

Cerámica Sonriente



Andrey Bartenev

Agost cuenta con una larga tradición artesana que se remonta a la Edad Media. El desarrollo de una intensa actividad económica basada tanto en la alfarería utilitaria como en la fabricación de materiales para la construcción, ha permitido la formación de un importante patrimonio ligado a la cerámica.

No en vano el principal producto cultural de Agost es el Museu de Cantereria, ubicado en una antigua fábrica de alfarería de principios del siglo XX. Desde que inició su andadura en 1981 por el impulso de su fundadora Ilse Schütz, ha sido un lugar de encuentro para la alfarería tradicional y la cerámica contemporánea. Las líneas maestras de actuación desde entonces han sido la difusión de la rica tradición artesana local, así como de las obras de incipientes ceramistas y consagrados artistas.

La exposición "Cerámica sonriente" es una oportunidad extraordinaria para fundir en un mismo espacio las obras elaboradas artesanalmente por Alfarería La Navà, Premio Nacional de Cerámica 2018 en la categoría de "Cerámica tradicional", con el arte de Andrey Bartenev, un artista de proyección internacional. Bartenev ha conseguido reinventar las formas tradicionales de la alfarería local, dotándolas de una nueva personalidad, creando un universo que invita al espectador a disfrutar de la belleza de las formas geométricas, así como de algo tan sencillo y bello como es la sonrisa.

La exposición "Cerámica sonriente" ha sido posible gracias a la colaboración inestimable de Alfarería La Navà, así como a la predisposición y facilidades brindadas por el propio Andrey Bartenev y su representante, Alexander Khromov, quienes apostaron desde un primer momento por la celebración de la muestra en el Museu de Cantereria.

Catálogo exposición "Cerámica sonriente".

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If one is to believe the statement that coincidences do not occur by chance, then they were destined to meet. The Russian artist Andrey Bartenev, who for more than a quarter of a century has created works on the topic of joy, and the masters of the La Nava ceramic factory, located in the Spanish city of Agost. This meeting occurred two years ago. Alexander Khromov, who has collaborated with the artist for many years and studies traditional Spanish crafts, proposed the idea and organised a cooperative project that culminated in the opening of the "Ceramic Smile" exhibition in the Pottery Museum of Agost.

Agost is a town in Valencia, located a few kilometres from Alicante, a place inhabited in ancient times by Iberians, followed by Romans and in the Middle Ages, firstly marked by the footprint of Islam, who built a castle on the hilltop above the city. The foundations and fragments of its outer wall are preserved to this day. From the hill a beautiful view opens onto the city. In the 13th century Agost belonged for several years to the crown of Castile, and then at the beginning of the 14th century was incorporated into the kingdom of Valencia. It received municipal autonomy at the end of the 17th century. In the centre of the picturesque old town is the attention-catching parish church of Saint Peter Apostle, built in the 16th century and extended in the 18th century.

The area surrounding Agost is rich in clay deposits, which lead to its development as a centre of ceramics. Today many of the old workshops have been closed, but eight ceramic manufacturers still operate, six of which still produce traditional products. Due to its remoteness from the coast, the city has retained its distinct local identity.

The Pottery Museum plays an important role in the life of Agost. The foundation of its collection consists of exhibits gathered by the German ethnologist Ilse Schütz. In 1979, Schütz, then a professor of mathematics in Hamburg, visited Agost during a vacation in Alicante. She visited the old Torregrosa factory and subsequently set up a private museum there. She studied the history of ceramic production and was a private collector, and served as director of the Museum between 1981 and 2000. The city has acknowledged her contribution to the preservation and development of pottery culture, assigning her the title of Daughter of Agost in 2011.

The museum actively collaborates with the Art Schools of the Valencian Region, and the University of Alicante. These projects entails in-depth research into traditional society, devoted to the study and preservation of pottery culture, as well as the reinterpretation of traditional forms from contemporary ceramics.

Located on the territory of an early 20th century ceramic factory, the museum allows visitors to view a real Arabian kiln. The exhibits depict the entire production process, from the collection of clay in nearby quarries to firing in wood-burning stoves. An exhibition displays a collection of excellent handmade pottery, presented to the museum by city residents.

The craft that existed in Agost became art long ago. The La Navà factory manufactures authentic vessels and crockery using traditional techniques. This kind of pottery is referred to as 'literary',

because similar dishes were used by the heroes of Cervantes and Lope de Vega's works. La Navà has been famous since the 18th century for the production of porous white clay jugs that serve as water flasks. Thanks to their design and the anti-bacterial properties of white clay, the water in these jugs always remained cool and clean. La Nava stands guard over tradition: today there are no problems with cooling and disinfecting water, but there is a need to preserve a unique story and to prevent globalisation from destroying the romance of this place. La Navà is open to cooperation with contemporary artists, a result of which is Andrey Bartenev's Spanish series of vase-objects. The head of the factory, Luis Vicedo, showed great interest in this cooperation.

