

WORKING POTTERS

CHRISTOPH & INES HASENBERG

If a person is hypersensitive in their perceptions, and is able to discern more things and moods than others, there is no choice but to lead an art-oriented life. I feel I fit this description and an arts-focused career has suited me well.

Finding Passion and Making Hard Decisions

My interest when studying in the university was porcelain, specifically industrial porcelain. And my start as a porcelain designer could not have been better. My final exam work (senior thesis work) was chosen by Friesland Porcelain Factory as a prototype for a new series and so I had the task to develop a whole dinner service, which was later called MONDO.

After a few years of freelance work, I got a call to teach at the State College of Ceramic Design and Technology in Höhr-Grenzhausen. Switching to teaching was not an easy decision back in 1990; porcelain had just begun to emerge and grow in popularity on the scene. However, I accepted the position and taught there until November 2017, as a teacher of ceramic sculpture, freehand drawing, model mold making, semiotics, and art history.

While there, I met my wife Ines, a potter from Berlin. Ines had her apprenticeship in the former DDR (East Germany), in Römhild, and came to the ceramic school in Höhr-Grenzhausen in 1992. She graduated in 1996 as a ceramic designer. Since then, we have been living and working together in Siegburg, working mostly on ceramics and leading our studio with passion and success.

Finding a Place to Settle

The decision to settle in Siegburg was not difficult for us. On the one hand, the distance





2



3

1 Christoph Hasenberg painting and drawing on big bowls. 2 Three columns, 37¼ in. (96 cm) in height, stoneware, fired to 2246°F (1230°C) in oxidation. 3 Photo from one of the European ceramics markets, located in Gmunden, Austria.

to school, where the work day was filled almost daily with classes and workshops, was not too far. More importantly, however, Siegburg is a lively, small town with a medieval pottery tradition. Even today, for example, in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, you can find medieval Siegburger bottles and jugs. We ended up finding a nice, old house that required a lot of renovations, which we were able to make our own. With our location, we live close to the cities of Cologne, Dusseldorf, and Frankfurt, which is wonderful, as they are filled with museums, theaters, fairs, and concert halls for us to attend.

My time as a teacher at the college of ceramics was filled with infinitely beautiful and inspiring moments. We have been able to build a wonderful network between colleagues, galleries, and museums.

Next Step in Life

I finished teaching in November 2017 after 27 years, again making a difficult decision to work as a freelance artist. Today, Ines and I both work as full-time artists, developing new projects and exhibiting in galleries and museums throughout Europe. We participate in international competitions and occasionally take home an award.

We no longer make porcelain wares, instead we switched focus to creating sculptures and both sculptural and functional vessels. Of course, the typical dishes, plates, cups, and bowls are a large part of the daily work and are also a significant part of the business day.

Nevertheless, our common passion lies in the exploration of making unique pieces with painting and drawing on the ceramic surface. We take part in this together, not at the same time but as a complementary process. Each of us responds to what the other has done, and we both leave a lot of space to work freely, and without commentary, until the kiln is opened.

Ines throws forms on the potter's wheel (sometimes she throws nearly 40 pounds (20kg) in one go!) and I build the large objects, often with models and molds made of plaster, and formed with a strong clay body.

For forms thrown on the pottery wheel, we use non-grogged clay or clay with very fine grog (up to 20% 0.5-mm grog). To build large objects and large bowls, we use a very plastic clay from Westerwald with 40% 2-mm grog, which we mix



4



5

into the clay. We also mix red clay with a white clay to make our light brown/beige clay.

The composition of the surfaces is textured and after bisque firing pieces to 1652°F (900°C), Ines starts painting and continues to develop the surfaces for several weeks. After she has completed the painting, then there is a lot of room for me to draw.

At a building site in the middle of town, we found Siegburger clay at a depth of 36 feet (11m) depth. We were able to process and store this clay, which is the same as what medieval potters used, in larger quantities. A longer-term experiment has now started with this clay.

Taking Time for Other Experiences

Ceramic arts and pottery determine our life, but there is still time for skiing and kayaking.

