

COMBUSTION CHAMBER

08.07-09.10.2022



ALBERT PINYA
AND
CATALÀ ROIG

COMBUSTION CHAMBER. CATALÀ ROIG, FEAT. ALBERT PINYA

Mercedes Estarellas

Freedom should not be considered a state, but rather a living force, giving rise to ongoing progress.

—André Breton

In terms of mechanics, “the fundamental chemical reaction required to make an engine work takes place in combustion chambers”. The metaphor is simple, though highly effective. In the project presented here, “Combustion Chamber”, by Albert Pinya (Palma, 1985) and Joan Pere Català Roig (Palma, 1973), the fundamental chemical reaction takes place between two artists. Through the disintegration and reintegration of concepts, they feed the motor leading to societal development and progress, which becomes strong enough to continue to build future reality.

“Combustion Chamber” is an ode to abundance arising from difference, understood as the primal matter for the creation of culture, the living force driving us to new understanding.

We can only build our future with a foundation in honesty, through real cultural interchange. In this symbiosis, the two artists project a renewed universal language, their perspective grounded in the ultra-local, which the viewer perceives as clearly as day. Just like what once occurred between Artigas and Miró, their mutual naturalness and know-how coincide to create a unified aesthetic that upholds communication from out of personal experience and honesty in form and substance. Over a period of four years, Pinya and Català Roig have studied and worked in collaboration, never ceasing to produce small and medium-sized

Albert Pinya and Català Roig, *Climate action now!!!*, 2022.
Grog stoneware painted with pigments, glazed, 87.5 × 33 cm.
Courtesy of the artists

works that have enabled them to explore the dynamics of each respective language. In this way, they have gone about constructing the gears that enable them to work through shapes, volumes and signs. Time has allowed them to reciprocally assimilate their ways of thinking, decomposing the pieces and then setting them up again together, materialising this project that demonstrates both artists' degree of maturity when it comes to creative processes.

Art is not always successful when trying to restore lost balance, but it always seeks to give form and meaning to culture that has been perturbed that way.

—Derrick de Kerckhove

So as to reason on the discourse this project strives to develop, the historical context it takes place in is important, where the concept of acceleration has surpassed velocity in importance, where technological advances in communication are bringing about a deep socio-cultural crisis. Historically, humanity has been able to assimilate enormous changes in its communication systems, as with the creation of the alphabet, the printing press, the industrial revolution, electricity and, finally, the telegraph, which marked the beginning of our era. The rapid interchange of knowledge led to the invention of the television and computers. From that point on, the internet and social media have been evolving so quickly that the concept of reality has become distorted. The idea that “the future is no longer what we knew it” sees us enter into a phase of discordance between what we held as certain and what is in fact going on.

In a context where the sequence of changes is so quick, society, considered as a conscious whole, does not have time to shut information down. This leads to a lack of understanding of our surroundings and, in turn, to growing uncertainty and to crisis itself.

In these situations of extreme acceleration, humanity repeatedly recurs to myth and popular culture to be able to synthetically explain the reality we are living in. In his book *Myth and Meaning*¹, the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss explains how the artistic code of representation is essential for our minds to assimilate changes and have the courage to take on the unknown.

It is incumbent upon us to centre our attention without delay on the symbology of the ancestral as the basis for creation. As if it were an enormous mechanical demiurge, and in rhythm with the sound piece composed by Jose Vives for the project, out of this “Combustion Chamber” ceramic totems are born. Sensual, large and strong, they symbolise the immutable principles that once ruled ancient societies.

Every time any society develops in progress, displacing the human in favour of the machine, pottery reappears as an expressive technique that enables us to revive our faith in social development. Pottery is thus a millenary technology, preserving and representative of the most refined cultures, always bringing along with it a balance between tradition and innovation. One of the few cultures that has been able to uphold its identity as a people without renouncing technological evolutions is that of Japan. In Japan, they understand beauty as the most authentic manifestation of knowledge, proclaiming that pure beauty is a primary need for the evolution of any society. If the community does not experience beauty on a daily basis, it will end up without knowledge, and as a result without the fundamental principles of its culture.

