

Yellow

Heidi Bjørgan



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This catalogue was published by Monique Deul Consultancy on the occasion of *Yellow*, a solo exhibition of work by Heidi Bjørgan, presented by Taste Contemporary at Rue Abraham Constantin 6, 1206 Geneva, Switzerland

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08 September – 19 November 2022



Foreword

I first met Heidi Bjørgan in 2017 after being introduced by Norwegian curator and writer, Jorunn Veiteberg. I was immediately drawn to her cast vases with their wildly protruding forms, bold objects that looked as if they had imploded in the kiln, and unorthodox glazes frequently found on her brightly coloured wall installations.

Much of Heidi's artwork originates from her exploration of the past, from new perspectives. Her quirky taste and keen wit often seem to inform what works as a renewable form or object. It is not surprising to learn that she cites George Ohr as a major influence. Like Ohr, Heidi is drawn to, and accepting of, a continuous cycle of experimentation, her many trials with glazes and multiple firings the result of discipline and patience, paired with a playful curiosity.

There is a duality present in Heidi's pieces that can be discomfiting but also soothing. They are abstract but also oddly recognizable. At first glance they seem deceptively soft but are hard; deformed yet consummate. In a traditional form, they are often set in a position of precarious collapse, on the threshold of a tenuous transformation.

As she explores shared pasts, she references forms and objects that make up the discarded remnants of our everyday lives. From this perspective we can grasp why her pieces captivate – they reel us in using the seductive magnetism of the familiar.

Alongside her studio work, it is not surprising that Heidi Bjørgan is also garnering attention as a successful curator of immersive, thought-provoking art installations. Her concurrent paths in making, interpreting, presenting, and collaborating are testament to her unique talent. She is someone who everyday seems not only willing, but compelled to explore a fresh perspective. I'm very happy and proud to be part of her journey.

Monique Deul, Founder & Director,
Taste Contemporary





Metamorphosis; material, heat and form

Alison Britton

Heidi Bjørgan is indefatigable – she makes a lot of work, through slip casting, and transforms it in glaze firings that subject the pieces to the point of near collapse. The forms are glazed with intense and often sombre colours, but also stony whites. The glazes may suggest volcanic eruptions, or glossy brilliance. In recent exhibitions her smaller works have been displayed filling an entire wall, poised on ceramic brackets she has made, often in bright yellow, that echo the acanthus leaf of classical columns.

She writes I actually enjoy having a 'messy' work space where objects lie around everywhere. These are either objects I collect or make myself. I always work on several projects at the same time and the 'mess' in my studio is my sketchbook. The 'mess' gives me inspiration and energy. I have a strong sympathy with these words – mess leading to new ideas – and we are lucky if we have the studio space for mess to thrive.

Heidi Bjørgan has a highly developed sense of touch and form, as well as a strong ambition to make and to show her work to people. She has a deep interest in researching materials, and also in ideas about things that have developed through ceramic history. The 'mess' she works in suggests to me both playfulness and a capacity to conceive her ideas three dimensionally; a vivid tactile and visual imagination. She is deeply involved in glaze exploration, tending towards glassy fluid earthenware glazes, dingy greens, browns and glorious yellows (historically a hard colour to achieve), that transform her surfaces into something light hearted and celebratory. Yellow is the overriding colour in her new exhibition, and now the gallery, and its shelves and tall supports like balustrades, are all painted to her chosen shade of yellow.

My first encounter with Heidi and her work was in the *Thing Tang Trash* exhibition and conference in 2012 in Bergen, that was part of the art historian Jorunn Veiteberg's research project, for which Heidi curated a large exhibition in Bergen's Norwegian Museum of Decorative Arts. Heidi wrote in the catalogue 'While studio ceramics used to be the antithesis of industrial production, a new kind of art and design has now emerged in which the clear-cut oppositions between machine/craft; mass-production/unique objects; and industry/art no longer apply in the same way. The debris left over in abandoned factories can serve as raw material for new artistic statements. The same applies to mass-produced objects, whether intact or broken, new or well-used, and to techniques and materials from industrial production that were previously taboo in studio or art ceramics.'

On Heidi's website she says 'I am a ceramicist and I collect overlooked objects. I give these forms a second chance in a new guise, in a new context, and sometimes I even add a new function.'

And she says of her new work '...when I was younger, I used to search through rubbish to maybe find treasures. Skips were often placed outside houses being renovated, or demolished. One day I found a plastic lampshade there. This form has since "pursued" me and become a signature form.' What starts as a stylishly generous lampshade form, bulbous and with a double curve that is slightly body-like, (as are many pots) is slumped and transformed through her casting and firing processes. Collapsing forms are increasingly a feature of Bjørgan's works, though most of them still survive as pots. She is attracted to the idea of the power of great heat, and the metamorphosis that it can bring.

