ewing-James** (Irska, Velika Britanija / Ireland, Great Britain), **Lea Georg** (Švica / Switzerland), **Tatjana Gomboc Jerman** (Slovenija / Slovenia), **Martin Harman** (Velika Britanija / Great Britain), **Jon Hatfull** (Velika Britanija, Slovenija / Great Britain, Slovenia), **Alejandra Jones** (Argentina / Argentina), **Barbara Jurkovšek** (Slovenija / Slovenia), **Satoshi Kino** (Japonska / Japan), **Ines Kovačič** (Slovenija / Slovenia), **Barbara Kuijken** (ZDA, Belgija / USA, Belgium), **Wing Kwan Tam** (Hongkong, Kitajska / Hong Kong, China), **Kim Logue** (Nova Zelandija / New Zealand), **Weronika Lucićska** (Poljska / Poland), **Chi Man Chan** (Južna Koreja, Kitajska / South Korea, China), **Lee Middleman** (ZDA / USA), **M. Dogan Özgüdogdu** (Turčija / Turkey), Daniela Polz (Nemčija / Germany), **Karin Putsch-Grassi** (Nemčija, Italija / Germany, Italy), **Liza Riddle** (ZDA / USA), **Nataša Sedej** (Slovenija / Slovenia), **Debra Sloan** (Kanada / Canada), **Jessica Smith** (ZDA / USA), **Vera Stanković** (Slovenija / Slovenia), **Thomas Stollar** (ZDA, Velika Britanija / USA, Great Britain), **Yi-Li Yeh** (Tajvan / Taiwan), **Sita Wong** (Hongkong, Kitajska / Hong Kong, China), **Dani Žbontar** (Slovenija / Slovenia), **Michał Żesławski** (Poljska / Poland)

**Exhibition contributors:**

Contemporary Ceramic Art from the National Museum of Slovenia

Loft Gallery  
28 June 2024 – 28 February 2025

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# Contemporary Ceramic Art

from the National Museum of Slovenia

26. 6. 2024 – 28. 2. 2025



The new exhibition venue of the Škofja Loka Museum presents a selection of thirty-six artworks from the collection of the *International Ceramics Triennial UNICUM*, which has been organised by the National Museum of Slovenia since 2015. *UNICUM* is Slovenia's central exhibition of contemporary ceramic art, featuring renowned artists, curators and other experts in the field of contemporary art from all over the world. This is the first time the exhibited artworks are on view to the public since the *UNICUM* triennial exhibitions. Many of them have received awards and distinctions awarded by the *UNICUM* triennial's international juries. The exhibition showcases contemporary production in the field of ceramic art in Slovenia and internationally. It also aims to draw attention to the Škofja Loka Museum's historical and archaeological permanent collections, which contain numerous ceramic objects, including Škofja Loka's famous painted burgher ceramics dating back to the 16th and the first half of the 17th centuries. A tour of the museum collections and the exhibition of contemporary ceramic art provides visitors with an insight into the close connection between man and ceramics, which goes back to prehistoric times.

The works exhibited in the Loft Gallery and two artworks-art interventions on view as part of the Škofja Loka Museum's art history collection – a work by **Weronika Lucińska** at the museum entrance and a work by **Thomas Stollar** on the staircase leading to the first floor – explore the artistic, technological and conceptual possibilities ceramic offers in the field of contemporary art. Some artists focus in particular on the development of distinctive technological and aesthetic solutions, while the works of others take a critical look at the current sociopolitical issues or thematise the ever-present intimate questions of human existence, such as man's relationship to nature and the search for meaning when it comes to actions within the social and artistic system. Their projects and works provide an insight into today's state of mind, asking questions and seeking answers to the present-day challenges.

