

ARCHETYPAL CERAMICS

Clay seems quintessentially the stuff of our world. It is soft malleable matter. It has weight and density. It is. Then it enters the fire. In this ethereal element, change happens. Clay becomes other, its molecules vibrating, accelerating faster and faster until transformation takes place and the familiar mud of the Earth releases its chemical water and becomes a dense hard rock-like material.

In the hands of Keka Ruiz Tagle clay becomes just such a substance of transformation. The figures that she creates belong. And yet do not just inhabit our quotidian existence but lie on a continuum; they live in the everyday but drag us into another mode of being where they inhabit a liminal world – the “betwixt and between” of our world and another. This is also the space inhabited by the “Magic Realist” novelists; when I first encountered her work, I was taken back to my first astonished encounter with the House of Spirits, by her fellow Chilean, Isabel Allende. In both of their work the past of other lives seems near; the ancestors are not distant, but here, very close to hand. Keka speaks of the figures as being shamanic; of course, as a creator she, herself, also adopts the mantle of the shaman – the mediator/magician, bringing to this world iconic images from a real/imagined past. She speaks of the possibility of her own Inca ancestry, suggesting that there is a contact to a primordial, more intuitive personal lineage. As an artist she looks to the pre-Columbian, Inca, past when a non-Christian culture stretched throughout the Andean coastal region, when different modes of knowledge and understanding prevailed. She describes the work as giving form to ideas that appear in her imagination. The images are archetypal – the Earth Mother goddess, whom the mythological scholar, Joseph Campbell, interprets as both “womb and tomb” – encapsulating life and death.

These opposites are further developed in Keka’s work in images created to emblematicize the forces that connect Earth and Sky. In this latter work the materials of ceramics are supplemented by their siliceous complementary – glass – whose transparency balances the opaque density of clay things. Thus, in this exhibition we see a drawing open of the veil, revealing through a universal archetypal iconography, which at the same time obscures the mystery of Being.

Dr. David Jones

Elected representative for the UK, Ireland and Benelux countries on the global Council of the International Academy of Ceramics, NGO in official partnership with UNESCO