This connects her to the great oddball of ceramic history, cherished by Heidi and many in the current ceramic scene, though not appreciated in his life time. This is the mid-western American George Ohr, who lived from 1857 to 1918 in Biloxi Mississippi, and made dark playful pots that no one in the locality wanted to buy. He is now seen as an icon of contemporary collecting.



Veiteberg wrote this in an essay for one of Heidi's exhibition catalogues in 2016:

'Ohr's vases often look like they melted in the kiln, the pots have edges that fold and curl. The metallic and shiny glazes shocked his contemporaries. Like Ohr, Bjørgan challenges conceptions about what good craft is by 'erasing' traces of what she learned when studying ceramics. Through being banged and tossed about, the forms thrown on a potter's wheel become deformed, and she mixes glazes that in theory cannot be mixed. A broken fragment from one work can become part of another. In this way, a tension emerges, between the constructive and the destructive, the beautiful and the ugly.'

I have picked out a few of Heidi's new pieces to focus on from this new series. Heidi has chosen to number them instead of titling them, to keep our imagination unconstrained, perhaps. I rather wish she had attached titles to her forms, not anonymous code-numbers, but she may want us to find our own definitions of these truly abstract shapes. For me, *Object 1206* is particularly striking, with a yellow/brown overall colour and runs of olive-green glaze, and little flakes of a white, drier, clay slip surface shrinking away from the glassy glaze, like old paintwork curling on a wall.

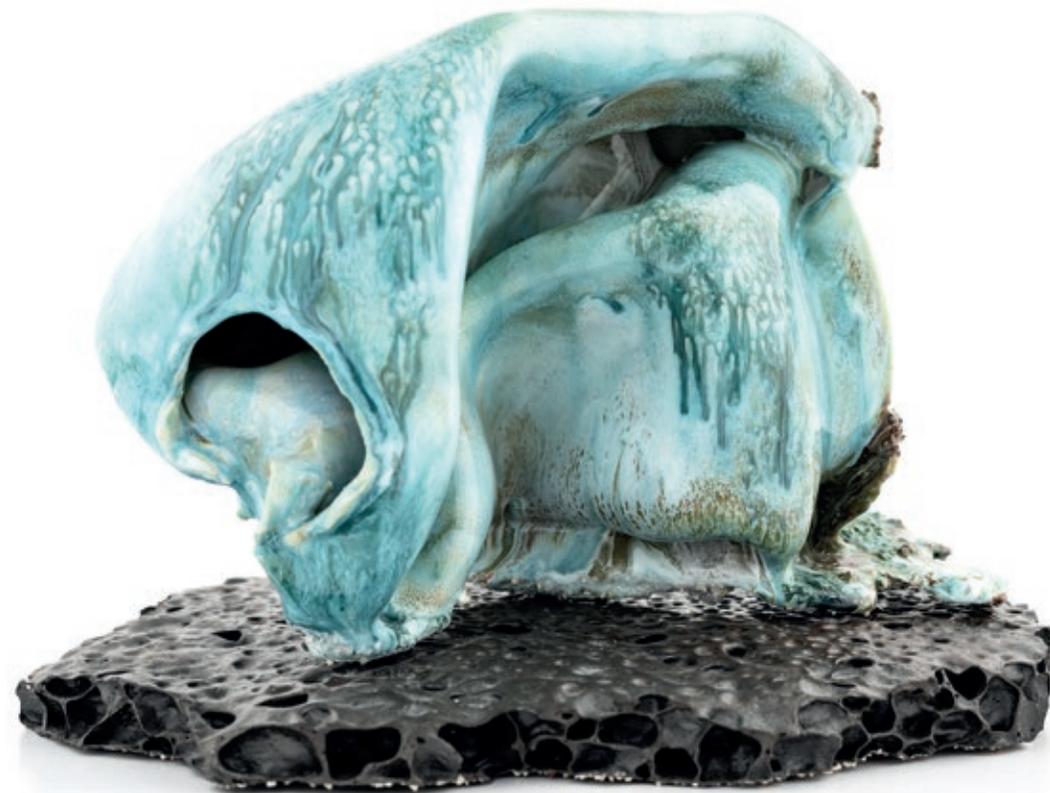
It is not much collapsed, we can see the double curve of the form, like a pear, reflecting a human body (as so many pots through history have), and it sits on a narrow foot ring.

