

# Caroline Achaintre

Revue de presse  
Press review



Caroline Achaintre, *Bfor*, 2013, hand-tufted wool, 59 x 27 1/2 x 7 7/8".

ROME

## Caroline Achaintre

FONDAZIONE GIULIANI

via Gustavo Bianchi 1

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In Caroline Achaintre's one-person exhibition, watercolor, ceramic, bamboo, and wool are the protagonists of a narrative that seems to emerge from the viscera of creative expression. The French-born artist's works take possession of the gallery space like three-dimensional biomorphic entities, even when simply hung on the walls like paintings. The porosity of their materials (paper, wool, clay) absorbs color, returning it to the gaze already digested, transformed. The viewer who enters the show is drawn down a meandering path that encourages the eye to continually shift from distanced looking and to focus close-up, acquiring ever-new viewpoints and perspectives. Achaintre herself has asserted her interest

in “the field of tension that is created between poles and antithetical conditions, in the viscosity of the moment of encounter, in transience.”

For *BiaUltra*, 2017, *Herbert*, 2018, *Cruizer*, 2019, *Bfor*, 2013, and *Louis Q*, 2020, the artist worked hand-knotted wool on the backs of tapestries, manifesting her interest in ideas generated by the mask—namely, that of the double, the ambivalent existence of a dual nature within the same individual. Meanwhile, in *Tenpence* and *Re-wine*, both 2019, the polished gleam of the glazed ceramic creates a disorienting tactile and visual counterpoint to the large-scale textile works. And, similarly, in *Observature*, *Gepetto*, and *Ten-Eyed*, all 2019, bamboo and wicker offer elaborate interweavings and perforated surfaces pierced by the light and by the gaze, bringing to mind ancestral morphologies or Rorschach studies, even more evident in the watercolors copiously disseminated on the walls.

*Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.*

— Marta Silvi

Charlotte Cosson & Emmanuelle Luciani

## Caroline Achantre: From Micro-Narratives to Macro History

Meeting with Caroline Achantre's œuvre was like being gold diggers finding a chimp: it was the historical link bounding the youngest artists working with vernacular crafts to older ones like those from Pattern and Decoration. She was almost the only one from her generation to do so. Also, her artworks escape every attempt at categorization. We bet that each time one would like to define her work with an adjective, it would be necessary to add that her work goes beyond this very term. She is, for instance – and by far – an artist for whom notions of birth country or city of residency do not apply. Neither the fact that she is German with a French father nor that she is living in London seems to appear in her work. Where she spent her childhood, however, may have played a role in choosing to work exclusively with watercolors, ceramics, and wool. We'll come back to that particular point later on.

As often when perusing an artist's œuvre, it is particularly interesting to do so in chronological order. One will discover that Achantre started producing works of art quite late: at the turn of the century, when she was around thirty. She indeed learned how to join, temper, weld, and hammer iron and steel before entering the Chelsea College's Art Section. Before becoming an artist, Caroline Achantre was a blacksmith. This tension between arts and crafts – aligned with William Morris's theories before ever knowing he existed – can be felt even today.

The installation she produced in 2000 for her degree does not look like what we currently expect when entering one of her exhibitions. Far from her now familiar bestiary, this work consisted of sequins applied on a black-painted polystyrene background, forming both an old-school sound-level meter and

the word *ROCK*. Here, Caroline Achantre's references were to be found in metal – both the music and the material. Let's unfold the allusion. At first, this installation may seem far from metalworking. However, everyone could feel the labor behind it: Achantre obviously spent hours fixing every dot covering the wall. Her artwork is crafted: even if it is mimicking technology, it's far from being technological. A similar double bind seems at stake within the black metal songs she was constantly referring to at the time: this music arises from industrial cities – so from modernity – but also from the despair created both by industrialization and its very fall. Like rock 'n' roll, it comes from the margins, which exists in the centers, that is to say: from countercultures born within Western cities.



