

Saskia Pfaeltzer – Works, curriculum vitae, publications

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Ceramic works by Saskia Pfaeltzer (selection):



1. Horse's Head / Unicorn, porcelain, 45 cm.



2. Giraffes, porcelain, 47 cm.



3. Goat's Head, porcelain, 45 cm.



4. Giraffe, porcelain, 47 cm.



5. Horse's Head, porcelain, 45 cm.



6. White Lady with Eagle, stoneware, 70 cm.



7. White Lady No. 2, stoneware, 65 cm.



8. White Lady No. 9, stoneware, 65 cm.



9. White Lady No. 6, stoneware, 65 cm.



10. White Lady No. 8, stoneware, 65 cm.



11. Lady with Baboon, stoneware, 75 cm.



12. Lady with Leopard, stoneware, 75 cm.



13. Medieval Figurines No. 1, stoneware, 16 cm.



14. Medieval Figurines No. 2, stoneware, 16 cm.



15. Cassowary Vase, porcelain, 130 cm.



16. Buck's Head Vase No. 1, porcelain, 150 cm.



17. Buck's Head Vase No. 2, porcelain, 150 cm.



18. Shoulder Vase, stoneware, 75 cm.



19. Men in Bathhouse No. 1, porcelain, 55 cm.



20. Men in Bathhouse No. 2, porcelain, 56 cm.



21. Vase with Golden Mouth, porcelain, 48 cm.



22. Silhouette Plate, porcelain, 50 cm.



23. Man-eater, porcelain, 45 cm.



24. The Stranger, porcelain, 55 cm.



25. Duo, porcelain, 250 cm.



26. Two Pillars, porcelain, 250 cm.

Other works by Saskia Pfaeltzer (selection):



27. Reclining Man, bronze.



28. Three Tigers, stone.



29. Capoeira, bronze.



30. The Parade, bronze.



31. Horses, bronze.



32. Pegasus, polyester.



33. Waterman Fountain, bronze.



34. Cloud Chaser, bronze.



35. Three Dancers, bronze.



36. Cut-out cardboard.



37. Theatre settings, cardboard.



38. Rider on Horse, cardboard.



39. Cut-out cardboard.

Always looking for new ways

In my career as a visual artist I have explored many materials: clay, bronze, plaster, wood, waste materials, metal, cardboard, paper, drawing materials and porcelain. I try to achieve surprising new results with unexpected combinations of materials.

Since my visits to the porcelain workshops in China, I have become very interested in the possibilities of this refined material. Jingdezhen is well known to me because of the two-month working periods that I have spent there annually for the past 15 years, both at San Bao and at The Pottery Work Shop.

With my next stay in Jingdezhen this autumn I want to continue my experiments with different materials, together with porcelain and glaze. What makes working with porcelain particularly interesting is that this material pre-eminently allows me to bring together my drawings and sculptures.

My aim is to surprise myself and others every day again with my work. Therefore I have to work as if I am breathing, constantly making lively things.



Biography

Saskia Pfaeltzer (Hilversum, 1955) was educated as a sculptor and painter at the

Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten (Academy of Arts) in Amsterdam (1973-1980), at the faculty of sculpture under the direction of Piet Esser, Paul Grégoire and Theresia van der Pant, and at the faculty of monumental painting under the direction of Harry op de Laak. She also studied modern dance at Huize de Liefde in Amsterdam.

She immediately turned out to be a successful artist and her work appears in important collections in the Netherlands and the Caribbean. Large sculptures were commissioned by various Dutch towns, to decorate their public spaces, like Helmond and Geldermalsen. Unilever Rotterdam and ING Bank are some of the many companies proudly displaying a large sculpture in bronze, created especially for them. Major art fairs like PAN, KunstRAI and Realismebeurs, all in Amsterdam, and Art Fair 's-Hertogenbosch show her work on a regular basis. ARTCologne, Lapada Art Fair, and London Art Fair are outposts abroad.

Saskia's choice is not to be presented by one main gallery, but exhibiting her work in an almost continuous series of exhibitions throughout the Netherlands and abroad. Saskia lives in Amsterdam, with a 10-year break in the Caribbean: from 1990 to 2005 she stayed on Sint Maarten and Sint Eustatius. The influence of the Antillean way of life is clearly reflected in her work. Dividing her time between an urban atelier in Amsterdam's centre and nowadays a large atelier in the countryside of France, she keeps looking at art from different angles.

Since 2010, she has been working two months a year in Jingdezhen, China, on a collection of ceramic statues, vases, pillars and plates. It gives her a new perspective and successfully so, as the Chinese have asked her to return as a teacher in an art they themselves master like no one else: ceramics.