One or two pieces sit on wooden discs. One such horizontal form, *Object 1210*, has a furry collar, another humanising trope. The bottle is not the only form being manipulated in this new group of work. *Object 1202* I see as a beautifully satirised Moon Jar, sagging like a rubber hot water bottle. Most potters working with it now, love it for its near-perfect globular form. The moon jar has been a big focus for a number of ceramic contemporaries. Its origin was just a utilitarian historic Korean pickle jar; and the one that Bernard Leach famously gave to Lucy Rie now sits in the British Museum.

The bright yellow room has a theatrical and vibrant atmosphere surrounding the cluster of upright wooden stands. Heidi's playful permutations of her slip cast forms; where we see them tipped, standing, lying down, or crumpled and transformed, imply a kind of choreographed catastrophe, through which a particular beauty and stillness is achieved.



Object 1205, 2022
Stoneware
20H x 26W x 21D cm



Object 1202, 2022
Stoneware
30H x 26W x 29D cm



Object 1209, 2022
Stoneware and Earthenware
35H x 32W x 23D cm





Object 1210, 2022
Stoneware and Earthenware
30H x 26W x 29D cm



Object 5503, 2022
Porcelain
42H x 25W x 32D cm



Object 1206, 2022
Stoneware
44H x 23W x 28D cm



Object 1200, 2022
Porcelain and Stoneware
33H x 36W x 28D cm





'I am a ceramicist and I collect overlooked objects. I give these forms a second chance in a new guise, in a new context and sometimes I even add a new function.

As a maker my aim is through sampling and remaking to explore the aesthetic potential of the shapes of these objects.'
Heidi Bjørgan

Heidi Bjørgan

Norway b. 1970

Education

- 2008 – 2010 Bergen Academy of Art and Design, Norway [Creative Curating]
- 2000 – 2001 Konstfack University College of Arts, Crafts and Design, Stockholm
- 1998 – 2000 Bergen Academy of Art and Design, Norway [Masters]
- 1993 – 1996 Bergen Academy of Art and Design, Norway [BA]

Selected Public Collections

- 2021 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway
Jugendstilsenteret og KUBE, Norway
The National Museum, Norway
Sogn og Fjordane Art Museum, Norway
KODE Bergen Art Museum, Bergen, Norway
The Museum of Decorative Arts, Trondheim, Norway
Sørlandets Art Museum, Norway
- 2020 Trondheim Kunstmuseum, Norway
KODE Bergen Art Museum, Bergen, Norway
The Museum of Decorative Arts, Trondheim, Norway
The National Museum, Norway
Bergen Municipality, Norway

- 2019 SKMU – Sørlandets Kunstmuseum, Kristiansand, Norway
- 2018 KODE Bergen Art Museum, Bergen, Norway
- 2017 The National Museum, Norway
- 2016 KODE Bergen Art Museum, Bergen, Norway
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway
The Museum of Decorative Arts, Trondheim, Norway
- 2015 The National Museum/The Museum of Decorative Arts, Oslo, Norway
The Museum of Decorative Arts, Trondheim, Norway
- 2014 KODE Bergen Art Museum, Bergen, Norway
- 2013 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway
- 2012 Victoria & Albert Museum, London
- 2010 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway
- 2007 KODE Bergen Art Museum, Bergen, Norway
The National Museum/The Museum of Decorative Arts, Oslo, Norway
The Museum of Decorative Arts, Trondheim, Norway
- 2004 KODE Bergen Art Museum, Art Group Temp, Norway
Arts Council, Art Group Temp, Norway
Private collections in New York, Beijing, Shanghai, London, Genève, Copenhagen and Stockholm

Selected Exhibitions | Solo

- 2022 *Yellow*, Taste Contemporary, Genève, Switzerland
Kunstbanken – Hedmark Kunstsenter, Norway
- 2021 Oppland Kunstsenter, Norway
Nitija Center for Contemporary Art, Norway
Sogn og Fjordane Art Museum, Førde, Norway
- 2020 Tag Team Studio, Bergen, Norway
The Candy Factory, Trondheim, Norway
- 2019 Tjörnedala Konsthall, Sweden
- 2017 Kunstnerforbundet, Oslo, Norway
Blås & Knåda, Sweden
- 2016 The Museum of Decorative Arts, Trondheim, Norway
- 2015 Gallery Format Oslo, Norway
- 2009 Porsgrunn kommune,
– 2011 *The green dog and others stories*
- 2007 Gallery Format Oslo, Norway
- 2004 Visningsrommet, USF, Bergen, Norway
- 2003 Hordaland Art Center, Bergen, Norway

Selected Exhibitions | Group

- 2022 *Cast Aside: Discarding the Domestic and the Everyday*, presented by Taste Contemporary, La Fonderie Kugler, Geneva, Switzerland
«MIGRATION(S)», Musée Ariana, Genève, Switzerland
Gustavsberg Porselain Museum, Sweden
Kunsthall Grenland, Norway
CLAY Museum of Ceramic Art, Denmark