Rock, 2000

Before we continue unraveling the meaning of Caroline Achantre's work, we'd like to be clear regarding our methodology. For us, a work of art is always a formal crystallization of either an aspect of society or of a societal change. In order to understand what it crystallized, one of our first steps is to closely look at the way those forms were produced. First, we think that if the public is so often lost when viewing contemporary art, it's because they do not understand how art production – and even production at large – shifted in the 1960s. Second, the way an object is created always reveals the value system above it. For instance, it is quite obvious that a huge, shiny, pink metal bunny, produced in a factory by dozens of assistants helped by machines before being labeled "Jeff Koons," is a perfect example of the capitalist system

separating ownership and labor, and its globalization in the 1980s and 1990s. We're not saying that it's bad – just that it's a typical outcome of the proud liberal system expanding at the end of the twentieth century. Following the first writings of Marx, we're thus more focused on how things are produced than on how they are received: on labor more than class struggle.<sup>1</sup> In the case of Caroline Achantre's degree installation, her do-it-yourself technique of course reveals the lack of means of art students and young artists. But as she herself is still producing her works during long hours in the studio, one can say that, in a way, she embodied a new generation of people caring for handcrafted goods, local production, and workers' empowerment.

This line grew and grew as she found what is now her favorite medium: tapestry. Indeed, her work shifted from watercolors or paintings to installation, and then, when she left Goldsmiths, she dropped polystyrene to take on wool and ceramics. After 2003, she thus dropped polluting materials to take on ancestral, informed, nonneutral ones. For us, it's no coincidence that Caroline Achantre did so after 2001. Following 9/11, everything changed: the beginning of the end of American imperialism was clear. Gravity, which is so patent in her rugs and ceramics – and which makes her forms sink toward the floor – is typical of this generation feeling the weight of history coming back the way they hadn't expected. Anyhow, this overall feeling of powerlessness or failure was already at stake in her initial rock installation, as the wall was shaken by a hidden engine. Unconsciously – as often when producing forms, and exactly how she tufted her tapestry from the back without being able to see her final patterns – she embodied what the Prix Goncourt winner Nicolas Mathieu wrote about the Nirvana generation: when they realized they couldn't make revolution anymore, all they had left was to make noise.<sup>2</sup>

When Caroline Achantre turned to rug-making later in the 2000s, she also steadily made her references shift from rock to primitive. After quoting *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* or painting clownish allusions, she narrowed the gap between dark imagery

1. Karl Marx, "Estranged Labor" in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Milligan (Moscow, 1959).

2. Nicolas Mathieu, *Leurs enfants après eux* (Arles, 2017).

and delicate doing. The point was indeed not lying in opposition, but in reconnecting, fluidly going from one point to its seemed opposition – “staying with the trouble,” as Donna Haraway would say.<sup>3</sup> One can perceive a path in this double change: Caroline Achaintre’s work went from underlining humanity’s dark side to incorporating itself within a larger perspective. Her process is inclusion-based: it creates more and more a whole. The monsters were reintegrated to characters; the masks became more and more general and nonspecific to a particular type of persona. She even reached a point where the boundary between human and animal could not be more blurred – not to mention the boundary between objecthood and aliveness.



Frank, 2013

This last point may lead us to an interesting debate on shamanism and exoticism within contemporary Occidental art. Indeed, the artist claims that “it’s the urge for the exotic that interests me rather than the exotic itself.”<sup>4</sup> She is thus less interested by outside references than by humans’ need to look elsewhere. Considering her works, speaking with her, we’ve been struck: more than underlining the colonial tastes behind the twentieth-century references or the blur between genders existing for millennia, she – again – goes beyond cultural, feminist, gender, and colonial studies by including all these stories within a bigger one. After post-structuralism and the fall of a unified past,

3. Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham 2016).

4. Conversation with Caroline Achaintre December 2017

society needed to deepen specifically every shred of hidden, unviewed history. Now that we start to have a better view on each, it might be time to gather those to gain a bigger perspective. Caroline Achantre is definitely *Oracular / Vernacular*: she participates in re-creating a unified past in order to be able to project again toward the future.<sup>5</sup>

We already said that a work of art is a formal crystallization of societal changes. To reveal the latter, a few steps must be followed. We talked about the first one: analyzing production. The second consists of a real art historian's job: comparing the forms newly produced with ones created in the past, and then comparing the time period in which they appeared with the one we live in – and where the forms pop up again. Last, and really not the least, this methodology needs a drop of specialization. Following Michel Serre's *passe-partout* metaphor,<sup>6</sup> one may want to dig into every knowledge field to maybe encounter the famous contemporary – and thus, to understand our time.