The atmosphere in her work lies on the border between theatre and visual art. In Pfaeltzer's world, a subreality of alter egos merges with the movements of animals and people. Kings and queens float in a dream state, where seriousness expresses itself in still forms. Here, the inner world is not simply shown, but revealed as a landscape of hidden emotions and whispering thoughts. Every movement, however small, carries a meaning — a vibration of an inner truth. The frozen postures of figures tell stories that cannot be captured in words. Animals creep like shadows through these still scenes, as carriers of instinct and subconscious power. It is a world in which time slows down and in which the inner unfolds as a tableau of desires, fears and dreams.

Galleries - exhibitions and work in stock, in the Netherlands, unless otherwise stated (selection)

Gallery De Twee Pauwen, The Hague

Musiom, Amersfoort

Gallery Delfi Form, Zwolle

Gallery Helga Hofman, Alphen aan den Rijn

Gallery and sculpture garden Giardino, Berg en Terblijt

Sanbao Gallery, Jingdezhen, China

Gallery A-Quadraat, Vorden (2013-2020)

Gallery Terra Delft, Delft

Tree Art Museum, Beijing, China (2016)

Galerie Heidefeld & Partner, Krefeld, Germany (2016-2019)

Gallery de Vis, Harlingen

Gallery Astrid Cornelisse, Amsterdam

SBK Kranenburgh, Bergen NH

SBK Kunstuitleen, Amsterdam

L'Abbaye de Saint-Michel, Saint-Michel, France

Dutch Dream Team Amsterdam (2012-2017)

Mufei Gallery, Jingdezhen, China

KiV Château St. Gerlach, Valkenburg

Projects

Miffy art parade, various locations in the Netherlands and Japan (2015)

Elephants Parade, global, various locations (2017)

Cardboard theatre, with singing, Amsterdam, Aalsmeer, France and Belgium

Metamorphoses I, II, III, singing performances with cardboard wings (2015-2017)

Project Beethoven, singing performance with cardboard wings (2020-2021)

Fayza and the Nutcracker, street theatre, Arnhem (2021)

Radio Podcast BNN VARA #55 - *St. Eustatius: forgotten Dutch pearl in the Caribbean*
(July 4, 2021), Sinan's Atlas

Memories to Majiayao I, Chinese singing with cardboard samurai warrior on horseback,
Halle, Germany, and Brussels, Belgium (2022)

Memories to Majiayao II, Chinese singing with cardboard samurai warrior on horseback,
Nieuwe Kerk, Delft (Gallery Terra Delft) (2022)

Barbe Bleue, 8 songs in the cardboard theatre, Théâtre Montbessier, La Meyze, France
(2023)

Artworks in museum and corporate collections

- *Birdman*, bronze, Willem Arntsz Hoeve, Den Dolder
- *Minuets*, bronze, Dutch Journal of Medicine, Amsterdam
- *Two sphinxes*, bronze, Oranje Nassau Vastgoed, Diemen
- *Caribbean Bather*, bronze, ING Bank, Amsterdam
- *Acrobat*, bronze, HSBC, Van Meer James Capel, Amsterdam
- *Witches' Sabbath*, bronze, Museum Jan Cunen, Oss
- *Le Dauphin*, bronze, Capgemini, Utrecht
- *The Far Journey*, bronze, and *Dancers*, bronze, Unilever, Rotterdam
- *Cloud Chaser*, bronze, market square in Helmond
- *Reclining Man*, bronze, Rabobank, Amsterdam
- *Merdía*, oil on canvas, government building, Philipsburg, Sint Maarten
- *Caribbean Head*, bronze, and *Birdman III*, bronze, Museum Kura Hulanda, Willemstad, Curaçao
- *Birdman II*, bronze, Aon Group Netherlands, Rotterdam
- *Heracles*, *Cats*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and *Pocahontas*, cardboard, wings for major dance shows, Sint Maarten (2000-2010)
- *Capoeira*, bronze, Hyatt Regency Hotel, Vladivostok, Russia

