



MERETE RASMUSSEN
BRONZE AND CERAMIC



(LEFT)
Perpetual Red in progress
at Pangolin Editions, 2015

FOREWORD

It is September and in a light, airy Camberwell studio Merete Rasmussen has uncovered a few of her finished ceramics for me to see. A glorious, complex yellow form rests on a turntable alongside a moody blue twisted piece and in a far corner a sumptuous, warm red work lures you closer. As clichéd as it might sound it is like discovering a treasure trove of precious jewels that are not loud or brash but calm and confident, glowing in their own space as if they had been waiting for millennia.

In amongst these 'jewels' are polythene-clad works-in-progress slowly taking shape. By the nature of the material Rasmussen is forced to wait patiently whilst these works dry and harden so that she can add the next section. It is a slow process and one that seems to be at odds with the dynamism of Rasmussen's final forms. Rather like seeing a wax being prepared with runners and risers for bronze casting these works in progress are at a transformative stage and the smooth, delicate entwined forms are interrupted by rough, weighty supports. These supports may not be beautiful but they are essential to the process and enable Merete to create her graceful, gravity-defying forms: if she misjudges their number or placement the form will crack or distort during firing.

Alongside the traditional ceramicist's tools lying on the workbench are small boxes of expired credit cards and store cards which friends give to Rasmussen to scrape the planes of her forms to their almost impossibly fine gauge. It has taken many years and many misfirings to discover how far Rasmussen can push the boundaries of her material but having worked the same stoneware clay for over a decade she now knows her material inside out. Nearby in the largest kiln in the studio and taking up almost every spare inch of space available is a huge, as yet uncoloured work (soon to become *Orange Form*, 2015) which emphasises Rasmussen's ability to create forms that have great presence even in their most naked phase without their signature bold coloured slip. Seeing this large work so carefully fitting the kiln also serves as a reminder that until this exhibition Rasmussen has been constrained by both the size of the kiln and the tensile strength of her material.

In the early days whilst studying in Denmark and Sweden fellow Danes such as Verner Panton and Arne Jacobsen provided inspiration but now as Rasmussen's confidence has

blossomed there are no direct associations and she takes her inspiration from a wide range of sources from nature to mathematical models. Rasmussen's sculptural ceramics clearly lend themselves to a translation into bronze but the challenge was how to actually realise them. Experimenting firstly with wax and later with strips of foam Rasmussen has had to learn the nuances of these new materials in a very short time frame. But with persistence she has overcome these challenges to create three beautiful small forms (*Convolved Form I-III*) which due to their complexity would be impossible to create in ceramics.

With the largest bronze *Perpetual Red*, Rasmussen has boldly gone beyond the confines of the kiln and ignored her usual constraints of gravity to fulfill a longheld desire to make a work that not only relates to human physicality but can also be displayed outdoors. This work originated as a ceramic which Rasmussen hand-built as she would in her normal working process. This was then scaled up by the foundry using 3D scanning and printing technology to create a more robust model that could then have a mould taken from it. Collaborating closely with Pangolin Editions throughout the process, working in bronze also offered Rasmussen the opportunity to experiment with new surfaces. Talking in more detail in the interview published later in this catalogue Rasmussen describes her interest in exploring reflective surfaces and the new colours that she is unable to achieve in the ceramics.

As Rasmussen's ceramics leave the studio to join their relatives in metal in the gallery we are offered a unique opportunity to experience their first dialogues. It is an exciting new departure and we wait with bated breath to see what future developments bear fruit from this interesting collaboration.

POLLY BIELECKA

Perpetual Red
2015, Bronze
Edition of 3
146 x 138 x 130 cm
(without base)