So why has Caroline Achantre tufted and molded more and more animals and tribal characters? What does it say about our time? Contrary to the beginning of the twentieth century and the introduction of primitive imagery within the so-called *avant-gardes*, this return, contrary to a century ago, doesn't acknowledge one of the consequences of colonization. It can, though, emphasize how the world – even its farthest lands – can be touched; and the globalization of the Internet can nowadays contribute to a similar feeling. Also, the artist stresses that her tapestries get some kind of an aura, that they are charged with the energy she used to make them. This almost animistic point of view could appear to drop dead in the willfully pristine and neat GAFAM (Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon) and advertising world we live in. It would not. Firstly, as we give more and more intelligence – or, at least, room and freedom – to our everyday tools, we Occidentals are unknowingly becoming like shamans talking to nonhumans. And secondly, our dreadful time period is also the one that makes possible the encounter

5. *Oracular / Vernacular* is the project, theory, and time frame we have been developing since 2012.

6. Geneviève James, "Entretien avec Michel Serres," *The French Review*, yr. 60, no. 6 (1987), pp. 788-96.



between the sciences and indigenous people, as quantum physics is starting to give credence to beliefs held for millennia.

A form can also appear within a need: here, the need to reconnect, both to values that exist outside of our rational time, which is reaching its end, and to the past – not to say history – in order to get a glimpse of our future. Caroline Achantre indeed realised that what was supposed to happen in the future is almost always portrayed as primitive and what might happen usually lies in what has gone. We can go farther than Nietzsche's "return of the same", and just "quote" Nature, which, with its alternation of seasons, days, and nights, follows a path where the old is always born again. Caroline Achantre's tufted rugs are talking about a future where industrial and manual will have to coexist as much as animals and people. And it's no coincidence that her ceramics are all about presenting skins. The skin is both what protects us from one another and what allows us to be touched. How one species can touch another is one of the biggest questions the twenty-first century will have to answer.

Ray-Ann, 2010



7. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (Chemnitz, 1882) Aphorism #341

Caroline Achantre is part of an artistic family that looks at the past in order to project anew. These artists use humble, nontoxic materials and craft them with handy or vernacular techniques. In doing so, they embody a political gesture without loudly claiming it. We can trace a genealogy of these kinds of practices that would link the Nazarene painters, the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood, Van Gogh, Giorgio Morandi, the Arte Povera, and so many others. Almost all the artists quoted here, and those working in the same vein nowadays – like Bella Hunt & DDC, Giovanni Copelli, Andrew Humke, Vincenzo Scome, etc. – come from small cities or villages like Caroline Achantre, who grew up in a small town in southern Germany. These artists are all thinking outside of big capitals – not to say a bit outside of capitalism. It is as if they had subconsciously understood what Fredric Jameson said about capitalism's being so strong that every attempt to jump out of it will be reintegrated into the system and even form the next step to make it grow.<sup>8</sup> It is exactly what happens to every counterculture: what's cool and marginal always becomes the next market trend.<sup>9</sup> That's maybe why Achantre dropped rock references and started to manufacture carpets: the rustic was already here when industrialization and capitalism went viral. It was already an opposite force. Lastly, the fact that she is producing rugs – one of the most domestic items – seems to go in a similar direction. Everyone, everywhere, at every time needed – and still needs – to cover the floor to live above it: it's an already globalized item. It touches everyone, everywhere, without separation.

As it arises from outside megalopolises, we call this inclination “southway.”<sup>10</sup> It can be traced back to the eighteenth century, when medieval references first popped up. Modernity was all turned to future: progress was the viewpoint. Referencing the Middle Ages was to look at the past in a nonmodern perspective: it was even referencing precapitalist modes of producing, relating, living, and thinking. The fact that there are nowadays more and more artists who are using such medieval modes underlines that

8. Fredric Jameson “Marxism and Postmodernism,” in *The Cultural Turn. Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998* (London, 1998), p. 40.

9. Dick Poutain and David Robbins, *Cool Rules: Anatomy of an Attitude* (London, 2000).

10. See CODE South Way magazine, running since 2016.

our society needs references lying outside of it – for example, before capitalism – to restructure itself. Caroline Achante herself started to make art by doing woodcuts – a typical medium from the premodern period. Finally, during modernism, rationality replaced spirituality – and the individual replaced community. However, a kind of renewed and monastic holiness glows from the work of these southway artists – and, of course, from Caroline Achante's works. And this even after she dropped dark metal's pseudoreligious imagery. What we can read with her artworks is that, far from the modernist man who always wants to get bigger and bigger, today, like when God still existed, some humans want to feel smaller than something again: smaller than Nature, smaller than History, but taking part of them anyhow.