Artworks in public space

- *Brooches*, various wall paintings, Sister Marie Laurence School, Sint Maarten
- *Three Torsos*, bronze, Vineyard Building, Sint Maarten
- *Minuet III*, bronze, Geldermalsen
- *Five Pelicans*, epoxy resin, Princess Juliana International Airport, Sint Maarten
- *Three Fates*, bronze, Steensel
- *Waterman*, bronze, fountain, Boscotondo-plein, Helmond
- *Three Dancers*, bronze, Motiance Dance School, Sint Maarten
- *La Lambada II*, bronze, Wickelhof, Mijdrecht
- *Ayer*, oil on canvas, Motiance Dance School, Sint Maarten
- *Contemporaries*, (temporary) cardboard project, Hugo de Grootkade/Bilderdijkpark, Amsterdam
- *Contemporaries*, wall painting, 14 x 3.5 meters (large edition), Frederik Hendrikstraat, Amsterdam
- *Hephaistos*, bronze (edition 15), Afval Energie Bedrijf Amsterdam
- *Birdman*, bronze (edition 100), Helmond Environmental Prize
- *Minuet*, bronze (edition 200), Netherlands Institute of Medicine, Amsterdam
- *Karate*, bronze (edition 60), Royal BAM Group
- *Merengue I*, bronze (edition 250), Stichting Ondernemende Kunstenaars, Amsterdam
- *The Human Scale*, bronze plaque (edition 100), Alsemgeest & Westerwoudt Architects, Rotterdam
- *Frigate Bird*, bronze, Heineken Fishing Tournament prize, Sint Maarten
- *Man on Bench*, bronze (edition 30), Rabobank
- *La Balance*, bronze (edition 100), Jan van Goyen Medical Center, Amsterdam

- *Equilibre*, bronze (edition 30), Motiance Dance School, Sint Maarten
- *Watchman*, bronze (edition 25), International Card Services/ABN Amro Bank

Art fairs

- KunstRAI (2004-present)
- PAN Amsterdam (2004)
- Art Antwerp (2004)
- ART COLOGNE (2006)
- London Art Fair (2012)
- Realism Amsterdam (2015-present)
- Art Breda (2015-2016)
- Affordable Art Fair Amsterdam (2019)

Didactic experience

- Various art academies in the Netherlands, France and the Dutch Caribbean (1991-2012)
- Jingdezhen Ceramic Art Institute (JCAI), China (2013)

Publications

- *Color St. Maarten then and now*, with Maria van Enckevort, University of St. Martin Press
- *My Stay on St. Eustatius*, self-published (2010)
- *My Stay in China 1, 2, 3, 4, 5*, self-published, 2010-2016
- *Out of the Groove* (China), self-published (2017)
- *Get Rid of the Routine!*, with Sophie de Wijn, Scrivare publishers
- *Spinoza's Roller Coaster*, graphic novel, with Erik Bindervoet, Wereldbibliotheek (2014)

- *The Philosophers Colouring Book*, Wereldbibliotheek (2017)
- *Thus Spoke Nietzsche's Sister*, graphic novel, with Erik Bindervoet, Wereldbibliotheek (2019)
- *Philosophers Beyond Borders*, graphic novel, ASC publishers Leiden (2020)
- *Gutmensch Block-calender*, Uitgeverij Jurgen Maas (2020 – 2023) www.gutmensch.org
- *Wittgenstein's World*, graphic novel, with Erik Bindervoet, Wereldbibliotheek (2022)
- *The Future of the Amazon Forest*, graphic novel, with Pitou van Dijck, LM Publishers (2023)



The creation and meaning of the Two Pillars

– by Saskia Pfaeltzer

The Gate of Chinese Porcelain, the white gold

Just under Shanghai, a good hour's flight away, lies Jingdezhen, the porcelain city: City of White Gold. For centuries, the most beautiful porcelain was made here and distributed all over the world. During one of my two-month working periods, I made The Gate Double, two and a half meter high, crowned porcelain pillars on sculpted wooden plinths.

To make the pillars, I cycle to the outskirts of Jingdezhen, to the large vase factory, with a backpack full of ceramic paint, buckets, brushes, water and bread. Since the seventeenth century, large porcelain vases have been made here for transport to Amsterdam.

Around each pillar, I paint a representation with the same cobalt that was already used in the seventeenth century. I have to warm up, as if for a competition, because painting the pillars in blue and white has to be done in one go.

Each pillar has a narrator, who explains the world. One pillar shows a woman with a falcon on her arm, with two hunting dogs on either side. Her world is one of high mountains, vast fields and wild seas. Vehicles drive over bridges from which acrobats hang. On her head she carries a modern city. On top of the skyscrapers, open spaces have been left to let the breath of life, the 'qi', flow freely.

The other pillar shows a landowner with two cheetahs on a leash, an owl sitting on his hand. His landscape is a valley with deserts. The city he carries is his future, his dream. Both figures look at the viewer. There is something distant about them; after all, they are the guards of their gate. But they invite you to enter the uncertain land behind the gate. Once through the gate, a new world is yours.





Details of the Two Pillars.