- 2021 *Odd and Even – A Collection*, Maison Louise Carré, Paris, France [presented by Taste Contemporary]
Hå gamle Prestegard, Norway
Årsutstillingen – The Annual Exhibition, Sørlandets Art Museum, Norway
First the good news, KODE – Bergen Art Museum, Bergen, Norway
- 2020 artgenève [represented by Taste Contemporary], Geneva, Switzerland
The Candy Factory, Trondheim, Norway
London Art Fair [represented by The Cynthia Corbett Gallery], London, UK
- 2019 *Beau-laid* [presented by Taste Contemporary and Rear Window], London, UK
artgenève [represented by Taste Contemporary], Geneva, Switzerland
- 2018 Nordic Craft and Design, Manchester Art Gallery, UK
Converging Bodies, Patrick Parrish, New York, USA
Kunsthåndverk
Dialogues in Time, TRESOR at Wildt'sche Haus, Basel, Switzerland
Material Consequences, Kunstgarasjen, Bergen, Norway
TÊTE-À-TÊTE, Gallery Kraft, [invited artist], Norway
Allrum, Blås & Knåda, Stockholm, Sweden
artgenève [represented by Taste Contemporary], Geneva, Switzerland

- 2017 *Material Consequences*,
Wu Changshuo Museum,
Shanghai, China
Perception of Softness,
Køppe Contemporary Object,
Copenhagen, Denmark
To live with Art, Kunstgarasjen,
Bergen, Norway
PRESENT, Bomuldsfabriken
Art Hall, Norway
COLLECT, Saatchi Gallery, London, UK
Greenlight, Grenland Art Hall
VASE, Farmleigh Gallery,
Dublin, Ireland
- 2016 *Pottery is back*,
Kunstnerforbundet, Oslo, Norway
Punk Ø – Love of the real,
Galleri F 15, Norway
INSPIRED II, Scandinavian
Center, Jingdezhen, China
Wangi Art Center / Dehua, China
Porcelain Museum, Norway
- 2015 Nada Art Fair, New York, USA
Zwinger und ich, Bomuldsfabriken
Art Hall, Norway
Collision, Entree, Norway
- 2014 European Ceramic Context,
Bornholm Art Museum, Denmark
The Ceramic Object, Gallery
Format, Oslo, Norway
- 2013 COLLECT, Saatchi Gallery, London, UK
- 2012 *The State of Things*,
Artendal Gallery, Norway
COLLECT, Saatchi Gallery, London, UK
Slipcasting – Cast in Form, The Galerie
Handwerk, Munich, Germany
- 2011 *Bergen Timeline 2011*, Gallery
Format, Bergen, Norway

- Size Matters*, KODE Bergen
Art Museum, Bergen, Norway
New Nordic Narratives, Denmark
Keramikkmuseum-Grimmerhus
Currency – Thinkthank,
Gallery Format, Oslo, Norway
Currency – Thinkthank,
Internationale Handwerksmesse
München, Germany
Currency – Thinkthank, Galleri
Officinet, Copenhagen, Denmark
- 2010 *Currency – Thinkthank*, Kammerhof
Museen Gmund, Austria
Le Cru et le Cuit, Galerie Favardin
& de Verneui, Paris, France
Gallery F 15, Artgroup Temp, Norway
EUnique, Karlsruhe, Germany
COLLECT, Saatchi Gallery, London, UK
- 2008 *Tendenser*, Galleri F 15, Norway
- 2007 *Triennalen 2007*, The National
Museum/The Museum of Decorative
Arts, Oslo, Norway
- 2006 *Tingenes tilstand*, The National
Museum, Oslo, Norway,
Art Group Temp

Selected Awards

- 2015 – 2025 The National Grant
for Artists
- 2012 – 2014 The National Grant
for Artists
- 2011 Bergen County, Culture Grant
- 2010 Bergen County, Artist Grant
- 2008 The National Grant
for Young Artists

Selected Scholarships

- 2010 Honourable Mention: World Craft
Council – Europe at EUnique



Acknowledgements

Thank you to Alison Britton for her thoughtful reflections on the work and career to date of Heidi Bjørgan. Thank you to Heidi for allowing me to be part of your journey and to Jorunn Veiteberg for making that all important first introduction.

Thank you, as always, to Matthew Tolliss and last, but certainly not least, thank you to Frances McDonald.

Photography

All images by Thor Brødreskift excepting Page 02, 03 and 31 images by artist
Page 26 image by Dorte Krogh.