Sáwash, 2014

## Dive in, it's arty: Edinburgh art festival - in pictures

Giant instruments, psychedelic swimming pools and Essex girls - Murdo MacLeod does the rounds at the visual arts festival

All photographs by Murdo MacLeod

Fri 26 Jul 2019 09:00 BST

### Caroline Achaintre

Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop commissioned French artist Caroline Achaintre to make new work, Encounter, for its large outdoor courtyard. Achaintre is known for her fabric work in the form of tufted rugs, her ceramics using paper clay, drawing, print and watercolour painting. She often integrates small sculptures within larger support structures, called "display furniture"





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Caroline Achaintre, *Hocus Locus*, 2018, hand tufted wool, 92 1/2 × 107 1/2".

## Caroline Achaintre

GALERIE ART: CONCEPT

“Duo Infernal,” the first solo show in France for the French-born, London-based artist Caroline Achaintre, included woolen wall hangings, glazed ceramic sculptures, and psychedelic watercolors set against pink-accented walls. Borrowed from a 1982 song by the German punk band Extrabreit and Marianne Rosenberg, the exhibition’s title served as a reminder of the essential role that duality plays in Achaintre’s oeuvre. The artist’s consistently contradictory works appear at once functional and decorative, earthly and otherworldly, abstract and figurative. Like a Rubin’s vase illustration where the negative space between two profiled faces reads as an urn, Achaintre’s paintings and sculptures impel the viewer to flip back and forth between two realities and thus engage in an exercise that brings an existential flux to her works.

Achaintre uses a tufting gun to make large-scale woolen tapestries. Shooting strands of yarn through the back of tightly stretched canvases, she creates colorful irregular forms that suggest fantastical trophy hides; threads of varying lengths alternately evoke silky hair, coarse fur, and even runny, dripping paint. *Hocus Locus* (all works cited, 2018), the larger of two tufted works on view, was inspired by the Ishtar Gate and recalls the ancient Babylonian yellow- and blue-glazed bricks of which it is made. Using mainly mustard and indigo wools, Achaintre reimagined the gate as an animistic curtain. Whereas the original structure was decorated with real and mythological animals, Achaintre’s soft, porous version embodies two creatures: a canine (muzzle pointing to the right and perky tail at the left) and an anthropomorphic face with slitted eyes and a long narrow mouth, slightly agape. A harlequinesque pattern of yellow and purple diamonds running across the curtain recalls the gate’s brick facade. Evoking traditional carnival and commedia dell’arte regalia, this motif (which appeared in several other works on view) also points to a key performative aspect of Achaintre’s works, which are often described as masks or costumes.