Saskia Pfaeltzer

By Kees Versluis

An energetic woman with expansive gestures, clear eyes, a warm, hearty laugh and a head of unruly curls. An artist from top to toe, who has lived a tumultuous life in which the search for challenges has been the leitmotif of all her activities. From art academy to artists collectives, from Amsterdam to St. Maarten and China, from bronze to clay and polystyrene foam. An extraordinary chameleon, who seems to be able to effortlessly adjust to the demands of the time and place, but above all to her own aspirations. "I have to continue to surprise myself; for me, that's the key to remaining energetic and continuing to derive real pleasure from what I'm doing." Anyone who regularly passes by Saskia's atelier, located in a former shop on the Nassaukade in Amsterdam, will see a new work of art in the window every month. Chinese men cut out of cardboard, wild tigers drawn in charcoal - you never know what to expect, as Saskia produces a huge quantity of work, and likes to assign a 'best-by' date to her art. "I'm not going to wait for ages until someone likes it. After a while, the deadline is past, and then it has to go. I'm always greatly relieved when I can transport half of the work in my atelier to galleries, or when I can lend a large portion of my artworks to exhibitions. And sometimes it can just end up in the trash bin. That helps me 'unclutter', and gives me peace of mind and room in my head for new things."

Inspiration and mentality

This 'room in Saskia's head' is a breeding ground for inspiration, which she finds in the people, animals and things in her surroundings. She observes and registers

everything that inspires her, and processes these impressions at a later moment to create tangible artworks. Her productivity is immense. "It's a question of energy and mentality. I've taught myself that you just always have to be making something, even if you don't have any great inspiration at the moment. You have to begin, to make quick decisions, and if it doesn't work out, you'll see that, of course. And very often, it turns out all right after all." This is how the sheep's heads and bird's heads - which at this moment fill her atelier - came into being. "A while back I happened to see a cockatoo, became fascinated by the animal, and decided to make one in stone. Before I knew it, I was obsessed with these animals, and that's where I am at the moment, in the middle of that process. They're fantastic to make; it makes me happy just looking at them."

Dancers and rubbish

This 'animal phase' is the latest in the many phases in Saskia's oeuvre which - at times connected with each other and at times completely separate - characterise her work. "After my application to the dance academy had been rejected, I concentrated mostly on creating images of dancers, which I continued doing for years. I was even able to create huge bronze sculptures of dancers, which now stand in city squares in Helmond and Steensel. Those were fantastic assignments." But this was no reason for Saskia to choose the safe route and follow the beaten path, and just build further on these successes in the Netherlands. She received an invitation to go work in the Netherlands Antilles for six months, and didn't hesitate for one moment. "I didn't want to say 'no'. Saying 'yes' is always so much more interesting! It offers new opportunities, opens doors, and helps channel my work into new areas of exploration." So Saskia went off to St. Maarten, where, contrary to all expectations, she ended up living for 12 years, without a real atelier or studio, and with limited materials. "My crate with art materials and tools never arrived from Amsterdam. I went to a rubbish dump and worked in the open air in an old ruin, making artworks from refuse materials. My most enjoyable exhibition ever!"

Freedom

Her stay in the Dutch Antilles was a long, stormy period, in which she encountered loneliness and more than once the destructive power of hurricanes. Nevertheless, her art dating from this period is characterised by sunny, colourful Antillean influences. Back in the Netherlands, Saskia realised more deeply than ever the way in which she had to continue to evolve as an artist. "In the Antilles I learned a great deal. There, I had to protect my existence as an artist, I had to struggle to be seen, without any network or safety net. No one asks anything about what you are doing, so I became my own critic. I made demands on myself, telling myself that I must create something new every week; I ended up amazing myself with the results." These experiences have made Saskia the strongly persuasive and independent artist that she is today, and one of the few who can experience freedom in the limited opportunities of the current economic crisis. "The crisis has given me a lot of

freedom; people are investing less and less in works of art, so now I can make whatever I want. I must find the energy within myself, and I can create surprising things, perhaps work that nobody will like or find beautiful. I have never felt so free in what I am creating, I am now truly just being myself."

Chinese porcelain

This urge to be free and to continue to surprise herself led Saskia to China in 2010. "All around me, artists were desperately throwing themselves into teaching, or just giving up. I absolutely didn't want to do either of that, so I decided to re - invent myself once more. A new country, new materials, new inspiration. It was a fantastic experience: I had never worked with clay before! I began with a basic course in ceramics, and then went to the porcelain region in China (Jingdezhen, Jiangxi) for three months. I had no idea at all where I would end up, but became fascinated by the people and the country, and by now I have returned to China many times. At present I am even learning Chinese!"

Self-willed and independent

With her energy, sense of perspective and a healthy portion of recklessness, Saskia is an artist who is prepared for the future. She is someone who, with her fresh outlook on the world around her, will continue to inspire others for years to come. "I would also like to try glass blowing, perhaps take another course or travel to Africa for an extended stay. I will never 'slow down' and take it easy; I want to continue developing myself. What other people think of my art is secondary. That's freedom; that's the way I want to live my life as an artist."