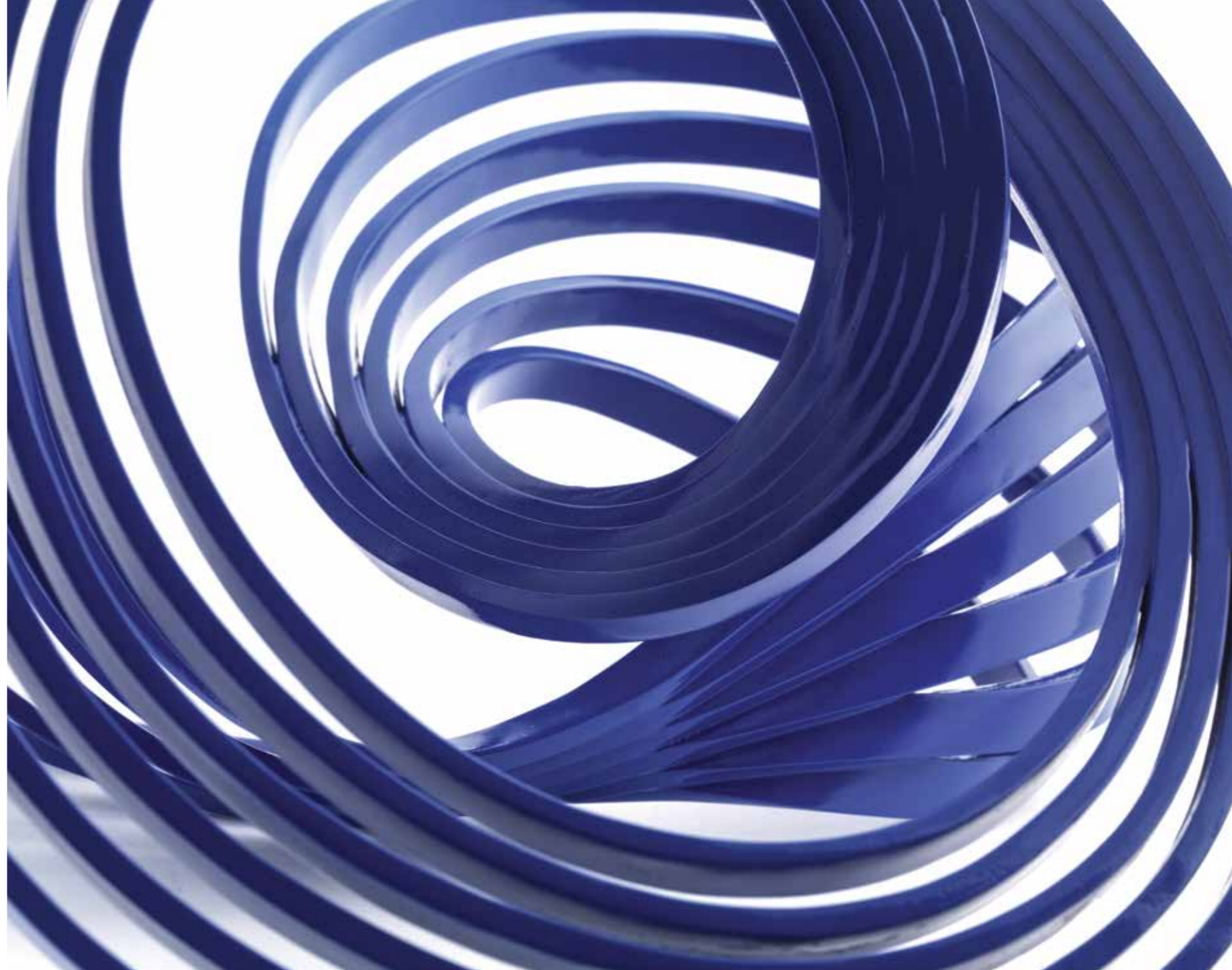
CATALOGUE





Orange Form
2015, Ceramic
with coloured slip
Unique
93 x 74 x 87 cm







Convolved Form III
2015, Bronze
Unique
44 x 26 x 42 cm

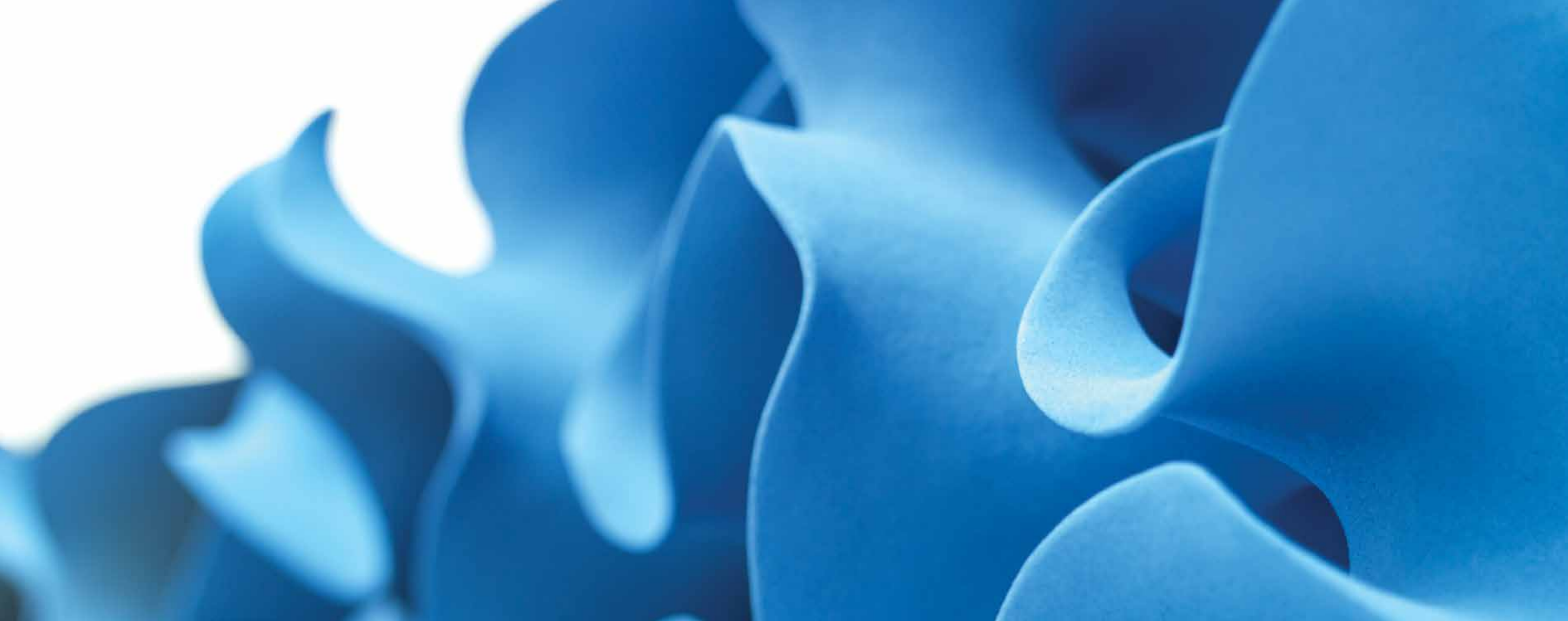


Yellow Twisted Form
2015, Ceramic
with coloured slip
Unique
40 x 60 x 50 cm



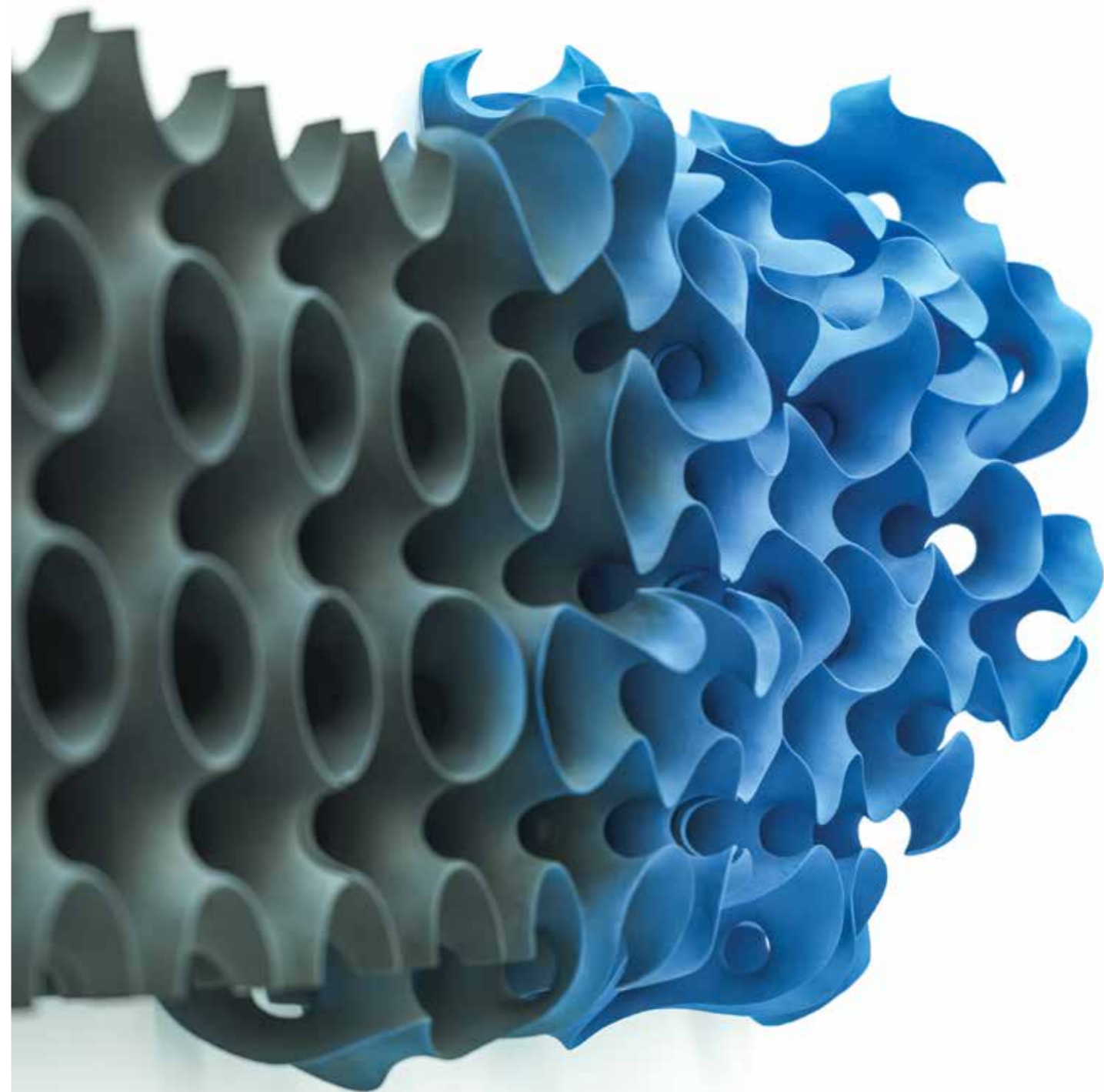


Red Loop (Wall)
2015, Ceramic
with coloured slip
Unique
50 x 60 x 30 cm





Morphogenesis
2015, Ceramic
with coloured slip
Unique
90 x 226 x 40 cm





Entwined Black Form
2015, Ceramic
with coloured slip
Unique
38 x 45 x 45 cm







Convolved Form II
2015, Bronze
Unique
45 x 24 x 30 cm





Orange Triple Twisted Loop
2015, Ceramic
with coloured slip
Unique
50 x 60 x 60 cm