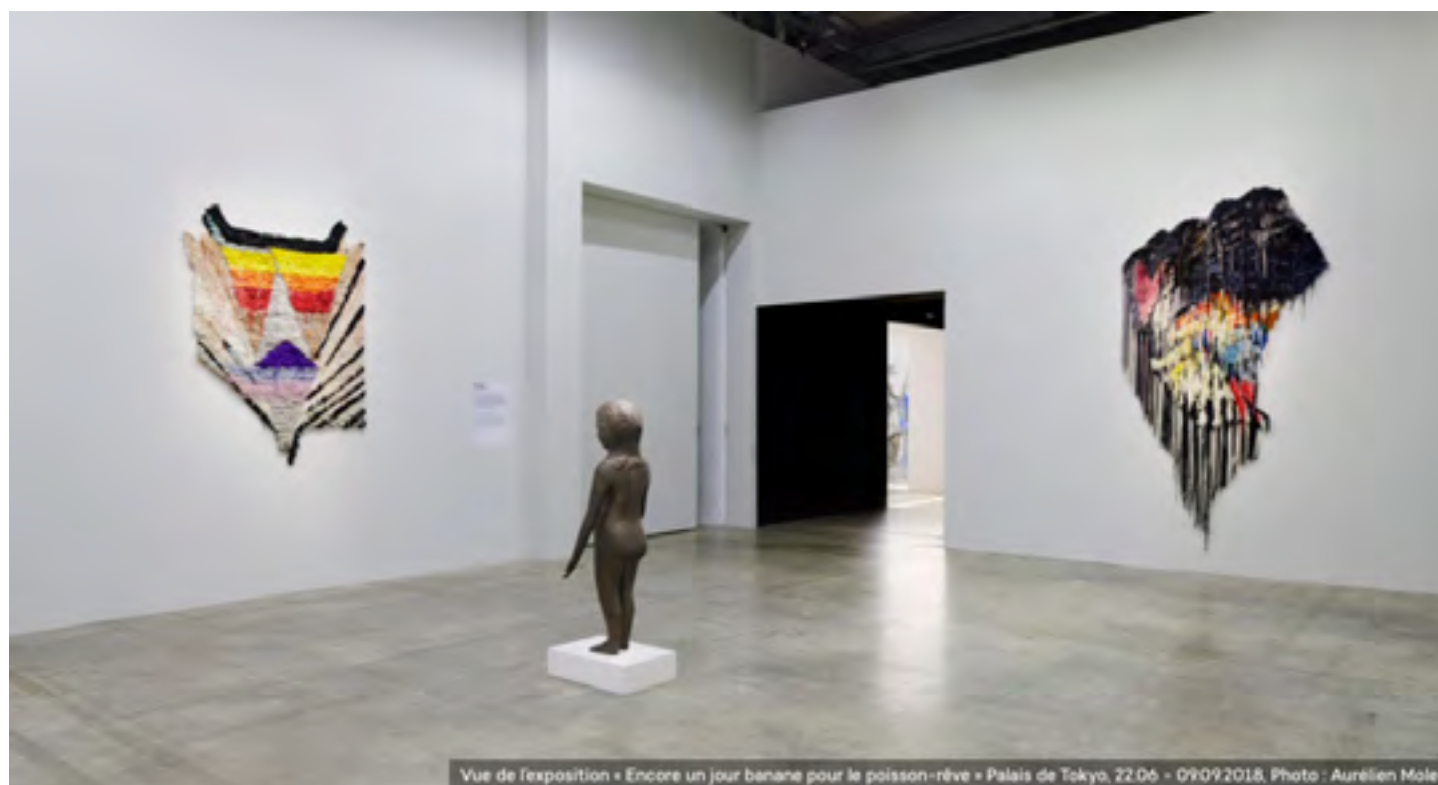
Flouting their brittle reality, Achaintre's ceramics have more in common with her woolen works than one might expect. Mounted on adjacent walls, *Sembler* (Appear) and *Veneer* appeared stringy, light, and impossibly animate. Displayed on pedestals, *Severine* and *Nero* were uncanny shape-shifters that morphed from innocuous lumps into spooky medieval executioner-style hoods, depending on the viewer's perspective. Adding to the eerily mutable and transient nature of these ostensibly static sculptures, scute- and scale-textured surfaces coated with glossy glazes of black and muted celadon suggested freshly sloughed reptile skins.

Perhaps her most intimidatingly ambiguous body of work, Achaintre's watercolors are colorful and complex Rorschach tests. *Dead Ringers*, one of ten such works on view, could have been read as picturing a pair of conjoined hooded figures (conspicuously reminiscent of images of torture victims at Abu Ghraib prison) or as a single large face with pointy horns and bristly skin. Predator and prey fight for dominance in this willfully uncertain, yet troublingly evocative dual image. And while any analysis of Achaintre's work will most certainly reveal more about the viewer's inner psyche than about the artist's intent, it is perhaps precisely this feeling of introspective anxiety that she seeks to cultivate.

— Mara Hoberman

## A découvrir : les créatures laineuses de Caroline Achaintre

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Vue de l'exposition « Encore un jour banane pour le poisson-rêve » Palais de Tokyo, 22.06 - 09/09/2018, Photo : Aurélien Mole

**Chaque lundi, Les Inrocks vous propose de découvrir une œuvre d'art. Cette semaine, focus sur les "peintures avec de la laine" de Caroline Achaintre, en ce moment exposées au Palais de Tokyo.**

Depuis le péristyle décadent ouvrant la déambulation du "poisson-rêve" (1), un visage de laine, au loin, nous accueille. Nous accueille ou nous menace, on ne saurait trop le dire. Première forme indéfinie, incertaine d'une série de cinq œuvres murales, entourant l'enfant sculptée de Kiki Smith. Caroline Achaintre réalise ces drôles de pièces à la croisée des médias selon la technique du tuftage, tissant son canevas à l'aide d'un pistolet à laine, qui lui autorise ses variations de couleurs et de longueurs de fils. Ces pièces relèvent autant de la sculpture, de l'art textile que de la peinture, en prise avec une fluidité qui fait leur charme.