SASKIA PFAELTZER

Sculptor of Movement

Ed Wingen



Saskia Pfaeltzer's Amsterdam studio is filled with small statues, although she also makes large ones, like the impressive male figure in her small backyard. It is called The Distant Voyage, executed in light polyester, resistant to sharp sunlight, rain and wind, it has acquired a distinct patina. When the slim sculptor is standing beside it, slender and robust enter into a remarkable dialogue. An identical copy, but in bronze and with a boat shaped shield, is property of the Unilever company in Rotterdam.

Saskia loves working with different materials. Placed against a side wall in her garden is a totem-like wooden figure. She also uses polystyrene and cardboard, works in stone and with terracotta. From an early age she has drawn with a paintbrush, in black and white as well as in colour. A gouache with an active sunset adorns the wall. Then there is the painted series of Tropical Drawings in black and white.

Naturally she also works in bronze, but in these difficult times this is now much too expensive. So Saskia has taken on ceramics. "Like cursing in church", she smiles. To her astonishment it turned out to be an enormous success.

China

The technique needed for making ceramics she learned two years ago while staying in China's porcelain city Jingdezhen in the province of Jiangxi. There the centenary of Delft blue and white was celebrated with a ceramics fair in which the Netherlands participated with an inspiring pavilion.

On this stay she published a booklet, giving an impression of her exacting communications with her helpers while working with clay and glaze, as they did not speak any English. Recently Saskia Pfaeltzer returned to China for a second time, and next spring she plans a 5 months' stay as a sculpting teacher at China's request. "I would like to learn Chinese, their techniques, how they live their lives. I want to gain foothold", she states in her booklet.

with visitors to embarking visitors with their own life's stories. It's a great moment when you can see the people you've met in your life, and you can't wait to see them again.

Dutch Antilles

Saskia Pfaltzer (Hilversum, 1955) loves to push boundaries. In the nineties she lived and worked at St. Martin. There she owns land and a small house with studio, which she visits every year. The islands of Statia and Curaçao held exhibitions of her work. Kura Hollanda Museum in Willemstad owns one of her large sculptures. In the Antilles, nature and the people inspired her through their graceful movements, expressing her own feeling: in her youth dancing and music played an important role. The upwind Caribbean breeze aroused her memories. Now she acknowledges to have found her own with this theme of movement. "It is in my veins, I always want to fly up and away", she says, lifting both her arms in the air.

Upright figures are prominent in her work. But also portraits, but only of friends and acquaintances. "It is not my livelihood", Saskia stresses. She had a thorough education in sculpting at the Rijks Academy in Amsterdam, from Paul Grégoire, Vincent (Piet) Esser and Theresia van der

Saskia loves working with different materials. Placed against a side wall in her garden is a totem-like wooden figure. She also uses polystyrene and cardboard, works in stone and with terracotta. From an early age she has drawn with a paintbrush, in black and white as well as in colour.

opposite page **The Inheritance**, 90 cm

right

Monte Casino, 90 cm



Pant and followed painting lessons in the monumental section.

Her elder sister Judith, also educated at the Rijks Aacademy, made a name for herself mainly with portraits, of queen Beatrix, for example. With her almost abstract statues she is the opposite of Saskia, who also gets inspired by myths, like that of Pegasus, the winged horse, born of thunder and lightning and the foam of the sea and the love of Medusa and Poseidon. She used a light polystyrene for this both dynamic and elegant subject, as this sculpture is supposed to hang suspended from the ceiling.

Then there are her dancing fate goddesses, bearers and proud wardens, playing and rolling horses and figures that elegantly lift their dresses or squat. These are all statues representing human or animal feelings that challenge the viewer to be recognised. Sometimes there is a tendency to the abstract, but figures keep dominating her work. To get an impression of the

larger statues one can visit the statue gardens of galleries like Beeldentuin Giardino in Berg & Terblijt, Gallerie Delfi Form in Zwolle and Gallerie Helga Hofman in Alphen aan den Rijn. Also a visit to her country gallery in Balen-Wezel, Belgium, will be worth your while, as here you can admire her impressive horse statues in the wild. For directions see her website: www.saskiapfaeltzer.nl

