

JOSEP LLORENS ARTIGAS

Josep Llorens Artigas. Cerámicas

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I pick up the primitive form: the one given by the lathe. Thus, the forms of my works are related to those of the primitive ceramics of all countries and all civilizations, and they have only come from my hands. My inventive and personal work is in the glazes and colours: here I am looking for the new.¹

Galería Elvira González is pleased to present *Llorens Artigas. Cerámicas*, the first exhibition at the gallery dedicated to the Catalan ceramist. Josep Llorens Artigas (Barcelona, 1892 - Gallifa, 1980) is one of the main renovators of western ceramic art. Driven by the *noucentista*² spirit of Barcelona, by the resurgence of ceramic in France and by his exhaustive study of the Song dynasty ceramics, Artigas moved to Paris in 1923, where he was surrounded by artists and ceramists that stimulated him to reach a unique style, with a perfect domain of the discipline.

Throughout his career, which he dedicated almost entirely to ceramics, Artigas focused on eliminating the decoration of the vases and achieving the maximum quality and beauty in his refined work of glazing. This exhibition gathers together a careful selection of pieces from different stages from 1936 and brings us closer to his perseverance with shapes and his personal universe of textures, coatings and colours. The material that characterizes his practice is stoneware; a type of clay that he used and researched for decades. Stoneware is composed of clay, sandstone and silica; is dense, impermeable and opaque. It vitrifies slowly at a very high temperature.

The final result is a resistant, impermeable and refractory ceramic. In its natural state, the stoneware clay is grey, but after the firing process it adopts a light brown or beige colour. The first stoneware ceramic was produced during the era of the Song Dynasty in China and arrived for the first time to Europe, in Germany, in the 15th century. Later on, in the 17th century, English potters began to produce a form of salt-glazed stoneware.

As the French art historian Pierre Courthion explains³, ceramic in Europe was considered a minor art that could not compete with the tradition of the East and Far East. As opposed to the popular ceramics of China, Korea or Japan, ceramic as an artistic practice did not appear until the 19th century in Europe, in France, with Ernest Chaplet. Chaplet discovered the importance of the pieces of oriental stoneware, in particular of the Japanese tradition, and introduced it as an art Paul Gauguin in 1886. Gauguin did ceramics in Chaplet's studio, in Paris. At the beginning of the 20th century, the ceramist André Methey put his practice at the service of

¹ Josep Llorens Artigas, Libreta "Fòrmules 1920-19" en Miralles, F., *Llorens Artigas, Catálogo de obra*. Ediciones Polígrafa, Barcelona, 1992.

² Fue Eugeni d'Ors quien bautizó el movimiento con el nombre de *Noucentismo*, conformado por artistas e intelectuales de 1900 que nacieron a finales del XIX, pero que publicaron sus primeras obras a partir del nuevo siglo.

³ Courthion, P., "Breve Historia de la cerámica", *Llorens Artigas*. Ediciones Polígrafa, Barcelona, 1977.

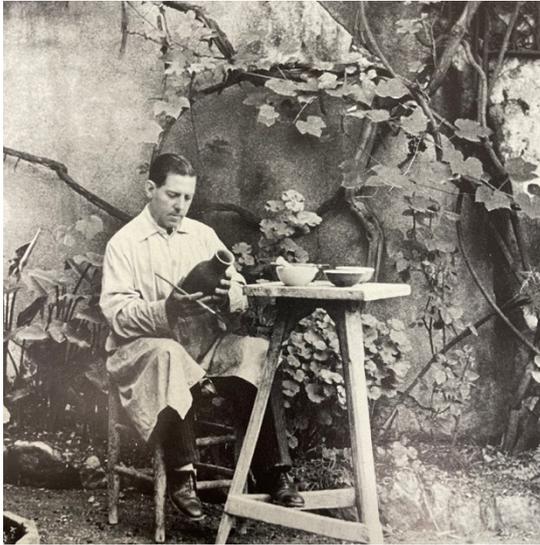
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artists such as Matisse, Vlaminck or Derain. In spite of this reappearance in Europe at the beginning of the century, ceramic was not understood as something more than a secondary or dependent art until the pioneer Artigas provided it, from the twenties and progressively, with a pure artistic conscience.



Llorens Artigas working at his studio at Juli Verne, Street, Barcelona. Fotografía: Otho Lloyd.

Josep Llorens Artigas. After initially training in drawing, in the early twenties Artigas completed his studies in ceramics at the Escuela Superior de Bellas Artes, Barcelona, where he coincided with Gargallo and Miró. In 1922 Artigas wrote his thesis on the ceramic pastes and blue glazes of ancient Egypt and developed a research on the glazes of the Chinese ceramics of the Han and Song dynasty.

From 1923 to 1941 he lived in Paris, where he worked regularly with Picasso and Dufy, and from where he frequently participated in exhibitions as in the Galerie Berheim - Jeune (in 1925 he held his first solo exhibition), the Salon d'Automne, Salon des Artistes Décoratifs, and

Salon des Tuilleries. Since 1948 he was represented by Galerie Maeght in Paris. Simultaneously, he held exhibitions outside France, at Brummer's Gallery, New York, and in Barcelona, where he returned in 1941. In 1944 Artigas began his long collaboration with his friend and artist Joan Miró. Since 1951 he lived in "El Racó", a country house in Gallifa, Barcelona, where he builds huge ceramic ovens. In 1955, together with Miró, he built two stoneware walls for the new UNESCO headquarters in Paris. Until his retirement he was a teacher of ceramics at the Massana school in Barcelona. He produced important ceramic murals for the Guggenheim Museum in New York (1966), the Maeght Foundation (1968) and at Barcelona airport (1971).

His last pieces were oven-baked in the early seventies. Thanks to Artigas in the early 1930's museums such as the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York and the Museu d'Art Modern in Barcelona acquired contemporary ceramic pieces for the first time.