Caroline Achaintre cultive cette fluidité, en un dialogue tantôt velouté, tantôt brusque entre les genres. Née à Toulouse en 1969, cette artiste française vit à Londres où elle tisse, modèle, dessine ou grave. Ses pratiques multiples convergent autour de la matière et papillonnent à travers les formes, en un système ô combien sensitif. Les œuvres de Caroline Achaintre donnent envie d'être touchées, vues, caressées ou grattées. On voudrait se rouler ou se cacher derrière ses fils, palper aveuglement ses céramiques-carapaces pour en déceler les secrets.

### **S'avancer à tâtons**

S'il ne s'agit de secrets, il y a bien du mystère dans les œuvres tuftées de Caroline Achaintre. Quelque chose à découvrir en tâtonnant. D'abord, de quoi s'agit-il ? Le champ des possibles est ici vaste: masque, relevé topographique, pelage animal ou monstre débonnaire. L'art textile - s'il en est - autorise ces multiples interprétations, rendues aussi possibles par la porosité de la forme. Il est peut-être difficile de savoir ce que l'on voit, quand on ne sait pas ce devant quoi on se trouve. L'artiste travaille probablement, par son recours aux techniques des Arts appliqués, à brouiller nos perceptions en les excitant. Elle nous lance sur mille et une pistes puis nous éconduit délicieusement, avec le sentiment doux-amer qu'accompagne l'impossibilité de choisir.

S'il s'agit d'une sculpture, on voudrait lui tourner autour mais le mur nous en empêche. S'il s'agit d'une sculpture plate, sa matérialité lui confère une forme décorative qui la transforme en objet, voire en icône. Pourtant, ces œuvres font davantage que s'exposer ou s'offrir à notre culte contemporain de l'image.

Et ainsi de suite de cette valse intrépide et tourbillonnante, qui tisse et détisse nos appréhensions, comme ces fils de laine. Il faut alors continuer à tâtonner, tous sens en éveil, pour démêler le fin mot de l'histoire. Ou se résoudre à un entre-deux tendre, significatif d'une création contemporaine refusant les catégories arrêtées.

## Débusquer le sens

Mais alors qu'y voit-on ? Si la forme se dérobe, aventurons-nous sur le fond. Caroline Achaintre interroge ici notre rapport à la figuration, en conférant volontairement à ses œuvres "*des traits anthropomorphiques*" qui ne "*sont pas abstraits et pas encore figuratifs*". L'artiste semble alors anticiper notre désir compulsif et cartésien d'arrêter un sens à une forme qui déjà nous échappe, comme mettre un prénom sur un visage. A tout prix, et c'est le titre d'une des œuvres de cette sélection (*Todo Custo*, 2015), on voudrait qualifier.

La vastitude des références dans lesquelles l'artiste puise ne nous facilite pas la tâche ! Comme ses œuvres, c'est un ensemble hétéroclite et bigarré allant de l'expressionnisme allemand à la scène *heavy metal*, en passant par l'animé et la tradition européenne du carnaval. Les zébrures de son *N.O.C.* nous évoque autant l'exotisme suranné d'une pièce d'intérieur XIXe qu'une forme de géométrisme malévitchéen. *Cornelia* peut être le portrait d'un baiser au maquillage défait ou une tentative hallucinée et virtuose autour de la couleur.

La surface, finalement, s'absorbe au profit d'une projection concrète ou symbolique. La convocation des formes anthropomorphes nous rapproche de visions rassurantes, qui nous confortent dans notre rapport à l'altérité. Il suffit ensuite que le fils s'allonge ou s'assombrisse pour convoquer un monstre, et battre en brèche la première impression. Caroline Achaintre s'emploie minutieusement à faire ployer les frontières. Le continent ordonné de *Todo Custo* devient champ de bataille ou jungle en lamentations. Un *no man's land* dans lequel on cherche désespérément la figure humaine, pour s'accrocher aux images et sensations familières que ces formes tissées bouleversent.

Les cinq œuvres de Caroline Achaintre sont à voir au Palais de Tokyo jusqu'au 9 septembre, dans le cadre de l'exposition "Encore un jour banane pour le poisson-rêve" (1).