The ceramicist is obliged to have touch as his main sense, as the transmitter of memory, understood as the accumulation of lived experience, that is, as a creator of culture.

1. Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *Myth and meaning*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press (1978).

In a world where everything becomes immaterial, where we live enslaved by the sense of sight, the return to a medium whose starting point is the sense of touch is significant. Deacceleration is obligatory; the time needed is not negotiable; for the creation of each piece a specific timeframe is required, and its quality will depend on each moment dedicated to it.

In this first state of creation, there is no place for rhetoric. Ceramics is a performative medium that naturally, and with honest sincerity, projects the ancestral knowledge that the artist is able to contain in his own body, which his domination of the medium requires of him. Awareness is born from out of the depths. With infinite serenity, intrinsic as it is to the nature of the medium, and on the basis of “immutable truths”, the artists seek to render homage to our ancestors; they wish to return to the foundation, to the beginning, to what is genuine.

Already in Ancient Egypt, craftspeople were believed to give continuity to the labour of the gods. They were taken to have a direct connection to the nature of creation. Considered, in this way, as the point of union between the beyond and the earthly, the high priest received the title of “the greatest amongst all artisans”. Through their artistic creations, the Egyptians did not seek to reflect an immediate, individual vision of reality, but rather the Immutable Order of things, what they felt to be “eternal truths”.

As the great Bernard Leach teaches us in his *A Potter's Book*², you cannot be a ceramics artist without an education where ceramics have been the main axis around which the artist's life has been pursued. The fortune to be able to rely on a master like Joan Pere Català Roig is grounded in the fact that he developed in a cultural milieu of knowledge, as passed down by his mother, Magdalena Roig, a master

2. Leach, Bernard. *A Potter's Book*. London: Faber (1945).



Works created by Albert Pinya and Català Roig in 2022



Albert Pinya and Català Roig, *Heroïna amb gres i pigments!*, 2022.
Grog stoneware painted with pigments, glazed, 87.5 × 34 cm.
Courtesy of the artists



Albert Pinya and Català Roig, *Wake Up!*, 2022.
Grog stoneware painted with pigments, glazed, 89 × 34 cm.
Courtesy of the artists



José Taltavull, *Untitled*, 2021

potter and professor, who for many years had her own ceramics school in the historical centre of Palma. The artistic sensibility with which Català Roig has grown as a creator is not, therefore, unjustified. From an early age he had acquired the language of ceramics and its capacity to transmit messages. Català Roig understands the importance of telluric principles, and their secrets as well. From the extraction of clay as a primal substance with malleable properties, to its transformation through the alchemy of fire into a concise and resistant material ready to last for thousands of years. In this process, the artist detains time and contemplates the whole. For entire days and nights, he remains awake, dedicating himself to the care and contemplation of the piece, while the fire, for its part, performs its magic act and the artist assimilates the movement of the earth, the moon and all the planets. The master becomes aware of the concrete nature of our existence, making it possible for poetry to appear, where man and nature are fused together in a shared lyrical sentiment.

From the interaction of all these factors the totems arise, representatives of the real, material foundation upon which all humanity is erected. Now the moment for narrative has come, the cloak which defines these totem's personality, granting the myth its identity.

Returning to Ancient Egypt, we might observe how the features of figurative sculptures have remained immutable over the centuries. Nevertheless, through hieroglyphic writing, their identity will be altered automatically, thanks to the destruction of the original inscriptions and their replacement with others on the same sites. As if by magic, the personality of the former individual is supplanted by the newer one, without the sculptor being forced to alter the physical appearance of his work.

Albert Pinya seeks to go even further back in the use of signs, taking cave painting as his main point of reference. His emits messages that are simple, clear and

crystalline, composed as ideographic pads or bars, which slowly but surely will offer us more clues to the statements being made by these ceramic gods.