Rice Paper

Her Chinese adventure focussed basically on working in clay, and its challenges in baking and glazing. Some figures emerged full of cracks and a large one broke into pieces, which had to be glued together. This one ended in front of the small atelier Saskia had set up in an unfinished side building, with the sign Expositie attached to it. Saskia drew dinner scenes on rice paper with ink and paintbrush. She also practised Chinese



opposite page **The Family**, 40 cmleft **Portrait of Wang Sha**, 25 cm

Saskia Pfaeltzer (Hilversum, 1955) was educated as a sculptor and painter at the Rijksacademie voor Beeldende Kunsten (Academy of Arts) in Amsterdam (1973-1980). She immediately turned out to be a successful artist and her work appears in important collections in Holland and the Caribbean. Large sculptures were commissioned by various Dutch towns, to decorate their public spaces, like Helmond and Geldermalsen. Unilever Rotterdam and ING Bank are some of the many companies proudly displaying a large sculpture in bronze, created especially for them. Major art fairs like PAN, Kunst Rai and Realisme beurs, all in Amsterdam and Art Fair 's-Hertogenbosch show her work on a regular basis. ARTCologne, Lapada Art Fair, and London Art Fair are outposts abroad. Saskia's choice is not to be presented by one main gallery, but exhibiting her work in an almost continuous series of exhibitions throughout Holland and abroad. Saskia lives in Amsterdam, with a 10-year break in the Caribbean, which has filled her heart and art ever since. Dividing her time between an urban atelier in Amsterdam's centre and a large atelier in the countryside of Belgium, she keeps looking at art from different angles. Two years ago she discovered China, staying there for 2 months both years. It gives her a new perspective and successfully so, as the Chinese have asked her to return this September as a teacher in an art they themselves master like no one else: ceramics.

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characters, a practise in composition that has to be absolutely right. In addition she took lessons from a Master in Chinese painting, who didn't speak one word of English. Ultimately her working period concluded with an evening exhibition, that was busy despite heavy rains, and where she sang an Italian song using Chinese words.

Then all her work had to be safely packed for travelling to Holland; the portraits, sitting and squatting figures, horsemen and also vases and decorated pots. Saskia Pfaeltzer felt as a potter "like a virgin in ceramic country". But working with porcelain, "porcelaine" in French, meaning Venus shell, fascinated her enormously.

Back in Amsterdam she vividly remembered the soft autumn light, the taste of steamed vegetables and bitter tea, the mountains with bamboo bushes, the crate maker, the language and its sounds. Everything she created in China keeps those memories alive and urges her to return soon.

Ed Wingen worked as headjournalist of Art magazine "Kunstbeeld" and has worked for the daily newspaper " De Telegraaf". His main subject is writing about artists from 1980 until now.



“A conversation crossing 5000 years”

Majia Yao, Lintao, Gansu Province, China. April-May 2019.

SASKIA PFAELTZER

Fourteen ceramists with different nationalities were carefully selected and invited by Jackson Li (Jingdezhen, Sanbao, Jiangxi province, China) and Simone Haak (Terra Delft Gallery, Delft, the Netherlands) to spend five weeks working in an artist residence in north-west China. Five thousand years ago, close to the Gobi desert in the valley of the Yellow River, the Majia Yao culture blossomed here, with its abstractly decorated pots formed without a potter's wheel. Through their work and with the films

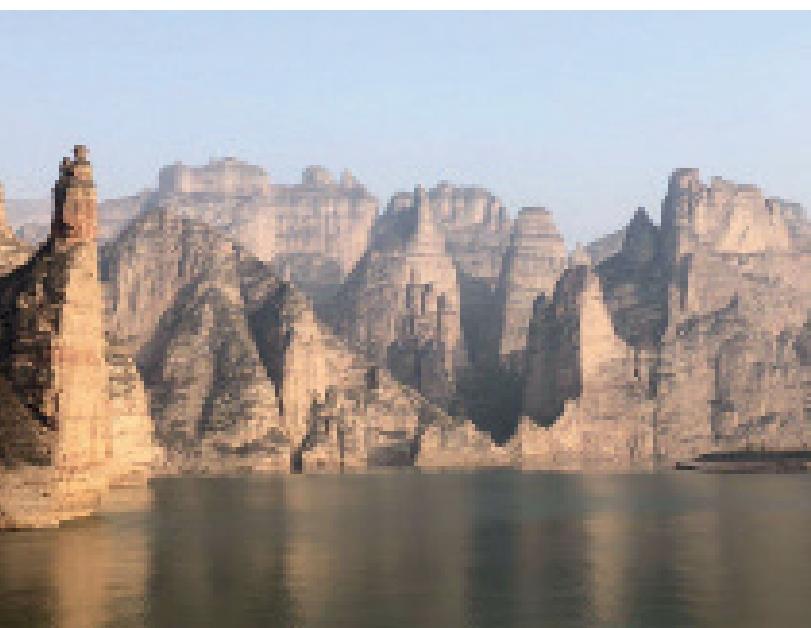
that are produced, the ceramists will focus attention on this faraway location and its magnificent history. On the high clay plateau they forge a bridge between past and present with their ceramics. The owner and benefactress of this center has donated generously to make everyone feel at home in every possible way. Originally from Tibet, she has dedicated herself to publicizing the wonders of this remote region. The Lintao Museum is featuring the exhibition 'A conversation crossing 5000 years', curated by Simone