For instance, a socially critical note is evident in **Vera Stanković's** work *Move It*. Her work criticises the neoliberal paradigm, which, among other things, affects interpersonal relations in society. It consists of a multitude of ceramic figures that are pushing against a wall as part of a group or as individuals – the individual is forced to put up an individual fight for survival as part of a host of people, which makes it easier to control him/her. **Thomas Stollar** also deals with the alienated individual, but on the level of one's individual experience. His work titled *A Day in the Life* consists of a sequence of ceramic tiles that feature his diary entries about his time spent in the studio. According to the artist himself, the work is a response to the alienation from work that can impoverish an everyday experience and the

individual. **Weronika Lucińska's** work *Icebergs* deals with environmental issues and criticises global warming. Another work that could be described as socially critical is **Chi Man Chan's** *Cylinder on Cylinder*, which deals with our fast-paced life. Although the artist comes from Asian culture, it is possible to draw a parallel with culture in the West, where the (overfilled) modern-day lifestyles demand instant culture; in fact, in our society, instant culture, such as instant food and instant messaging, has become mainstream. According to the artist, the aim of his work is to attract the attention of young people in particular, who are losing touch with manual skills as a result of modern lifestyles. **Debra Sloan** has used various technologies to create a figure that reflects the world we live in: her work *New Consumer* is a criticism of a society focused on consumerism, which permeates the entire society, even its youngest and most vulnerable members. Social criticism is reflected in three other works, namely **Tatjana Gomboc Jerman's** *Perfect Citizen*, **Arina Ailincai's** *Forbidden Speech* and **Ivan Albreht's** *Gift*, ironically in the form of crumpled and empty cans. In his work *Roots*, Michał Żeślowski deals with the aspiration to create a perfect set of teeth. In contrast to this, the artist foregrounds their imperfect form, which is linked to the genealogy of our ancestors, and gives them an individual stamp.

In the second part of the exhibition, the featured artists play around with the depth and form of their respective works, and the technical aspect of the production of their ceramic works is usually very varied. They have achieved the desired effects by mixing specially selected coatings and carefully adjusting the firing temperature. It took a number of experimental trials and several firings for them to achieve the result they wanted. Some have devoted considerable attention to developing their own coatings, e.g. glazes, engobes and metal oxides, as seen for example in the works by **Michał Żeślowski** and **Liza Riddle**. For many years now, Riddle has been working on a series of artworks that are reminiscent of the beauty and roughness of nature. Her work *Fractured* (#347 and #331) captures the elemental palette of earthy colours and the dramatic process of fracturing and destruction. The artist has hand-shaped both pieces and a cracked structure in random geometric patterns has been revealed after several firings. She coats each work with ferrous metal salts and metallic paints. Other featured artists whose exhibited works deal with the imitation of natural forms in ceramics are **Weronika Lucińska**, *Icebergs*; **Karin Putsch-Grassi**, *Fuji*; **Dani Žbontar**, *Wish to Be a Rainbow*; **Martin Harman**, *Escape*; **Kim Logue**, *Silica Isles*, and **Lee Middleman**, *Desert Sunflower*.

In Europe, East Asian porcelain has been admired since the Middle Ages. It used to be considered a status symbol, but it was not until the early 18th century that the

first European porcelain manufactory was established at a castle in Meissen, Saxony. The exhibition features several masterpieces created using porcelain – a material that is difficult to shape by hand. The work titled *Peace* by **M. Dogan Özgüdogdu** is distinguished by technical perfection in the production of Limoges porcelain. In terms of technology, other artworks worth mentioning are *Wind (Oroshi)* by **Satoshi Kino**, *Slant* by **Wing Kwan Tam**, *Celadon Solo Opus 23* by **Sita Wong**, *Light* by **Claudia Biehne** and *Sextet B\_Y\_G\_V* by **Lea Georg**. **Barbara Kuijken** has paired porcelain with paper, natural twigs and organic material.

The third group of the exhibited works is epitomised by their lightness – levitation, i.e. the works are up in the air in apparent defiance of gravity. The work on view that are found within this context are *Wind (Oroshi)* by **Satoshi Kino**, *Light* by **Claudia Biehne**, *Celadon Solo Opus 23* by **Sita Wong**, *NET(works)* by **Leah Anderson**, *Gravity and Grace* by **Nataša Sedej**, *Slant* by **Wing Kwan Tam** and *On Another Note* by **Jessica Smith**.