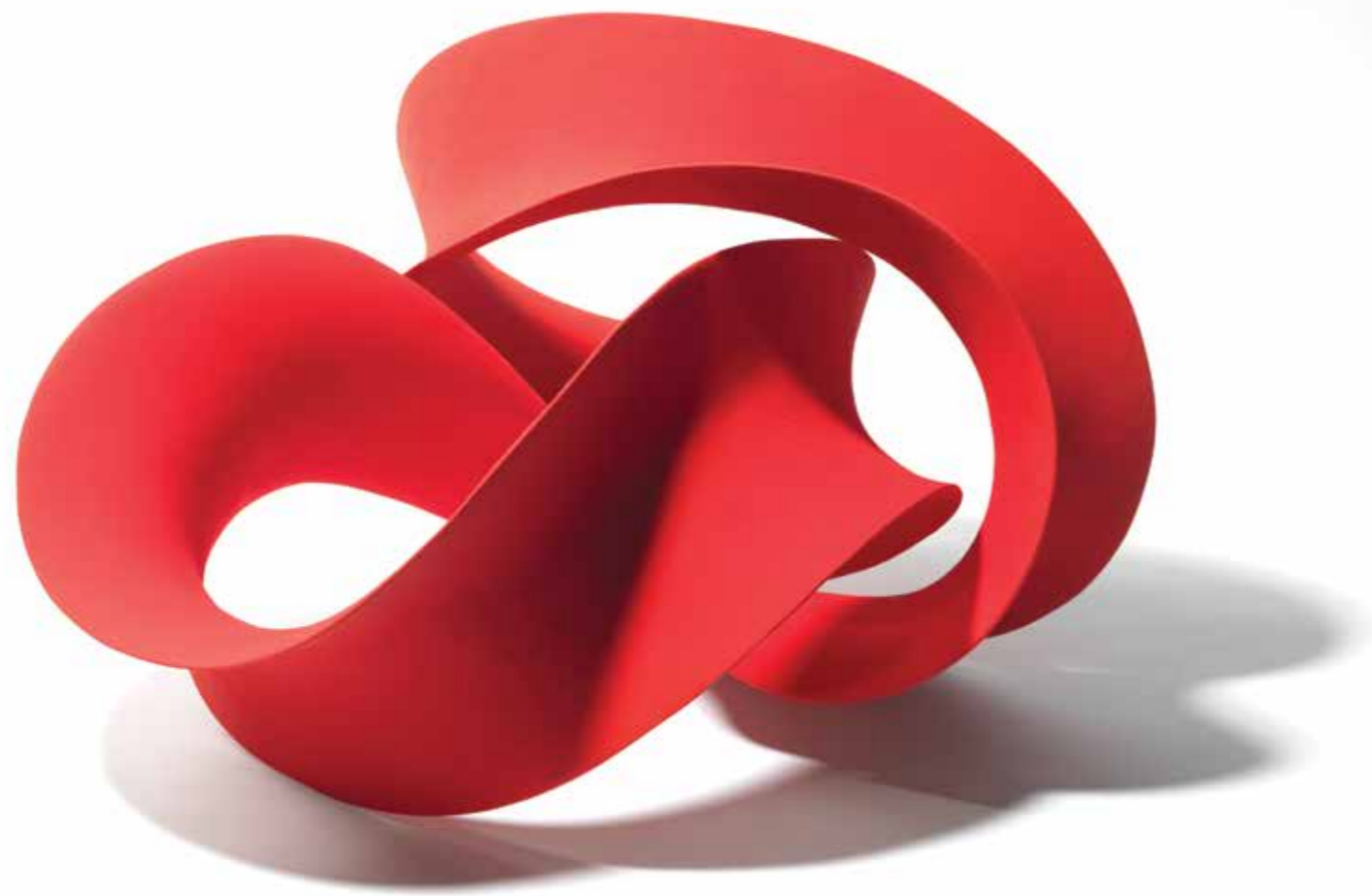


Entwined Yellow
2015, Ceramic
with coloured slip
Unique
36 x 60 x 55 cm





Turquoise Loop
2015, Ceramic
with coloured slip
Unique
34 x 38 x 36 cm



Red Loop
2015, Ceramic
with coloured slip
Unique
36 x 52 x 38 cm







Convolved Form I
2015, Bronze
Unique
58 x 26 x 40 cm



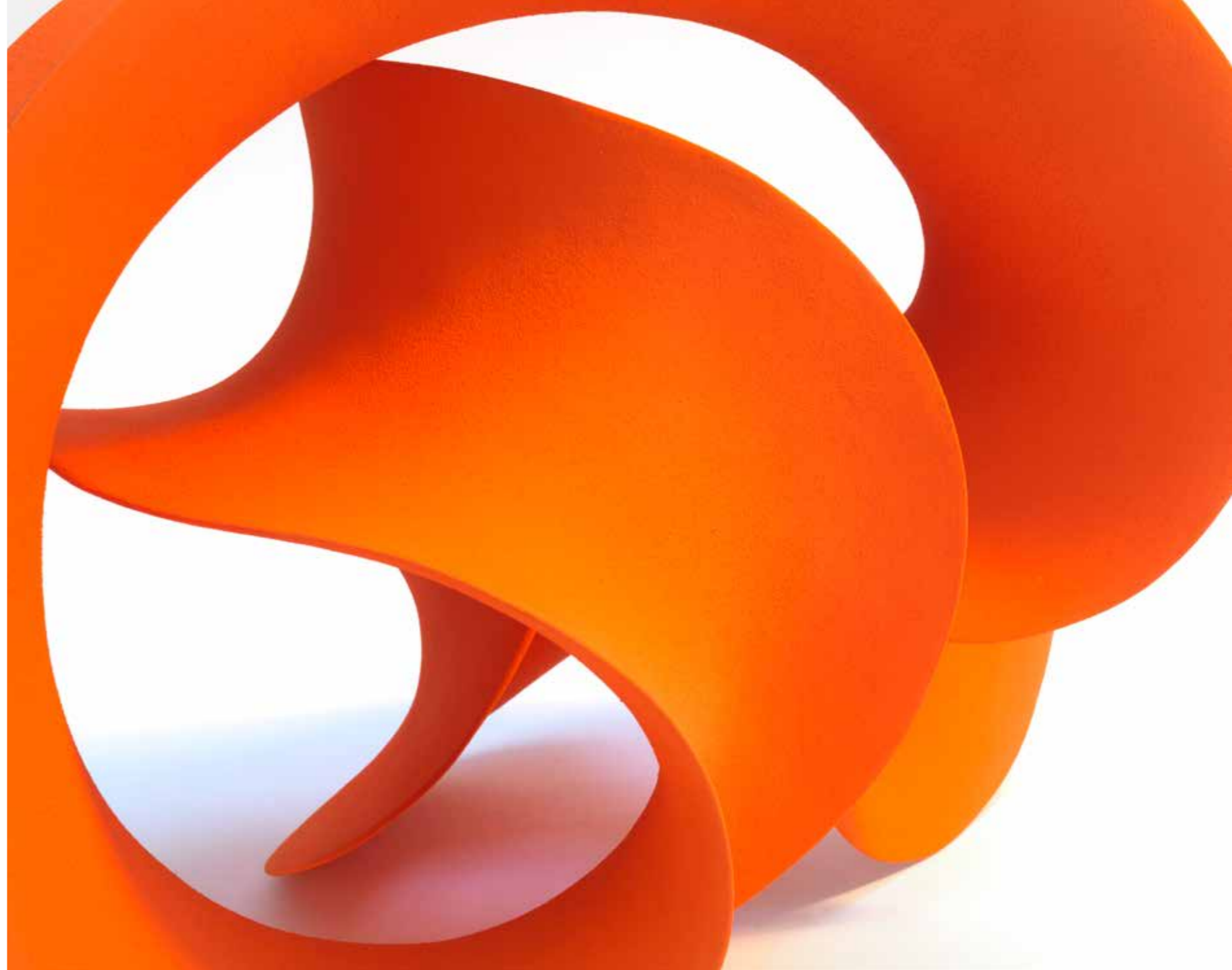


Grey Loop
2015, Ceramic
with coloured slip
Unique
60 x 45 x 50 cm



Blue Twisted Form (Wall)
2015, Ceramic
with coloured slip
Unique
70 x 70 x 85 cm







Continual Orange Form
2015, Ceramic
with coloured slip
Unique
35 x 55 x 40 cm

Folded Pale Blue
2015, Ceramic
with coloured slip
Unique
36 x 38 x 15 cm





Blue Loop
2015, Ceramic
with coloured slip
Unique
30 x 40 x 40 cm



BRONZE AND CERAMIC

Merete Rasmussen in conversation with Polly Bielecka, November 2015

For the benefit of those who do not know much about your work or indeed about ceramics perhaps you could start by talking a little about your making process?

Of course. Firstly I sketch in clay; both to see how the shape works and to explore a new form. I also use and need this shape when I am building the final piece as I follow the sketch. I then build up the shape over several days using what is known as the coiling technique. The build up of the physical form takes a few days as I need to wait for the clay to dry so the shape can support itself. Then when I have built the whole form I scrape the surface down so it becomes smooth. To do this I use different scraping tools and so on. After the first firing I sand down the surface to make it smoother and use a slip, which is a clay based glaze and then I fire it again which makes it stronger. I make all my glazes myself which I brush or spray onto the surface of a piece.

So after the first firing the works are still porous. Is that still the case after you've fired with the coloured slip?

Yes - they are still to some degree porous,

which means they are not suitable for outdoors. However they are fired between 1100 -1200 degrees so they are high fired in terms of strength.

When you work with the sketch maquette it sounds like a much more rapid, fluid process – would that be right?

Yes, I make a few sketches which allows me to change them back and forth as I like. I keep the ideas once I have fired them and use them as my sketchbook and return to them later and develop them. But really it is once I have fired something, when I have the physical form in front of me and I can move it around that I see the idea clearly and see it from it's different angles. This is also where I get ideas for new forms. I can think of them as three-dimensional compositions once they have been fired.

And you are working in the same type of clay for the sketch and the final pieces?

Yes, I use stoneware clay and have worked with this clay for the last ten years, I know it very well and use that for everything I do.

Merete Rasmussen in the studio, 2015.





*Merete Rasmussen's
'Colour Cupboard'
of test glazes.*

I even use it for the supports that I build when I fire a piece. Now that I know it so well I can see by the colour how dry it is and when I can continue to work on it.

People often ask whether there is a digital element in your making process. Is there?