Haak and Jackson Li. The collaboration between TerraDelft Gallery in the Netherlands, and Jackson Li, of Jingdezhen, Sanbao, China, dates back years and results time and time again in a variety of splendid encounters between invited ceramists in locations off the beaten track in China. The artists continually gain the attention of the media and local authorities, and so are able to prevent the echoes of the past disappearing forever in the onslaught of a new rage of modern construction.

Jingdezhen was for centuries the center of production of porcelain for the Chinese imperial court; for hundreds of years this region of the 'White Gold' also provided Europe with the most beautiful porcelain artwork.

Notes about our trip:

The flight from Beijing to Lanzhou takes three hours. The reception committee for the Western guests stand ready with bouquets of roses. It is another two hours with the bus to the residence in Lintao, which has never been used before. It is not unusual in China: empty museums, empty residences. Only the local clay is available here. This very simple ceramic offering causes the western ceramists to swallow hard. They will be filmed often. There is no comparison here with what is available in other residences, where ceramically speaking anything and everything



top -
In the fields of Majia Yao
below -
Landscape of Lintao



Replica Antique pots Majiayao

is possible.

The artists get to work: That old culture, what was that? And without religion? The high mountains, the seasons, and the cycles of life and death must have been honored? We visit the Yinshifu family, who throw pots and decorate them as their ancestors have always done. A few ceramists ask if their work can also be decorated in this manner and after some hesitation the father and son decorate work made by three of us. The result is amazing!

Trip to the Buddhas

After three weeks our work has to dry and we travel by sleeper train to the Great Buddhas in the north. Along the river Tao we see mosques with dome rooftops gleaming green like horseflies. On this clay plateau, Uyghurs, Turks, Tibetans, Buddhists, and Muslims live together. Four of us share a sleeping compartment. It is convivial: vodka, peanuts, and conversation. In the restaurant car, the female Tibetan conductors (with whitened faces and wide cheekbones) give a dance show and then everything breaks loose; we, artists, dancing and singing through the aisles while the embarrassed Chinese staff hide behind their mobile phones. They seem frozen in their seats. Meanwhile the landscape changes from grey high-rise apartment buildings to mountainous scenery and night falls. Early in the morning the train arrives in

Dunhuang in the Gobi Desert. 2000 years ago, in the time of the Great Wall of China, the Chinese warriors fought the Mongolian enemy. It was the beginning of the Silk Road where heavily-laden dromedaries travelled to foreign lands. The Great Wall, constructed of straw and loam, has been eaten away by sun and wind. The first Chinese Empire, the Qin dynasty, only lasted fifty years because the Emperor's son, an incompetent lout, could not govern the empire.

Completely unexpectedly we land in an oasis with vineyards. War horses used to be bred here. Everything looks agrarian, but prosperous. At lunch we eat donkey meat.

In the desert stands a plastic police agent to direct traffic, but there is no sign of traffic. The bus brings us to the Mogao Caves, made into a tourist center by President Xi. Who is playing music? A music system has been placed inside a plastic dromedary (also serving as a rubbish bin). The mountains of sand are fabulous; we climb until we can do no more. In the caves (800 AD) there are small Buddhas made of clay and straw. Westerners discovered them in 1910 and took many of the ancient manuscripts back to Europe and America.

In the landscape of high cliffs and deep coves we see one small house where someone is shoveling in a garden. Directly behind is the thirty-meter-high Buddha,



The singing vase 1 and 2



Tall Buddha



In front of the museum

carved out of the cliff wall, very precisely formed! Old men with leathered cheeks bow deeply while they mumble and finger their necklaces of wooden beads. My project 'The Singing Vase' becomes more and more important. At first I wasn't certain if it would take place, but now it is a joyful and conspicuous part of the opening program of the museum. Listening and clapping is simply not enough for western ceramists. Surrounded by smoke I sing a Chinese song while jumping out of a fabric Majiayao vase, a real act!