From spring to autumn each year, we exhibit in international ceramic markets, driving through Europe with a caravan and our ceramics. During these events, we get to experience the fact that we are part of a large, wonderful family of ceramic artists.

The scene of high quality ceramic markets in Europe is very special and lively. Here, the potters, sculptors, and artists meet for wonderful ceramic events with exhibitions, competitions, and meetings with ceramic collectors and gallery owners. The high quality, individuality, and diversity of the goods and the self-determination of the exhibitors guarantee a high standard of the ceramic works.

Of course, there are always other experiences too, with bad sales, bad weather, too few visitors, etc. Despite this, we would not refrain from seeing our artist family on many weekends. We take time celebrating together, dancing, and last but not least, making sales

together. We started showing in ceramic markets about 20 years ago, applying by sending images to the organizers and often being accepted as newcomers or emerging artists. To get into the best markets took more time. We had to develop and keep improving our work; enter work into competitions; have pieces shown in museums; never tire of evolving, exploring, and watching the scene; and apply again and again. Today, we are included in the large markets in Europe. The recognition of our studio grew through these events.

It is common in Europe that you have to re-apply online to participate in the markets every year, and past participation is no guarantee for the future. We hope to continue participating for a long time. We keep on evolving, constantly questioning our work and exploring new work.

Making Work Available

Selling work at ceramic markets still represents a significant part of our annual income and sales. In addition, we are consistently represented in Dutch galleries. Our major gallery, *Gallery Smashing Colors* is in Tilburg, The Netherlands. Simone Theelen, the gallerist there, shows ceramics, paintings, wooden sculptures, bronzes, glass, etc. It's not a typical ceramic gallery, but it's very successful. The good, busy, professional, and enterprising galleries are a bit rare.

To live for and from ceramics offers an infinite variety of opportunities, with endless work, wonderful encounters, and the chance to travel widely. For those interested in this career, you should understand this life as a passion! Ines and I recognize that we need enthusiasm and a will for constant change in our imagery as well as in our actions, and cannot imagine approaching our lives any other way.



6



7



8

4 Ines and Christoph Hasenberg at their house and studio in Siegburg, Germany. 5 Ines painting a mid-sized plate with engobes. 6 Mirror, on display at the Carouge Museum, in Geneva, Switzerland. 7 Bowl triptych, 6 ft. 5 in. (2 m) in length, stoneware, displayed in the Museum for Art and Cultural History in Dortmund, Germany. 8 Cups and bottles, stoneware, 2015.

CAREER SNAPSHOT

YEARS AS A PROFESSIONAL POTTER
30

NUMBER OF POTS MADE IN A YEAR
more than 250, including large bowls, large sculptural objects, ceramic wall panels, tableware, and murals

EDUCATION

Christoph: Completed the apprenticeship certification exam as a stained-glass artist and art-glazier at the Chamber of Crafts in Cologne. Study of object-design, ceramic design at the Hochschule Niederrhein University of Applied Sciences in Krefeld.

Ines: Apprenticeship in Römhild, ceramic design degree from the State College of Ceramic Design and Technology in Höhr-Grenzhausen.

THE TIME IT TAKES (PERCENTAGES)

Making work (including firing): 60%

Promotions/Selling: 30%

Office/Bookkeeping: 10%

TOOLS AND EQUIPMENT

two big potters wheels, slab roller, 3–4 pug mills, clay mixer, clay roller, glaze mills, brushes, pottery tools, self-made oxide chinks, and a forklift for putting larger pieces into the kiln

WHERE IT GOES

Galleries: 20% (needs to be more)

Craft/Art Fairs: 40%*

Studio/Home Sales: 40%

*In Germany, France, England, The Netherlands, Austria, and Italy, the ceramics market scene is very strong. Sometimes, the top markets attract more than 60,000 visitors on a weekend!

WHERE TO SEE MORE

Gallery Smashing Colors in Tilburg, The Netherlands www.simonetheelen.nl/gallery

European ceramic markets: Austria: Gmunden.

Germany: Diessen, Freiburg, Frechen, Kandern, Oldenburg, Schwerin, Siegburg. The Netherlands:

Swalmen, Keramisto (our Woodstock) in Milsbeek.

United Kingdom: Hatfield (2019).