

Seven questions for

# Lene Bødker



*Resting, 2009, 57 x 19 x 17,5 cm*

When I visited Lene Bødker's studio for the first time in 2002, I was completely fascinated by these simple glass forms with such a strong emotional content, whereas traditionally we associate glass with its sole esthetic beauty rather than the idea of existential depth.

On the one hand, I was astonished by the surprising approach to the matter that seemed to surround and contain light, rather than just "carry" it; on the other hand by the intellectual and spiritual dimension of the works. A strong

sensuality gave them an immediate appeal. Looking closer, they offered opposites that met and expressed themselves in the same artwork through form, colour and texture. They were at the same time completely contemporary and marked by a form of archaism.

In the best case scenario, an artist's artwork continues to inspire thoughts, emotions and questions. This conversation with Lene Bødker is an extension of this continuous dialog.

# 1.

## Work method

You hold a double training as a ceramicist and a glass artist. What is your work process?

*Most of the time, it starts with clay, a matter that holds such plasticity that I can open myself and enter a mental mode that allows a specific energy to unleash itself. It can emerge from a sensorial experience of meeting nature, another country's culture, music, literature, an atmosphere or an emotion...*

*During the modeling phase, I do my best to make myself available for the process: I go towards an optimal open-mindedness without too many preconceived ideas. In this sensual and sensitive process, I devote myself to the clay and let my hands speak. I become a spectator in a way.*

*When the clay model has found its right shape and when I feel that I should "release" my grip, the next step begins. It is a totally practical procedure, named the lost-wax casting technique, which consists in several stages: creating a silicone mould from the clay model, taking a wax imprint of the silicone mould, making a plaster mould from the one in wax, steaming out of the wax, drying of the plaster mould before the firing in the kiln where the glass fusion and cooling take place. After a month, the mould is broken, the glass object cleaned and the finishing work begins: grinding, polishing or chisel and hammer cutting of the glass object until the desired surface structure is obtained (matte, shiny or other).*

**Does one require a specific temper in order to create through such a complex, technically demanding and long process?**

*A total presence is required in each and every one of the numerous stages the work goes through. The agenda of doubt, restlessness and languor that the mind desperately tries to impose must be counterbalanced by a soft but insistent attention, with a desire to switch to a mental space of confidence. At the same time, work discipline and structure are needed.*

**Is it the vision of your finished artwork that carries you through the process?**

*That is a good question — which is hard to answer.*

*Sometimes, the road can seem endless.*

*It is important to understand that the creative phase differs strongly from that of carrying out, but both are enriching and demanding. The first one is introverted, intense — one fantasizes and gets carried away; it requires a very specific form of presence: the inspiration flows and one feels a kind of resonance with the crystalline and material vibration of the artwork. The technical stage of realization also requires absorption and concentration, but it goes through different "channels" and leaves more space for everyday tasks. It is easier to connect with the exterior world during that process.*

## 2. Nature - Architecture - Chaos - Order

Nature and elements hold a constant place in your work, as does architecture. It would be tempting to see these themes as an indirect exploration of notions of Chaos and Order.

*The organic fluxes and rhythms of Nature are a big inspiration for me: the power of the wind, the movement of the sea, the influence of the seasons on plants, animals and human beings. The small inside the huge.*

*The water element, that is often present in my work, is a symbol or an image of transformation, of a new life and a curative dimension.*

*Nature holds order and chaos. It gives and it takes. There is a time for everything and everything is in motion. Nothing is static. Architecture structures. It carries time and culture. We stand on cultures from times past, on the ideas, feelings, grieves and joys of other nations. They are part of us as we are part of them.*



*Tribute to Alhambra, 2007, 99 x 60 x 2,5 cm*



*The Messenger I, 2013, h 50 cm*

## 3. The body

These past few years, the body in a more or less explicit form had made its way into your work. How do you explain this? Is it something conscious?