No there is not. I don't draw on the computer: I like looking at three-dimensional, mathematical models for inspiration but I don't do digital drawing and all the ceramics are hand made as I've described. I don't even like to draw on paper, as in two-dimensional drawing, because I need to see the shape; so I sketch with the clay.

So when you are making a piece, at what stage does the colour come into it?

Talking about colour and how I choose it varies for every piece. Sometimes I know I want a strong colour on a piece from the outset and I have one or two colours in mind.

Do you find the stronger pieces take the stronger colours and sometimes the softer, gentler pieces take more muted colours?

Yes, sometimes. I think a really bright colour adds more strength to an already dynamic form. It gives it a presence, which I like.

It adds something to the shape.

You have been working in this way for such a long time; do you still prepare yourself for mistakes? Do you still have things that explode?

Yes I do; but that only happens when you are pushing things to get through the firing too quickly. I am lucky; I don't have too many firing disasters with cracks etc. I have worked in this material for so long now, I know when things like that are likely to happen and it is usually because I should have made more supports. It's a slow process I find.

This exhibition and the opportunity to work in a new material has brought about an exciting new departure in your work. How have you found working in bronze and how has your making process altered compared to your ceramic works?

It has been really exciting and has offered a new and welcome challenge that has really taken me out of my comfort zone. In terms of my working process and how that has changed, the most challenging aspect has been learning to work with and rely on other people. Normally I am in charge of every part of the making process whereas with the new bronzes

I was working with new materials such as wax and foam that I had never used before so I've had to learn very quickly. It's been good but difficult at times. I feel I have learnt a lot over the last two years. Going to the foundry has opened up new horizons of possibilities in my work. It is something I have thought about for years but have been unable to do. For example working in thinner contours has always been an idea but would be impossible with my ceramic work, as the material just does not have the strength, even in the model making stage.

The two bracelets you made for our Sculptor's Jewellery exhibition was your first experience in working with the casting process from the outset wasn't it?

Yes I worked in wax for the models which I hadn't done before. I designed the bracelets to be functional and wearable even though they are sculptural. I wanted them to work as little pieces on their own, which they are. Seeing the polished silver surface is something I have really appreciated as well as the weight of them because they still have the preciousness of my pieces but in a different way.

Can you explain how you made the smaller bronzes?

I sketched first in wax and then in foam, as it has the same qualities as the clay, but the foam

I could move it around much more than I could the clay and I enjoyed sketching with the foam. It was a specific foam that once it had been heated and cooled it held its shape and gained strength. Working on another scale with the bronzes has shown me possibilities of where my work can go and the possibility of larger works in bronze or even working in a different metal.

Did you enjoy being able to explore more complex forms?

Yes, absolutely. I liked that the shape was fluid and would twist round but the strips could also open up into a more complex shape that I could look through. I liked that part and being able to look through my work.

The bronzes are going to have a different surface texture from your ceramics can you tell us a bit more?

I have worked with matt surfaces in my ceramics for a long time now and I prefer it because it is not reflective and you can see the different shades of light in the colour as you read the form. Initially I thought reflections might be a bit disturbing on how you read the bronze. But with some experimentation and after seeing the cast bronze at its most basic stage a reflective surface appealed to me and got me thinking where I could take it. I think it is very exciting to be able to use glossy paints and

to see the depth of colour it gives the painted surface. It was really interesting to see something I had made in a polished surface.

What has working in bronze allowed you to do that you aren't able to do in ceramic?

One of the things I have always wanted to try having worked with these shapes for many years is to have viewers relate to my pieces in regard to their own body size. By this, I mean to make them so large you could walk through them. That would be fantastic. But I have gone as big as I can with the ceramics because of gravity basically, both with the building and the firing process in making these thin shapes, I can't go any bigger as the clay is not strong enough for that – but metal is! Bronze has allowed me to size up. It's stronger and to handle it, even the smaller piece that I handled at the foundry, the strength in them is so different to that of the clay I work with. It's something I have really liked about working in bronze; it's strength and flexibility.

Are you looking forward to seeing the bronzes outside, as your ceramics are always displayed in an interior environment?

What I have made for outdoors is very different from my ceramics; it will be wonderful to see these works outdoors in natural or urban environments.

Are there any colours that you are using in the bronze that you cannot achieve in the ceramic?

Yes, with the painted bronzes I can choose any colour, whereas with ceramic you have to do a lot of glaze tests, its not that simple and it is very time consuming as you are constantly trying to find the right shade and sometimes some colours just do not work for instance green. I just can't get the shade of green in my ceramics yet I am able to do this with my bronze pieces.

Now you have had a taster in working with a different material, obviously you are not going to leave the ceramic behind, but have you started thinking about where the process might take you next?

I have many ideas and I have been thinking about stainless steel and working in that. My challenge is how to make a model into something that the foundry can use.

Do you see colour in the outside world and take inspiration from it or is it something that happens in the studio?

No, its both. I mean I love colour, I enjoy wearing colours, my garden is very colourful and it gives me a positive feeling and I am very specific about colours that I like.

I think choosing a colour or a different shade is something very intuitive and something I can't explain. There is no formula I just know what I like.

Tell me about your large new wall piece *Morphogenesis*? It feels like a new departure.