After Andrey Bartenev had developed the sketches of the forms, La Navà's masters fashioned vases from the same porous white clay. After firing came the most exciting stage. In Andrey Bartenev's hands the mute abstract forms came to life in different guises. Murals appeared on some of the vases, thanks to which they acquired the features of male or female faces with prototypes. These vase-portraits are in a happy, cheerful mood. Looking at the faces, which are easily and freely drawn in an improvised manner, it is impossible not to recall the works of Pablo Picasso, although other artists also painted porcelain heads before him. It is safe to say that this topic was opened by the Florentine Luca della Robbia, and continued by the unforgettable Natalia Danko, who created a cup in the shape of a woman's head. What is so novel and unusual about Bartenev's works? The main distinguishing feature of his objects is that they strive for dialogue. For them, all of the exhibition's visitors are participants in a fun game of peek-a-boo. With such a vase-sculpture in the house it would never be boring. They are like silent psychotherapists, always cheering you up and creating a good mood. Another group of vases are painted with cheerful faces that wink coquettishly with schematic eyes in the form of commas. They cause feelings of happiness and resemble animated cartoon characters from the middle of the last century.

Several spherical shapes, interconnected in characteristic Bartenev style, turn into Edward Uspensky's fairy tale character, Cheburashka, quite literally standing on its ears. In this manner, traditional Spanish 'literary' ceramics are livened up with a cheerful Russian-themed connotation.

A separate part of the series features objects with abstract paintings. Bartenev's combination of black and white is always filled with special meaning. For a man whose childhood was spent in the snows of Norilsk, white is a constant symbol of winter and cold. The artist has staged several performances on this subject. The black patterns on white vases vaguely resemble figures, characters from Andrey Bartenev's performance, "The Snow Queen". The vases, which all differ greatly in terms of their form and the system of painting applied, were created by an artist who perceives any object as a volume in space, like a static figure that can come to life at any instant. Each of Bartenev's vases is a potential Galatea.

Valentina Belyaeva

Museo Estatal Ruso, San Petersburgo































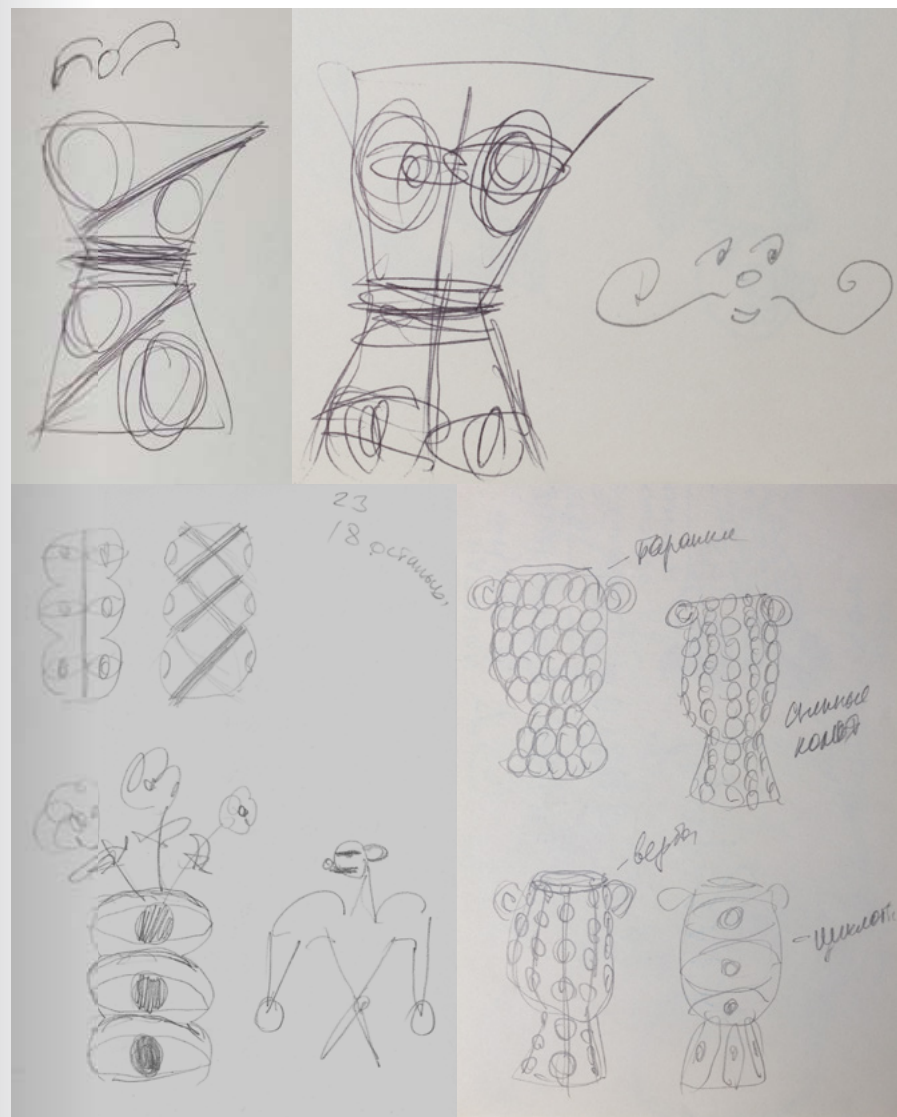














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