

ceramics  
HANDBOOK

# Wall Pieces



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*Chapter One by Anne Mercedes*

## Chapter 1

# Wall pieces from past to present

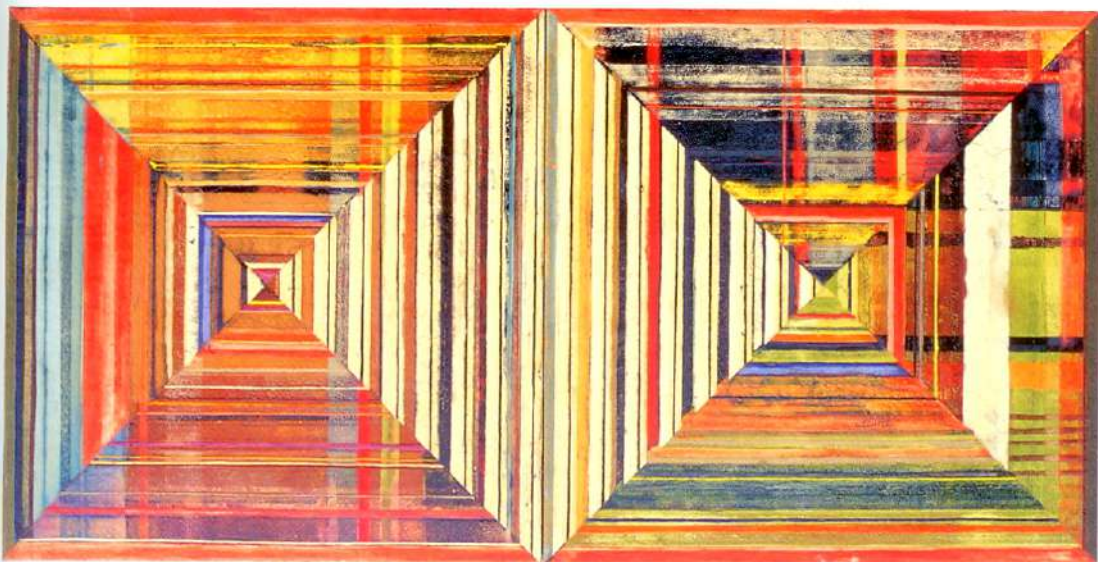
This chapter provides an overview of what wall pieces are, and how they fit into the contemporary scene, with a look at their historical origins in other forms, and how they have evolved. More and more artists and designers working with ceramics are showing an interest in making wall pieces, and finding ways of producing large-scale work for which they may not have been trained. Achieving these projects often involves working in collaboration, so this chapter briefly examines the practical and economic factors influencing the different forms of collaboration.

The projects that this chapter examines provide examples of different

types of wall pieces, and highlight the social and economic developments relevant to anyone wishing to undertake projects of this kind.

### **Walls; structuring space and life**

A wall is a vertical solid structure which divides or encloses, and by doing so defines two areas: as soon as a wall is erected, two discrete spaces or territories are created. When a single wall, even though it does not enclose a space, is erected outdoors or stands as a ruin, it nevertheless affects the space around it. A wall thus plays an important role in



*Fired Painting* by Shin Sang Ho, 2005. Glazed ceramics, 50 x 50 cm (19 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 19 $\frac{3}{4}$ in.) and 50 x 50 cm (19 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 19 $\frac{3}{4}$ in.). Photo by Hyungduk Shin.



*Bird Man on Building* by Alice Mara. 90 x 60 cm (35½ x 23½ in.). Digitally printed tiles. Commissioned by Western Parks Museum, Sheffield. Photo by Tom Glendining.

then coated with a cover coat film which enables the image to be transferred onto the tile. The cover-coated image is put into water and the image slides off the backing paper. The image is then positioned on the tile, any excess water wiped off, and the tile is fired at 850°C (1562°F). The image sinks into the glaze of the tile and does not erode over time.

