

Reality

An investigative work about interaction between ceramic art works and photographs

Summary

This artistic development project is a study around the relation and the perception of different types of ceramic art works and photographic representations in a spatial context.

The project was presented in two different venues, *Gallery NEC* in *Paris* and *Nääs Konsthantverk* at *Nääs*. A significant outcome from the shows was that viewers were puzzled by the combination of the two different mediums and by the smoothness of the ceramic surface, which they couldn't tell by only looking at them. The experience of these perceptual differences caught them with evident surprise and they were eager to share the experience, it kind of sharpened their attention.

Background

The starting point of this project actually begins at the end of a previous one, *Förlopp* (<https://gupea.ub.gu.se/handle/2077/41360>), and more precisely when I started to photograph the outcome of it. Taking photographs of my work has always been part of my practice as documentation and as a mean of distribution. Up to now I never considered them under any other aspect. At the end of *Förlopp* I looked at the photographs alongside the ceramic work and I engaged myself in how I perceived the two. There was something in the photographs that attracted me much more than the images of previous works. The fact that the ceramic pieces were two dimensional and mostly rectangular, I discovered their relation to the photographs to appear much closer and stronger compared to those which represented three dimensional objects. It is from this point the project starts and evolves around how I could work with the perception of my ceramic work and photographs of it. During the project I was invited to have a show at *Gallery NEC* in Paris (<https://galerienec.com/artists/renata-francescon/>) and I thought it would be a good opportunity to investigate how ceramics and photos of the ceramics could interact.

What interested me and what I found intriguing was the sense of nearness that the photographic picture transmits, and the not questioning the existence of the thing seen in the photographs, which is so particular for this medium. Our perceiving the world through the eyes embraces far more than what we see in photographic images but never the less we don't question what is depicted in the photograph not to be real due to photographs transparency. It is as if we are seeing through them. When we look at a photograph, we directly see the objects and the events in it and the image being mechanically mediated shows what was actually there. The camera has extended our way of seeing and it also gives us the possibility to see into the past. (Walton, 2010)

Work

I started to take pictures in the studio, both details that could show were my interest in the ceramic work is based, and of the work in full scale with some surrounding. At this moment taking photographs of the wall pieces was closely connected to the aim of showing them in a space that really got me into different perceptions of the work depending on the viewpoint. I took both frontal

pictures and side views but that did not really show the work in its complexity, they did not tell how the light and the shadows changed while walking along them. The difficulties appeared differently while photographing the three-dimensional work. Here I had to take in consideration a back, a front, an up, a down and an inside and at the same time also render the smoothness and the softness of the material which I had been working with and was a central part of the work in clay. For the show I ended up with the selection of a frontal photo of one of the wall pieces and hung it on the wall nearby the actual ceramic piece. What I noticed was that people coming in to the gallery was rather puzzled by being exposed at the same time to both the photographs and the ceramic works as several people asked me if the photo and the ceramic work hanging beside one another were actually the same. This question may have occurred because the picture didn't reveal all the information perceived while experiencing the work in the room, such as the changes of colours and the play of the shadows.

The show in *Paris* included even three-dimensional works as cylinders in different formats and colours with soft and smooth surfaces. I chose to show these pieces together with the photo of one of them seen from above. What the photographs didn't tell, and neither did the cylinder in real, was the smoothness of their surface which one could discover only by touching them. Most visitors were surprised by this perceptual difference and were eager to share their surprise. I've been working with this cylindrical form in several occasions, and with long time span between the periods, but one thing that I've noticed every time I show them is the will of the viewer to touch and to feel what is seen. To underline this, I would like to quote *Juhani Pallasmaa* (2012):

Touch is the sensory mode which integrates our experience of the world and ourselves Even visual perceptions are fused and integrated into the haptic continuum of the self; my body remembers who I am and how I am located the world.

The project proceeded with a show at *Nääs Konsthantverk* (<http://www.naaskonsthantverk.se/arkiv/2018/renatafrancescon.php>), but this time with a different approach to the photos and the cylindrical forms. Alongside with the feeling of smoothness and softness I wanted to show them as containers of space both as ceramic pieces but also through the photographs by just showing parts of them in different lightning and from several angles.

For this show the photographs of the cylindrical forms were printed on a matt paper so that the perception of their surface was closer to the ceramic structure. A different approach was also to print them in a quite big format both to emphasize their spatial qualities, but also to get images which revealed more than was possible to see at a first glance in the real. The big format enhanced details both of the clay itself but did also tell about the way these cylinders were made.

As in *Paris* so even at *Nääs* questions about the photos actually being of the exposed objects aroused and another common thing was the surprise showed by visitors in sensing the smoothness of the cylindrical forms.

The organisation of the space at *Nääs* was an attempt to have the cylindrical forms as much as possible connected to the photographs so the visitor could sense the connection between them. The setting of the wall pieces and the photos was slightly different: in *Paris* they were very close to each

other and this I would say enhanced their connection and at Nääs the larger distance between them weakened this link.

Another difference between the shows was the presence of photos in both shiny and matt paper at Nääs which pointed out their materiality and how different the perception of the images was depending on the paper's quality. The shiny mounted on an alumina board and the matt hanging freely on the wall were telling different stories and also engaged the visitors in different ways: with the shiny some tried to look on the back to discover something hidden and the big matt photos reminded them of drawings or paintings.

Bibliography

Pallasmaa, J. (1996 [2016]). *The Eyes of the Skin. Architecture and the Senses*. Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

Walton, K.L. (2008 [2010]). *Transparent Pictures: On the Nature of Photographic Realism*. In *Photography and Philosophy. Essays on the Pencil of Nature*, S. Walden (Ed.) US: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.