

'Reminiscence Bauhaus' firesculpture: an amazing performance by a duo of European master ceramists

The players: Reinhard Keitel (Germany) - Ariane Coissieux
(France) - Rest of Best (Germany)



The city of Weimar in Germany celebrated the centenary of the founding of the Bauhaus by organising an extraordinary and unforgettable event. As the city was the cradle of this movement that has since had an international influence on the arts, design and architecture,

the city council knew that they would not be disappointed after commissioning one of the German master ceramist Reinhard Keitel's public 'Firesculpture' performances—famous all over the world—as the grande finale of the centenary celebrations in Goetheplatz in the city centre on 7 April 2019.

Opening a kiln for ceramics nearly 3 metres high when the immense sculpture that it contains has reached 1200°C might seem incredible and perfectly mad. However, there is one ceramist in the world who has developed and continues to develop this technique, attaining a very high and spectacular level of skill.

Once again, Reinhard Keitel and I decided to pool our skills as Masters of Fire with international reputations. The performance was held before a crowd of spectators who had often come from far away and were now amazed and happy.

We helped each other from our first meeting at the 10th International Terra Cotta Symposium in Eskisehir in Turkey, where we were guest artists, each with the task of making a sculpture more than 2 metres tall to decorate the parks in the town. I was the first representative of France in the decade that the terra cotta symposium had been running. The fire and magic of the change that takes place when 1200 °C is reached has generated deep-seated fascination—a source of emotions and strong sensations—since I was a child. Yes, fire can be dangerous, devastating and a source of anxiety. But for ceramists it is creative, as long as it is mastered, first and foremost as regards safety. But it will never lose its share of freedom, even when face-to-face with the most experienced ceramists ever!

And when the cover of the kiln was raised by Ingo Tittl's crane set above it, the sculpture was revealed to the public in a crescendo of suspense. The world renowned 'Rest of Best' made a full contribution to the atmosphere of the evening with a sound and light performance.

All eyes were on this XXL scale birth that attracted eyes and body like a magnet. Its immaculate whiteness resulting from the high temperature lasted for only an instant before it switched to fire colour. We were in charge of the performance and had to concentrate closely on the gestures to be made as we had great responsibility but nevertheless felt strong sensations when we were very close to the giant radiating in the dark of the night.





In addition to this fascination with fire shared to a greater or lesser degree by a number of ceramists, involving very early on our various collaborative work, a taste for technical challenge, a desire to push to possibilities of clay ever further towards their limits at all stage of the making of a piece. Each in his or her own field and each in our manner. Reinhard and I share this kind of fever for technical innovation for aesthetic and functional purposes and in which effort, experimenting and failures finally give way to the poetry of an achievement ... until the next challenge comes along! Such a project cannot be carried out single-handed and working with this unique ceramist during all the stages was an immense pleasure—from the maquette to the grande finale. Incorporating the theme of the Bauhaus in a sculpture whose presence also corresponds to our sensitivity was a challenge in itself and we carried out much preparatory work before we got there. The last 1:5 scale maquette marked the start of the construction of

the big baby. Building such a sculpture is a hand-to-hand combat with clay, a strategic, carefully planned operation with scrupulous respect of the technique devised by Reinhard Keitel, while we both sought together in real time solutions for the questions raised by the project as a whole, as is done each time. Because it is not just a colossal sculpture but it must stand up to the thermal shock that comes when the kiln is opened. This is technical prowess, especially as the sculpture was in stoneware and would therefore be vitrified at the end of firing. This would make it less able to absorb tensions than if the piece were to conserve the porousness of raku clay.

The design and building of kilns yourself is a field that we share and our discussions of the subject are sometimes long—with our small disagreements leading to further innovation! This taste results from the need for kilns adapted to our respective creative work—Reinhard for his folly for monumental heat and me for my research on glazes, another unending quest that requires great precision.

The day before the event, the unfired sculpture was transported and placed on the floor of the kiln—a great step forward. It would not leave until it was consolidated by firing and therefore easier to transport.



The public started to arrive from everywhere early in the afternoon and in spite of the numerous questions asked I had to stay concentrated so that the firing was homogeneous and steady for the entire 2.5 metres of the sculpture. Suspense reached its peak at nightfall. From 5 pm onwards, music by the well-known group 'Rest of Best' accompanied the firing and our talks with four magnificent voices, sometimes a cappella and going as far as dancing on the spectators' tables! Their plays of light and sound with intimate connivance and perfect rhythm contributed to making the performance an inimitable show with precisely orchestrated dramatics with synergy between the musicians, the lighting engineer and the ceramists. Finally, at 9 pm the cover of the kiln was raised and the sculpture stood—glowing and majestic—radiant in its powerful and peaceful being. Moments of grace in which time stops—unforgettable.