Another instance of the potential of ceramic tiles as an artistic medium is provided by Shin Sang Ho's *Fired Painting* series (see p. 11 and opposite). They magnificently enhance the Clayarch Gimhae Museum, South Korea, opened in 2006 with the aim of strengthening the mutual development of art and architecture: 'ceramics will broaden its possibilities through architecture, while architecture will secure its artistic and

material diversity through ceramics'.<sup>8</sup> The building is circular, embellished with 5000 large, hand-made ceramic panels on the second floor of the exhibition foyer and the façades, where Shin Sang Ho proves to be a master of clay-as-painting. The abstract lines of different colours build up patterns reminiscent of textile, and echo the early geometric abstracts of European artists such as Paul Klee and Vasily Kandinsky, as well as the American painters Mark Rothko and Sean Scully.<sup>9</sup> Trained in the tradition of both Korean and Chinese ceramics, Shin developed dark vessels whose surfaces were animated by dynamic abstract strokes remarkable for their tension and liveliness. However, these strokes seemed imprisoned in the shapes of the vessels. He went on to explore the



*Dream of Africa* by Shin Sang Ho, 2005. Hwasung, Kyungkido, South Korea. 300 x 300 cm (118 x 118 in).  
Photo by Hyungduk Shin.

world of the Palaeolithic caves, more specifically sculpting heads of animals, and transferring to three dimensions the dynamic that was previously visible on the surface of his vessels. Shin then decided to paint on large supports (walls), to develop the prodigious vitality and strength we can see at work in the *Fired Painting* series, and which exploit the potential of colours as autonomous realities, freed from the boundaries of any outline.

In 2006, the Clayarch Gimhae Museum hosted a symposium called *New Way of Architectural Ceramics*, featuring 16 artists from several continents. It also acts as a centre for artists in residence that helps, like other events supported by the Korean government, to foster artistic projects in the realm of architecture. In 2005 the *Third World Ceramic Biennale*, organised by WOCEF (World Ceramic Exposition Foundation) in South Korea, presented a special exhibition dedicated to Ceramics and Architecture. In 2009 the *Fifth Biennale Conference* will focus on Ceramics, Architecture and Environment. Like other recently created institutions across the world, Clayarch Gimhae Museum and WOCEF testify to a profound change in the link between ceramics and architecture, as the artists are given help to produce large-scale work and thus become more visible to possible patrons. In Europe, the spearhead of such an alliance is the *European Ceramic Work Centre*, which opened in 1992 in the Netherlands, and expanded its sphere of work by introducing architecture as one of its subjects.

### ***Ceramic compositions hung on a wall***

For the purposes of discussion, these have been divided into four main sub-categories which can overlap in twos: monumental or non-monumental work, and site-specific or non-specific work.

#### **Wall pieces where size is relative to domestic space and dimensions**

In contrast to paintings, to which they can be related, these are 3D pieces, but often of a thickness negligible in comparison to their width and length. This means that they do not encroach upon the space available in the room: this is sometimes a driving force in the decision to make wall pieces or to acquire a wall piece. In urban areas the domestic space available has generally shrunk over the last 30 years. This is certainly a reality in the UK. These wall pieces offer the possibility of a sculptural approach, and enhance a space while not 'occupying it'. They are often conceived as an autonomous entity, independent of a specific site, and do not always require specific attention to planning regulations. However, unless they are small, they should be attached to a wall with caution. Some pieces include a complex device at the back, which allows for hanging. In spite of their aesthetic unity, the wall pieces in this first category can in fact be comprised of several elements, as in the following example by Marie-Ruth Oda, modest in size though commissioned for a temporary outdoor public project.

During her stay as artist in residence in Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park, Japan, Mari-Ruth Oda saw an exhibition of newly excavated dinosaur fossils from China: 'I was overwhelmed by the amazing forms of the dinosaur bones, and how fundamentally similar they