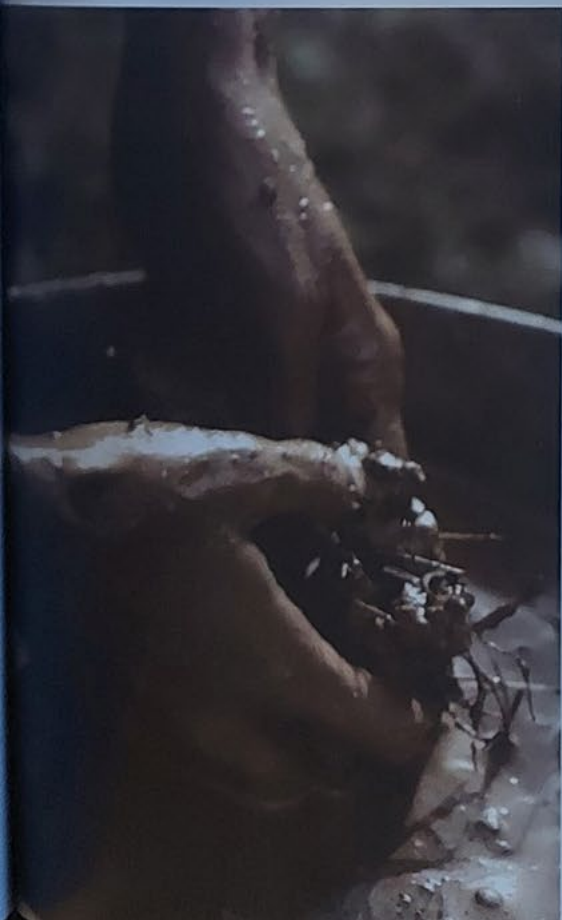


# RESEARCHING THE ELEMENTS

CATERINA ROMA



## Researching the elements

I've always believed that ceramics is a path for the passionate, for the researcher, for the lover of the immeasurable. Clay being such a humble material, it allows for infinite creative possibilities, and one will never know more than a very tiny bit of the whole discipline. It's like getting into a maze: every option, every choice takes you to a new range of possibilities, some take you nowhere, and many open yet another route.

I am deeply in love with the techniques that bring me closer to the natural elements, to the wild: digging the clay, making glazes out of natural materials and more especially, wood-firing. With the exception of porcelain, which appears to me at the other end: the ultimate refinement for the potter's hands.



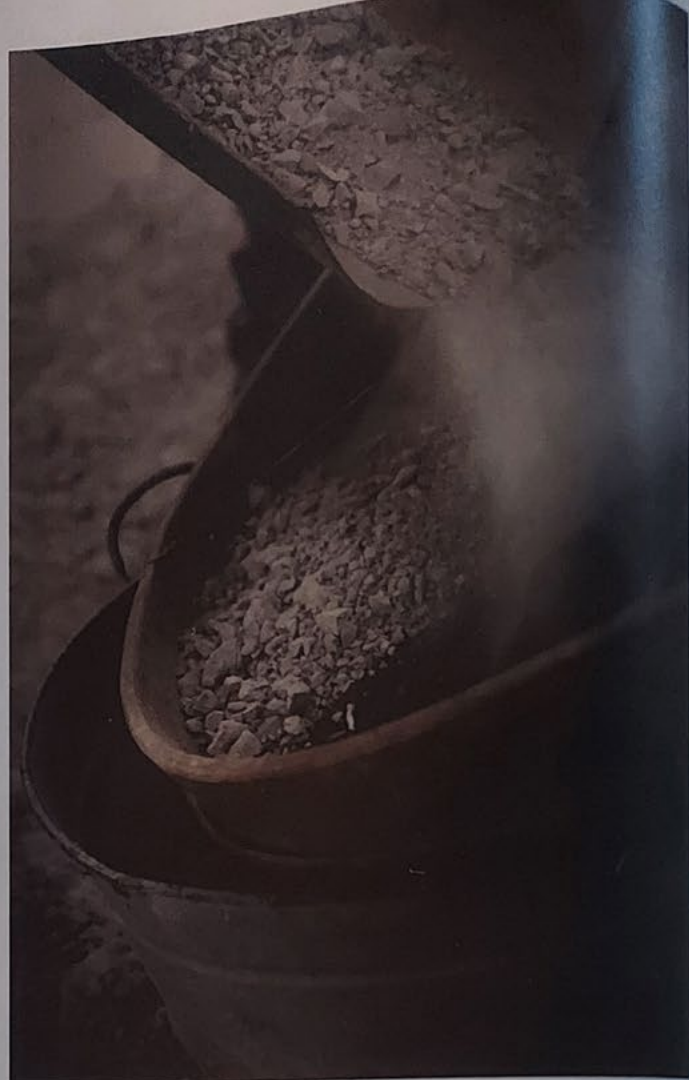
## Out of Nature

I generally work with clay I collect in the mountain, and I try as much as possible to make glazes out of the natural elements around the studio: soft rocks, low temperature clays, and more specially, plant ashes... I feel it is an amazing way to transform the surroundings into everyday pieces that create a deep connection with our natural world, or to pieces that are as close to art as nature can be. And I believe this can be felt by the person who uses the piece in his everyday life.