*Very early on in my artistic work, I explored the house as a metaphor of the body, as a holster for our desires and dreams. At the time, I was much too shy to work directly with a figurative motif or a motif directly linked to the body. I overcame this shyness a couple of years ago when I decided that priority would be given to my hands and to the impulse of the "here and now." Only then was I able to give myself freely to what came my way, to more or less abstract objects referring to the spiritual states of the body.*

For example, if we look at the series *The Messenger*, I see something organic, a 'body' member but also a geometric element, something constructed and closely linked to the physical?

*These works started with a section, an atmosphere, but a need for anchoring and the necessity to connect with the earth quickly manifested themselves. The geometric elements were born in opposition to the organic forms.*

## 4. Spirituality - The sacred

The spiritual holds an important place in your work... and you've executed several commissioned works for churches\*. Where does this dimension in your work come from?

*Since my childhood, I have felt a strong inner need to belong to something larger than myself. I am not a dogmatic believer but, taking into consideration my personal quest, it appeared very natural to me to work with the diversity of symbols and numerous historical references the Church abundantly offers. Sacred spaces with their refined materials and craftsmanship have always fascinated me.*

\* Church: in principal the word refers to a Protestant church in Danish. The country has a Protestant Lutheran church since 1536: "Den danske folkekirke", "The Danish People's Church" also known as the "Evangelical Lutheran Church".



From Earth, 2005, 100 x 60 x 2,5 cm



The One Who Sees, 2010, 29 x 33 x 23 cm

## 5. Colour

How do you work with colour?

Can colour and its relationship to light provoke the creation process or does colour follow the form — as a way to back up an expression?

Or inversely, is colour the way to create a tension, a contrast in an artwork?

*Most of the time, colour is one of the last things I determine. Colour brings a tonality of darkness or light, warmth or cold to an artwork.*

*If I choose the colourless glass, it can lessen the heaviness of a particular shape and thus balance the tone of the work. On the contrary, if I choose an intensely coloured glass, a dense shape can be supported to the point of gaining more "weight" and mass.*

*The choice of colour is linked to the character of the surface: should it be matte, transparent, semi matte or carved by chisel and hammer? Each of these surface types more or less opens the possibility for light to influence the whole.*

## 6. Kinship

Are there artists you feel related to? Those who have or continue to inspire you?

*During my entire career, Brancusi has been a major inspiration for me. Furthermore, Sonja Ferlov Mancoba, Svend Wiig Hansen, Louise Bourgeois, Per Kirkeby, Arp, Anthony Gormly, Tony Cragg and Anish Kapoor are artists I am drawn to again and again.*

## 7. Places

The exhibition for the Maison Louis Carré was conceived with the desire to fit in this specific space, in this architecture that Alvar Aalto created for Louis and Olga Carré. You have often received commissions for specific spaces (administrative public buildings, schools, trade unions, churches — both for the exterior and the interior). What is your approach regarding this type of commission?

*In the beginning, I always try to get in tune with the soul of a place and its spatial density to see what I can eventually bring to it. It is only when I have grasped the architect's intention, the idea and underlying structure that I can start. Then I have to decide if it is better to go "against" or follow in the footsteps of the movement and "dance" that I have pin-pointed.*

*It is also very important to ask oneself questions such as: Who lives here? Who works here? What kind of landscape or urban structure surrounds the house or place? Which materials are used? How do the surfaces present themselves? Does this place have a history that should be taken into consideration? Etcetera.*



Maison Louis Carré, view of the living room

*Sometimes, I am lucky enough to speak directly with the architect and thus test my ideas. In other situations, I have to position myself in relation to an older preexisting architecture and thus trust my own capacity to capture the soul of the place, intuitively.*

**Which artwork would you like to create for the Maison Louis Carré?**

*The rigour, clarity and movements integrated in the house find such a beautiful continuity in the layout of the garden. The meeting between the building and the pond inspires me to contribute with an artwork that refers to the curved ceiling in the lobby hall of the Maison Louis Carré and to all the organic and refined details that one finds in Aalto's architecture and design.*

**Maria Lund**

Translated from French and Danish by Jessica Watson and Maria Lund

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