After overnight preheating aimed at completing the drying of the colossus, we started the firing itself at 5 am. I have piloted all sorts of gas-fired kilns in my life as a ceramist and this one did not frighten me more than another. No problem – even if it was necessary to climb a ladder to handle the opening of the chimney—it wasn't the first time!



And the show was not over. We worked on making it more powerful. Like a volcano, the sculpture started to release eruptive flames and a firework display drawn from within towards the summit, amazing everybody, with all the technical aspect forgotten. Once the first amazement had passed the public went wild. Hypnotised shouts and whistles converged. Everything had been planned and everything worked precisely as expected—better even! This was where our childhood souls emerged, playing with fire and making a great show that was unique in the world.



Then came the calm after the apotheosis and gradually the colours of the Bauhaus appeared: a yellow triangle, a blue disc and a red square. All this celebrated the genius of the Bauhaus artists who are so alive and innovative and close to us in their perpetual experiments. The matter rejoiced while the lights continued to give a magic atmosphere to the whole of Goetheplatz, with the buildings and vegetation contributing to the picture.

Beyond the performance that is a work of art in itself, a remarkable feature of Reinhard Keitel's technical skill is that the sculptor made it a lasting object forming a second work that contains the memory of its spectacular and grandiose arrival.

Nobody knows who removed the barriers when a wave of spectators arrived at the sculpture itself once everything had quietened down. In fact, the barriers did not move although many people climbed over them as they could not resist the attraction of the still radiant colossus. I remember the stars in their eyes and the amazed smiles facing us... After all our efforts and months of preparation we accomplished our mission, that of creating unexpected emotions, making barriers disappear and sharing our happiness!

Ariane Coissieux



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English translation: Simon Barnard

The Artists

Reinhard Keitel Master Ceramist / Germany

As a master potter and ceramist, Reinhard Keitel masters a broad range of craft and art know-how. He learned the foundations when he studied civil engineering at the Bauhaus University in Weimar and during design studies at the Burg Giebichenstein Hochschule für Formgestaltung in Halle in Germany. For 40 years he has been professionally and passionately devoted to ceramics. Reinhard Keitel's pottery and sculptures have made him well known beyond the frontiers of Germany and he is regularly invited to international symposiums and festivals focused on ceramics. His works are displayed all over the world and are present in numerous collections and museums in Germany, the Czech Republic, Italy, Austria, Switzerland, Poland, Russia, Turkey, China, Thailand and elsewhere. Reinhard Keitel was the organiser and technical director of the international ceramic symposiums in Römhild, Germany, from 2008 to 2015.



Ariane Coissieux Master Ceramist Artist / France

Clay, rocks, fire ... Poetry.

As a professional ceramist for over 20 years, Ariane C is known for her unique, mainly large-scale, architectural ceramics, as well as her refined tea-ware and her unending quest for high fire glazes: Celadon, Yuteki Tenmoku, Kaki, copper reds, Jun ... "This is my humble tribute to thousands of generations of ceramists, the hands in the same clay, pushing the limits of the technique to transform raw rocks and ashes into poetry ..."

Her work has been exhibited world-wide and is part of numerous private and public collections: from Taiwan to the USA, Turkey, Singapore, Thailand, China, Paris, Brussels and throughout Europe, as well as the Forbidden City, Beijing...

Ariane is also invited for lectures, symposiums and workshops around the world, and is leader of the professional ceramics school founded by her father 40 years ago, teaching techniques and sharing cultures of this wonderful way of finding joy every day: being a ceramist!



Rest Of Best

The internationally famed quartet 'Rest of Best' from Weimar in Germany consists of talented musicians whose performances are captivating. From a cappella singing to a rock 'n' roll sound and light show, Rest of Best is one of the most versatile and popular groups in Germany. Their most noteworthy performances include events at the last nine summer and winter Olympic Games and numerous television appearances during galas and operas. Their public is delighted at company events or private occasions for eminent personalities. The four renowned musicians have given concerts in China, Italy, Japan, the United States, France, Canada, Russia, Great Britain, Switzerland, Spain, etc.

Since 2012 they have performed regularly with Reinhard Keitel for firesculptures for which they provide breathtaking son et lumière events.