In the museum

The work is beautifully exhibited between the antique vases of the Majiayao culture. The ceramists' long banners between the display cases full of history show the connection between 'then and now'. It has cost some argumentative power to convince all of the concerned parties of the beauty and strength of this exhibition. But now that everyone is convinced, there is an avalanche of energy streaming over this exhibit: journalists want to know what the ceramists are doing, the national

television channel comes in all their glory to report. Interviews and photo-shoots for Jackson Li's film 'The sound of Majiayao', about this project, take place nearly every day. The local people get to know us through large billboards with our names, faces, and our work. In the city, every bus stop has a poster featuring one of us. After years of silence the region is now filled with information about this fantastic project. The song project (three human voices echo in the antique and new vases) is planned for the museum hall. 'The Singing Vase' will open the exhibition in the museum.

The Majiayao Cultural Festival

Thirty portable toilets have been placed in the square. Many people are expected to attend the opening. The Rolling Stones would be jealous of the podium; there is a twenty by five-meter LED screen. The high-ranking dignitaries will sit in the front rows.

There is a Tibetan banquet on the mountain in the evening before the Majiayao Cultural Festival. The bus rides up small

mountain roads. A fire burns on the mountain meadow. Tibetan villagers stand ready with their mobile phones. The police push people behind the tape and everyone looks at the Westerners. Then the show begins. A group of older men who look like shamans dance with pig-bladder trumpets and fans around the blazing fire. Their headdresses indicate that they ward off the gods. The television team films in between the sword-fighters and the Dancer with the seven masks. The people push tightly against us with their mobile phones in order to get a selfie with us. One never sees a western face around here!

The activities for the third Majiayao Cultural Festival start early in the large festival area. The half-million residents of the city swarm the area and the television team films. On the stage a dance group performs a show about the development of the Majiayao culture. An enormous balloon in the shape of an antique pot floats in the air and various singers pay tribute to the rich cultural period of their country. We applaud with little drums, again

Ceramists in the desert



In the museum





At the party on top of the mountain



In the studio.

and again. High above us high-ranking government officials pour colored ink into glass tubes and suddenly the name 'Majiayao' appears, to everyone's astonishment! In the afternoon, in the museum, we explain to the cameras what we are trying to express with our work. In the evening we sing songs made famous by Pavarotti. What a fantastic event for us to be allowed to experience!

The artists

The group of artists in Majiayao is a nice mixture. We not only have different nationalities and cultures but we are also at different stages in our careers. Some are at their peak, others are just starting, and so on.

There is John Higgins (United Kingdom) who is like a magician on the wheel, playful and impulsive, making something new every time.

Liesbeth Kamp (Netherlands) is the opposite of John; she works in a balanced way, no mistakes or surprises.

Paul-Robin Sjöström (Sweden) has the same approach; very slowly he produces weird forms. His pullovers and bag show his fascination for colors.

Sang Woo Kim (France) wanders around and whispers now and then, very silent. Flat stones, if I may call them that, are experiments full of cracks. He smooths them till they shine.

And Marc Janssens (Belgium) produces two "Sad boys", standing figures with a variety of expressions on their faces. He

manipulates the figures until they reach their full expression.

Mechtild Pauwe (Netherlands) makes a connection with the pottery of Majiayao. Her vase will be smashed into pieces and buried until it is excavated by the next generation.

Mieke Everaet (Belgium) and Martin McWilliam (Germany) both arrived one week later than the others. They made the most stunning work in just a few days. Mieke makes a 'chamber pot' from the time of Louis XIV and Martin created a few small vases 'inside, outside'.

Vilma Villaverde (Argentina) is the senior lady of the artists. Her work is huge: gigantic ladies making a split jump. Of course she has an assistant. She is quite famous in the ceramic world, as are Mieke, Morten and Martin.

From the hands of Hidemi Tokutake (Japan) appear strange flowery forms, as if they come from deep down in the ocean. She is outgoing and expressive, and gives the group a special flavor through her positive attitude.

Morten Espersen (Denmark) controls his glazes as a scientific researcher. He has

had exhibitions in Brussels, New York and London. Skillfully he throws vessels where later on lifelike-looking creatures are crawling out. He colors them with plastic toxic kids clay.

Jackson Li (China) the visionary behind this all, stacks little pots on top of each other. This way he creates a different view of history. He is well known artist in de world and an important intermediary. Me, Saskia Pfaeltzer (Netherlands), I'm an allround artist. I work in clay, bronze, paper and carton board but act also as a singing performing artist. My sculptures, mother figures, are completely different from what I used to create. I'm very much inspired by the Majiayao Culture.

Jay Lu (China) known for his delicate and funny teapots, lives both New Zealand and in China. He makes an artistic bridge by inviting Saskia to create a collaboration. Together they create the "Desert Warrior", a sculpture of a man on a horse.

SASKIA PFAELTZER

is an allround artist. She work in clay, bronze, paper and carton board and she is also a singing performing artist. She lives in the Netherlands.

www.saskiapfaeltzer.nl

At the entrance of the residency