When working with raw clay one feels that it is still alive, it beats with the energy of the mountain and of the river, all in all, a piece and part of nature almost unprocessed. I usually sieve it, taking out the bigger stones and impurities, but I leave in the small mineral bits that melt and leave an imprint, making the works unique.

It's of course not all peaches and cream: it's not easy to find a clay that works for the purpose, and then lots of digging, soaking, sieving, mixing and drying. And then, test and error. It's not exactly the same clay every time I dig, and the clay doesn't behave the same way if collected from the wall of the mountain, or the floor, for example. I found clay crusts are the best, since the material is washed, purer, and thus more resistant to high temperatures.

When I started working with this specific material, I realized the creative process needed a particular approach. One usually makes a design, picks the most suitable materials, and executes the idea. But having to work with clays of such a strong character, the talent here doesn't really fall on deliberately obtaining a specific result but on getting out of the way and letting go. Adjusting oneself to what the material has to say. The resulting pieces have the mystery of things given birth to, a process that takes place without a rational intention of making something pretty, attractive, aesthetic, or whatever. What comes out is usually harmonic, with a refined but rough spirit. I feel my work is not so much inspired by nature, but nature itself.



## Wood-firing today

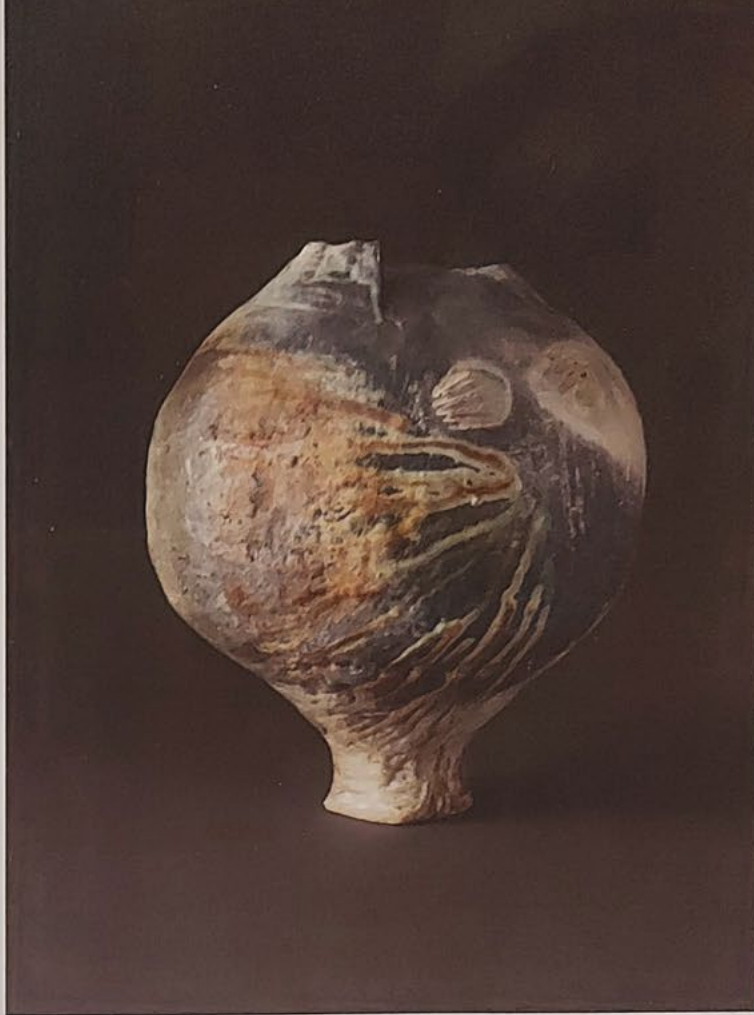
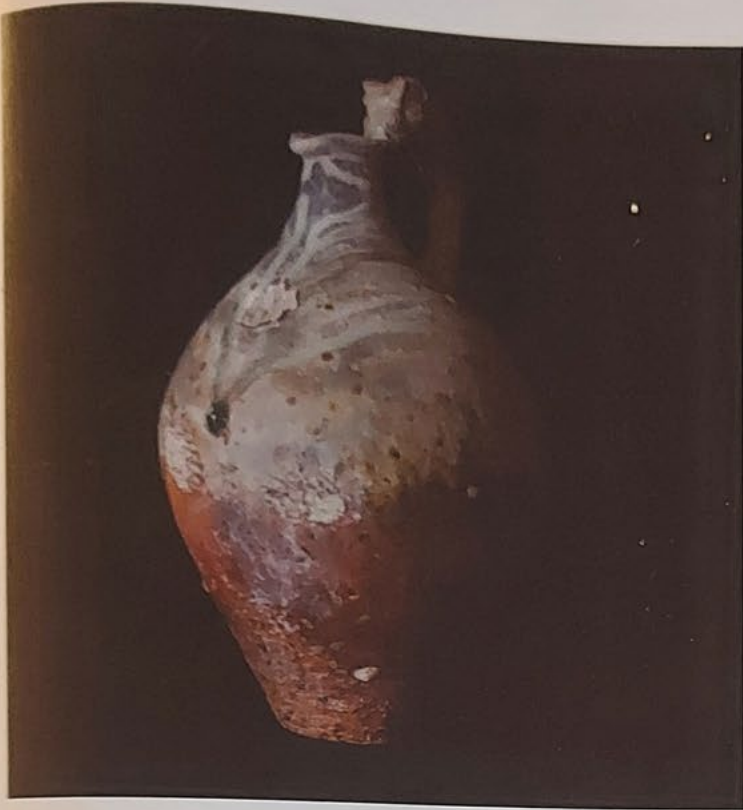
An extreme way to move ceramics even closer to the wild is wood-firing. The process of firing is unique, deep, moving, both from the maker and human point of view. Hitting such high temperatures is as much exciting as frightening. We humans cannot totally control natural elements, and I guess that's what attracts us: dealing with something mightier than ourselves. That's why so often wood-firers get lost in the passion of the firing. We would almost wood-fire for the pleasure of doing it. The process makes it easy to forget the goal of it all.