The exhibition also includes works that explore the historical and artisanal-industrial characters of ceramics. **Lea Georg's** work *Sextet B\_Y\_G\_V* was created using advanced 3D printing technology. The basis for the work was the universal ceramic form presented in a new light. Another artist that used this form is **Rhiannon Ewing-James**. She has shaped a vessel that is not hollowed out and intended to be used, thus creating a useless object that is not noticed until the viewer gets close to it. **Gratia Brown** started from a plate, which she saw in a new light. **Ines Kovačič's** *Footstool* reflects the artist's technical prowess and the alternation of hand-formed ceramic shapes and shapes created on a potter's wheel, demonstrating her ingenuity in reworking the form of an everyday object.

**Patrick Crulis** has a distinctly multifaceted approach to ceramic art, i.e. he is interested in many different artistic genres, as evident in his work *Stunning Upset XI*. The humour and playfulness he seeks through art lead his sculpture down an interesting path. His work is reminiscent of the process of instability and the disintegration of a three-dimensional sculpture. Crulis continues to revive and recreate vitality in a world of chaos.

The works of art created by **Barbara Jurkovšek**, **Jon Hatfull**, **Matthew Dercole** and **Yi-Li Yeh** impress viewers with their imaginative boundlessness in both content and form.

Intimate questions related to human existence are explored more extensively by two artists. **Daniela Polz** thematises intimate memory, life and death: her work resembles a human figure in a box, suggestively evoking different meanings. **Alejandra Jones's** work *Could Not or Did Not Want to Be* combines ceramics and personal

confession through words.

This wide variety of ceramic art, which is presented as part of the exhibition staged at the Škofja Loka Museum, is reflected in numerous biennial and triennial exhibitions across the globe, which stimulates theoretical discourse in this field. This discourse is increasingly intertwined with various aspects, such as artistic, historical, social and anthropological perspectives on ceramics. The numerous ceramic art exhibitions show the rich artistic production in this field, revealing the fact that ceramics is a vital part of contemporary art movements.

### On the International Ceramics Triennial UNICUM

Following the decline of the ceramics industry, Slovenia is witnessing a boom in the studio-based practice of making small-batch applied ceramics and art ceramics. Ceramic art has been stimulated, among other things, by the ceramics study programmes at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design and the Faculty of Education at the University of Ljubljana and the University of Maribor, as well as by the *International Ceramics Triennial UNICUM* and a number of other ceramic art exhibitions.

The *UNICUM Triennial* is Slovenia's major international exhibition of contemporary ceramic art and a reference project, comparable to other similar global events. The focus is on the concept of how to look at ceramic art from different angles, aiming to highlight the diverse theoretical, curatorial and artistic approaches to the way it is explored. The exhibited works and the awards are selected by an international jury based on an open call for artists. The triennial also includes an international exhibition of students selected by invited mentors and an accompanying programme across Slovenia. The *UNICUM Triennial* was conceived by a curator of the National Museum of Slovenia, Asst. Prof. Mateja Kos Zabel, PhD, and the academy-trained sculptor, Professor Emerita Dragica Čadež Lapajne, who is featured at the exhibition with her work *Clay and Wood*. This artwork was exhibited as part of the accompanying programme at the *Fifth International Ceramics Triennial UNICUM 2023*. As the chair of the organising committee, Čadež Lapajne does not participate in triennial exhibitions.

In 2009, the National Museum of Slovenia staged the *1st International Ceramics Triennial UNICUM 2009*, which was followed by the *2nd International Ceramics Triennial UNICUM 2012* at the Betnava Manor, both of which were organised by the Slovenian Association of Fine Arts Societies. The *3rd*, *4th* and *5th UNICUM Triennials* were organised by the National Museum of Slovenia, whose collections contain contemporary ceramic art, among other objects.