Pinya employs ancestral writing systems to stitch together the history of myth, drawing schematically, like the ancients once did. In this phase of the process of creation, the artist spontaneously gives importance to memory as the ground for the transmission of key concepts for social growth.

In these contemporary totems we can read apparently disordered messages, which are so concise and direct that they could be used as advertising slogans. Some of them, like *Climate Action Now; One Earth, One Chance; Future, Stop Bombs, and Stop War*, respond to the decontextualization and recontextualization of phrases gathered into an image archive (which the artist has developed as a kind of idea soup) dedicated to demonstrations, youth and student marches and protests featuring phrases on posters and banners that speak to situations related to climate change and opposition to war.

Additionally, and picking up on the discourse that Pinya has been developing for many years, we also find phrases like “Everything is handmade here”, which refers to the importance of creating by hand and artisanal processes, in opposition to machine manufacture, techno-barbarianism and the digital realm. Finally, we find phrases making reference to love, such as “I love Català Roig”, a reflection of the generous way of working of both Albert Pinya and Joan Pere Català Roig.

Related to this declaration of love, and as a demonstration of the total symbiosis arising through this project, it seems essential to me to reflect here on the words of Català Roig:

This collaboration with Albert Pinya has meant reaching a summit I have unconsciously sought for a

long time, to have a companion for artistic “mischief” in the studio.

Our artistic relationship sets out a kind of squaring off that allows the classical concept of ceramics to be bound together with a conceptually contemporary vision of painting, whose result is work that is original and fresh, crisscrossing frontiers.

On the other hand, it is impossible to disassociate the artistic relationship from the personal when I work with Albert Pinya. From the very beginning, we have had a human and artistic connection that accentuates the meaning of the idea of “co-labour”, where no one vision holds greater sway than the other, where the periods of time when you are not working are as important as any others.

I truly believe that we are lucky to live in one of those unique moments when the union of two ways of working, of two worlds and two visions, can create something of lasting value.

Finally, as a key feature of this project, we must make reference to what the poet and philosopher Jaume Munar (Felanitx, 1982) calls “poetry of inexperience”, in his micro-essay *El futur. Poesia de la inexperiència*³. He understands it as the beauty that arises from experimentation and knowledge exchange, as the result born of collaboration that imperceptibly forges the future of societies.

Munar, in this short yet lucid essay, understands that the poet must be an explorer and ask questions of himself. He states that only “in uncertainty lies the origin of the possible”, that it is only through the exploration of established limits and the questioning of one’s surroundings that the human race is able to evolve its culture; that it is

3. Munar, Jaume. *El futur. Poesia de la inexperiència* [The Future: Poetry of Inexperience]. Calonge: AdiA Ediciones (2018).

only through the act of transgression amidst surroundings about to be fossilised that real and socially useful artistic creation may arise.

On the other hand, he speaks of the obsolete and deceptive character of sentimental art, which leads us to the artist's interior, to self-complacency and rigidity. The artist must choose to shift into action, doing political art and criticising his social milieu, forgetting about the self and looking outwards while taking on the future, understood as everything that has not been experienced, as that is where poetry lies.

“Combustion Chamber” is born of the collaboration between two artists living in the future. A future that is created every single day, based as it is on one's own life, on constant confrontation with the unknown, with the sum of experiences that end up composing knowledge.

These totems look to the future as magical, benevolent beings which, in a moment of absolute uncertainty, give form and meaning to culture, in relentless and constant evolution.

Combustion Chamber
Albert Pinya and Català Roig
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to 9th October 2022

Organization
Es Baluard Museu d'Art
Contemporani de Palma

Director
Imma Prieto

Curator
Mercedes Estarellas

Exhibition Coordination
Catalina Joy
Beatriz Escudero

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Installation
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Correduria March-Rs

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Jose Vives
Xavier Barberà

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Hermanos Berenguer

Texts
Mercedes Estarellas.
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DE PALMA

PLAÇA PORTA SANTA CATALINA, 10
07012 PALMA
T. (+34) 971 908 200

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