Not so long ago, when talking to an experienced potter, he stated that there was two types of potters: water-potters and fire-potters, the two powerful natural elements predominant in ceramics. That expression made me realized how much fire-potter I was: it is the transformation of fire that interests me, the piece itself gains its personality only after the firing.

Mine is a train-kiln, designed to have as much ash effects as possible: the modern (and sustainable) version of the anagama. The process is undeniably Japanese – or oriental, really, but I aim to make ceramics that have an authentic Mediterranean and personal expression: the green-blue tones given by the pine and beech wood from the forest around the kiln site are, in my aesthetic approach, deeply related to the green pines beside the sea, and the pot shapes bury their roots in the long ceramic tradition of the Mediterranean.

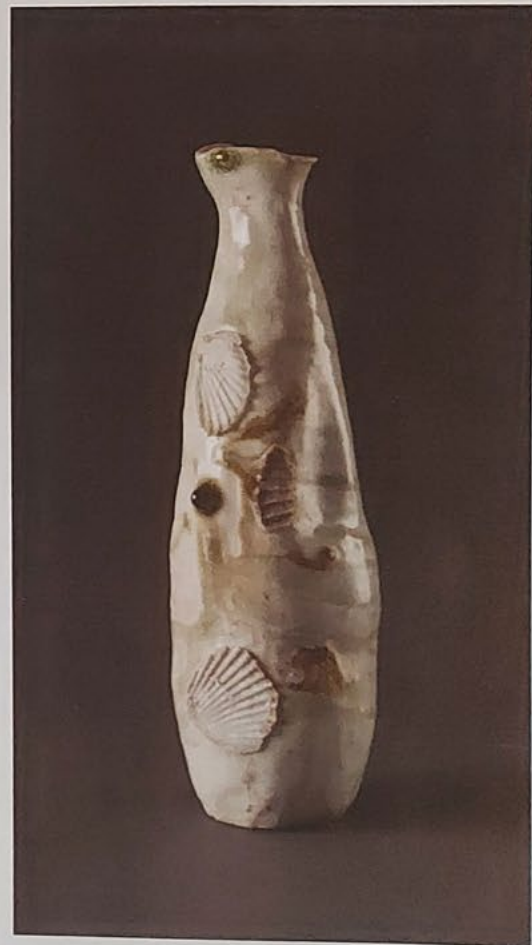
Still, I research a personal and contemporary approach to wood-firing: combining the work with other materials, especially iron, or working on the pieces after the firing. The wood-firing aesthetics are quite strong and distinguishable so, again, it is more a matter of adapting to it, and making it even more powerful.

ceramic gallery  
 After years of making tableware for high-end hotels and restaurants, life brought  
 me the possibility to set up a gallery. Selling utilitarian pieces together with wood-  
 and larger pots seem to me an amazing way of building a bridge between art and  
 everyday life, or in other words, helping to make art a way of living. I believe that  
 the sense of mystery of 'born pieces' is an open door to the transcendent though  
 everyday objects, taking people closer to nature and the essence of humanity.



Catalonia, and the area we live in, is a place with a long tradition of ceramics. There's plenty of clay available,  
 mostly red earthenware, and an active manufacturing and trading industry that has for years brushed aside  
 the hand-made small studios that could still work in a traditional style. The regard of the general public  
 towards ceramics is, thus, quite biased, and the work, misunderstood. The attitudes are changing these  
 days, with the appearance of makers and artists that use clay in innovative ways.

Having the gallery is a way of contributing to this, explaining how things are made, and building a whole  
 aesthetic around ceramics. Ca l'Humà is a large stone house, with gardens and terraces, just beside the  
 castle where Gala, the wife of the famous painter Salvador Dalí, settled her home, turned today into an  
 intimate museum. It is a new and exciting project, that includes the gallery itself and many ceramic-related  
 activities - workshops in the garden, rakú firings, making experiences for groups and families - focused on  
 promoting ceramics to the place it deserves in the craft and art world.



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