Essentially it is a repeated construction. I have used this method before but with a very different outcome. It is a set of rules I create for myself, which I often do in my work especially if I want it to be continuous in some way. With this particular piece it is even on the edges and has an almost mechanical controlled shape: but by letting it grow or expand it gives this organic, flowing expression whilst keeping the repeated constructions. I am interested in how different it can look and I like the idea of it growing.

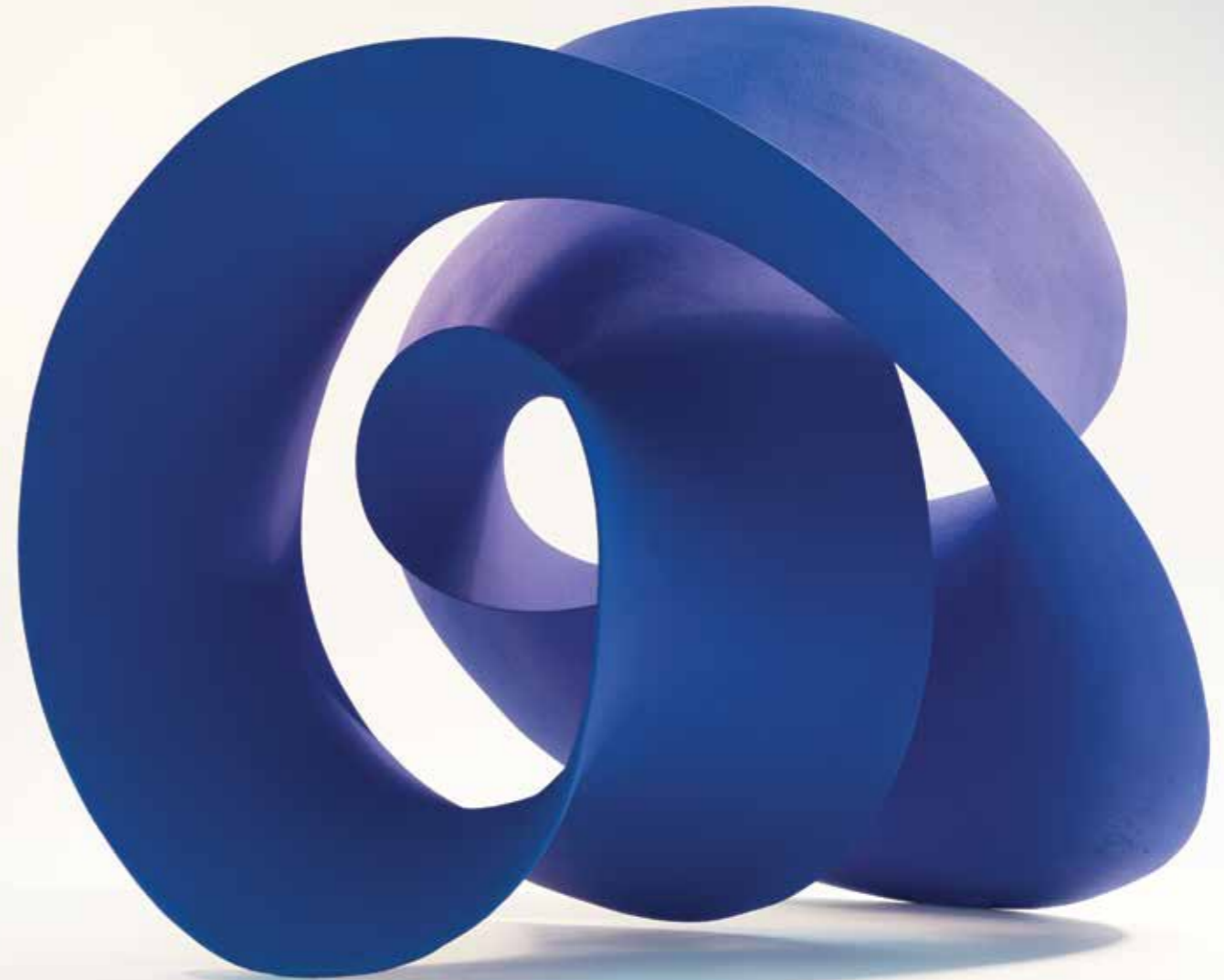
Do you ever set boundaries for yourself, mathematical or otherwise which once you set out, become impossible? I remember you beginning to work on the first element of this piece and you were cursing how complex it had turned out to be!

I have pushed it on this piece. It's good but it has been a lot of work. There is a lot of surface in it so just the physical part of it has been very exhausting.

People are very good at pigeon holing artists in their distinct guises. Do you think it is possible to still be considered a ceramicist and have this metal element?

Well ceramics are my main material and I can't see that changing but then again you never know. From a personal perspective, being shown and represented by a gallery which deals in sculpture I feel is the right thing for me, more so than being shown in a gallery that is crafts based because sculpture is what I want to make. It is good for me to be close to that as I feel sculpture and ceramics are still very divided.

