



fire and earth

Damaris Zehentmayer  
Ceramics

[www.keramaris.ch](http://www.keramaris.ch)

He who works with his hands is a laborer.

He who works with his hands and his head is a craftsman.

He who works with his hands and his head and his heart is an artist.

(Francis of Assisi)



**Damaris Zehentmayer**

sculpture artist

2016

I was born in Kreuzlingen, at the lake, in 1961 and grew up in a typical East Swiss village, surrounded by meadows and orchards. I was shaped by the pleasure I took in living in the countryside. I grew to love the garden and overcame my fear of wet soil.

Today, I live in a similar environment. From my atelier, I see the garden, the animals of my neighbour, the Lake Constance and, in the distance, the Säntis mountain. A calm place to meditate and experiment.

I have loved fire since I was a child. During that time, a lot of garbage was simply burned. I used to observe the process, fascinated by it.

What fire did to all sorts of materials, how things melted, transformed, burned. Fire plays an important roll in my artwork as well. Not only do I fire in my electric oven, but also over an open flame burning gas or wood.



Originally, I wanted to become a potter. Perhaps luckily, it did not work out. I probably would be focused on shapes and objects. My life went in a different direction in the beginning. I concerned myself solely with children, at first professionally for some years, then as the mother of four children. The age around three fascinated me espe-



cially. At that age, children are unspoiled, open, extremely creative. Just sitting there and watching closely has truly helped me along. I soaked up the atmosphere of this small world. Today, I am thankful for that. It was a time that gave me inner wealth. I learnt something

that no one can learn at school, something that only life can teach you.

I hope a part of me will always stay a child. I am open and curious, and clay is a material that for me, an artist, constantly opens new doors for shapes and colours.



In the nineties, my fascination for clay and fire started to express itself more clearly. I did not care for containers, but was passionate about the endless possibilities of portraying bodies and especially faces.

I try to show strong feelings in the faces of my artwork, what lies beyond the face. They are snapshots.

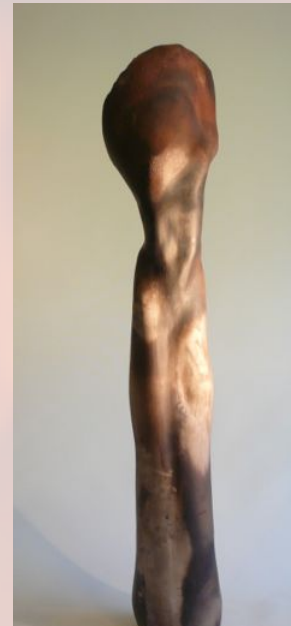
The faces are created using a special stretching and forming method. It is as if the face lied under the sur-face of the water and slowly came closer, until it is looking at me. This process fascinates me every time.



"covered", 2012

I also used to make torsos applying the pipe stretch method for a while. They were fired in an open log fire using the pit fire method. That gave them a special patina. Naturally, I also failed now and again using this method, since the development of the temperature could almost not be controlled. Oftentimes, I was challenged to take a risk here.

Applying different metal oxides and metal sulfates as well as the burning log fire would always result in a special surprise.



Frauentorso,  
2010

In 2014 and 2015, a whole sculpture series was created. In the media, we saw images of people seeking refuge every day. Then and now, they are not simply a crowd of people to me. They are uncoun-  
table individuals, “washed up” from different living situations which they could not bear anymore. I wanted to give faces to this “human flotsam”. It is without a doubt not an easy topic, which does not meet every-one’s approval. However, it is us artists’ task to make people think.

The sculptures show people that have survived and are looking for a future. I did not want to portray the distress but the new start.





In 2015, I went in a new direction once again. The clay was joined by plant fibres, metal colours, as well as silver and gold metal leaf. Tubular bodies, naturalist and strongly focused on themselves, inward-looking and emerging at the same time, “metamorphoses”.

Jute fabric incorporated into the clay is incinerated during the firing process at 1000 degrees Celsius. A fine structure remains. My eagerness to experiment has been rewarded with unique results.



The bodies have Latin plant names, which hint at certain characteristics, an homage to my love for flowers.

My work has gained great recognition in various exhibitions in Switzerland, Germany, Italy, Austria and Spain.



Wasserschloss  
Hagenwil


vernissage,  
8 may 2015





In my atelier in Romanshorn at Lake Constance, I do not only work alone but also like being active with friends and children who enjoy experiencing the fascination of shaping something out of clay and want to discover their inner artist.



The background of the image is a close-up, slightly blurred view of a fire. The flames are a mix of bright orange and deep red, with some darker, almost black, areas where the fire is more intense. In the center of the image, there is a black silhouette of a person. The person appears to be wearing a hat and has their arms raised, possibly in a gesture of surprise or excitement. The overall mood is dramatic and intense.

Every child is an artist. The  
problem is how to remain  
an artist once we grow up.

(Pablo Picasso)