Revolving Blue Form
2015, Ceramic
with coloured slip
Unique
55 x 65 x 50 cm



MERETE RASMUSSEN

BIOGRAPHY

1974	Born in Copenhagen, Denmark
1977	Moves to Sweden with her family
1997-1999	Oestra Greve Folkhoegskola, estetiska linjen - keramik, Sweden
2000-2005	Returns to Denmark to study Ceramics MA at Designskolen Kolding
2004	Glasgow School of Art, Student Exchange, Scotland
2004	TERRA, International Sculpture Symposium, Serbia and Montenegro
2005	Network, The International Ceramic Research Centre, Denmark
2005	Moves to Camberwell, London
2007	Awarded the Crafts Council Development Award
2008	Ceramic Symposium Tel Hai, Israel

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2014	<i>Equilibre & Couleur</i> , Mouvements Modernes, Paris
2013	<i>Merete Rasmussen</i> , The Scottish Gallery, Edinburgh
2013	<i>Sculptural Ceramics</i> , Sculptural Showcase, Pangolin London
2011	<i>Sculpture in the Workspace</i> , Public Art at Canary Wharf, London
2011	<i>Merete Rasmussen</i> , Bluecoat Display Centre, Liverpool
2010	<i>Merete Rasmussen</i> , The Scottish Gallery, Edinburgh
2009	15a Galerie & Beedentuin, Lochem, The Netherlands

GROUP EXHIBITIONS & FAIRS

2015	Collective Design Fair, represented by J.Lohmann Gallery, NY
2015	<i>Future Heritage</i> , Decorex International Design Fair, London
2014	<i>Sculptor's Jewellery</i> , Pangolin London

2014	The Salon, Art+Design Fair, represented by J.Lohmann Gallery, NY
2014	Collective Design Fair, represented by J.Lohmann Gallery, NY
2014	<i>Sculpture Showcase</i> , Pangolin London
2013	<i>Sculptural Ceramics</i> , Pangolin London
2013	Puls Gallery, Brussels
2013	Collective Design Fair - represented by J.Lohmann Gallery, NY
2013	Collect 2013 - represented by Sarah Myerscough Fine Arts, London
2012	SOFA New York 2012, represented by J.Lohmann Gallery, NY
2012	Collect 2012, The Saatchi Gallery, London - represented by CAA
2012	<i>With Love from Denmark</i> , Puls Gallery, Brussels
2011	British Ceramics Biennial 2011, AWARD exhibition, Stoke-on-Trent
2011	Collect 2011, The Saatchi Gallery, London - represented by The Scottish Gallery
2011	SOFA New York 2011, represented by CAA
2011	<i>Fables Contemporaines</i> , Mouvements Modernes/ Dutko Gallery, Paris
2010	Puls gallery, Brussels
2010	<i>Summer Pavilion</i> , Gallery Lilly Zeligman, Laren, The Netherlands
2010	Collect 2010, Saatchi Gallery, London - represented by The Scottish Gallery
2010	SOFA New York 2010, represented by CAA
2010	<i>Contemporary Ceramics</i> , Galerie Besson, London
2010	Focus, CAA, Contemporary Applied Arts, London
2010	Ceramic Art London 2010, Royal College of Art, London
2009	Origin, London
2009	<i>Made it</i> , Contemporary Ceramics, London Design Festival
2009	<i>Ceramic Art London</i> , Royal College of Art, UK
2008	Mouvements Modernes Gallery at FIAC, Paris
2008	<i>Form and Texture</i> , Contemporary Ceramics, London
2008	Origin, London
2008	<i>Danish Ceramics</i> , The Scottish Gallery, Edinburgh
2008	<i>Paysages en fusain</i> , Galerie Fusion, Toulouse, France
2007	<i>Sommerspiele</i> , craft2eu, Hamburg, Germany
2007	<i>Hoestsamling</i> , Galleri Pictor, Aengelholm, Sweden
2007	Showcase V&A Shop, Victoria & Albert Museum, London, UK

2007 Hannah Peschar Sculpture Garden, Ockley, UK
2007 Showcase, Contemporary Ceramics, London, UK
2007 *Esperanto*, Brick, Vienna, Austria
2007 Showcase, The Scottish Gallery, Edinburgh, UK
2007 Showcase, Yorkshire Sculpture Park, UK
2007 *Keramik i Kolding*, Koldinghus, Kolding, Denmark
2007 Ceramic Art London 2007, London, UK
2006 Public Art at Canary Wharf, London, UK
2006 The Danish Museum for Arts and Crafts, Copenhagen, Denmark
2006 Ceramic Art London 2006, London, UK
2005 The International Ceramic Research Centre, Denmark
2005 Designer Zoo, Copenhagen, Denmark
2005 Contemporary Art Gallery, Kikinda, Serbia and Montenegro

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Victoria & Albert Museum, UK
Museum of Arts and Design, New York, USA
The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge
National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh, UK
Crafts Council Collection, UK
York Art Gallery, UK
Oldham Gallery, Manchester, UK
FNAC National Fund of Contemporary Arts, France
TERRA, International Sculpture Symposium, Serbia and Montenegro
Guldagergaard, The International Ceramic Research Centre, Denmark

(DETAIL)
Orange Twisted Form
2015, Ceramic
with coloured slip
Unique
55 x 65 x 50 cm



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Pangolin London would like to thank Merete Rasmussen for her willingness to be stretched beyond her comfort zone and for all her hard work in producing this spectacular exhibition. Our thanks also extend to Pangolin Editions and the craftsmen in the many departments that have been involved in realising these ambitious bronzes. Finally our appreciation also goes to Steve Russell Studios for their brilliant photography.

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