## TEN EXHIBITIONS TO SEE IN JANUARY

Discover work by artists ranging from a Victorian  
watercolourist to a contemporary sculptor



### **'Fantômas' at the De La Warr Pavilion, East Sussex**

*20 January to 29 April*

Featuring new and existing sculptures by Caroline Achaintre, this exhibition will showcase the artist's bold style and innovative approach to materials, encompassing everything from ceramics to wall hangings. Influenced by Modernism, Primitivism and popular culture, her work blends elements of abstraction and figuration, frequently exploring the role of the mask in our cultural history. *Image: Caroline Achaintre,*

## Caroline Achaintre's Witty Works to be Exhibited in England Soon

BY BLOUIN ARTINFO | DECEMBER 13, 2017



Caroline Achaintre's sculpture

(© Caroline Achaintre)

Visually appealing and striking ceramic sculptures and hand-tufted wall hangings by French artist [Caroline Achaintre](#) will soon be the talk of the town. Her works bring together a host of references such as carnival, catwalk fashion, and death-metal iconography, and also Primitivism and Expressionism – early 20th Western art movements that were heavily inspired from the non-Western and prehistoric imagery in order to find new ways of representing the modern world.

Caroline Achaintre's sculptures quite often resemble masks as they appear in different cultures across the world. These masks have a potential to take on a life of their own, conjuring "characters" in our imaginations. For art lovers there is good news, her latest series of works entitled "Fantômas" will be on exhibit at De La Warr Pavilion in Bexhill on Sea, East Sussex, from January 20, 2018, through April 29, 2018. It will be a solo exhibition by the French artist.

The exhibition's title refers to the mask worn by the shape-shifting French criminal Fantômas, invented by writers Pierre Souvestre and Marcel Allain in 1911. For Achaintre, the mask is a place where fantasy and reality can exist at the same time, noted [Creative Boom](#).

Caroline Achaintre is a mixed media artist living and working in London. Her work draws heavily on Primitivism and Expressionism. The artist was born in Toulouse and spent her growing years in Germany.

# ART SUPER | COLLECTORS GUIDE



ART BASEL MIAMI 2017

CAROLINE ACHAINTRE | ART : CONCEPT

## TOP 10 | ART BASEL MIAMI 2017

ART : CONCEPT | CAROLINE ACHAIANTRE



Caroline Achaintre, *Finnbar*, 2017, sculpture, enamelled porcelain, framed, Art : Concept, Paris

**Caroline Achaintre**, born in 1969 in Toulouse, France, she lives and works in London. Achaintre cites German Expressionism and post-war British sculpture as influences on her work. These movements are known for their crude aesthetics which conveyed the trauma of a war-time generation. Her work also draws from 'Primitivism', a style of early 20th century art that incorporated imagery from tribal cultures. Achaintre is interested in these periods because they present junctures between the ancient and modern, psychological and physical, exoticism and technology. Achaintre likens her work to anthropological museum displays, where objects are removed from another place or time and are brought into a contemporary context.

Caroline initially started making tufted objects as a way to translate drawings into real space. To make her work Achaintre tufts each individual piece of yarn into a woven canvas base, a process which she likens to painting in wool. The length, texture and colour of each thread takes on the qualities of expressionist painting. Achaintre uses wool because of its physicality, its attractive but sometimes also repulsive attributes. Its natural fabric suggests something primitive, but also the technological precision and connoisseurship of post-industrial craft. These ideas are reflected in her compositions, which look like futuristic tribal masks. She is interested in masks because they represent duplicity: whether used for shamanism, theatre, or carnival, masks suggest a state where reality and the fantastical can exist at the same time.

**Art : Concept**

Miami Beach 2017, Positions| MBCC | H2



## Caroline Achaintre - Why I Create

Exploring the inspirations and attitudes of artists working with clay and ceramic, featured in Vitamin C



Caroline Achaintre photographed by Teri Pengilley for the Independent

Originally training as a blacksmith before moving to London, Caroline Achaintre's work encompasses not just clay but a diverse range of media. Across her practice, she focuses on handcrafting techniques and her work has often been described in terms of the primitive or the carnivalesque.

Achaintre has a preference for paper clay (normal clay reinforced with fibre), and her ceramic sculptures are divided into three groups: masks hung on the wall, sculptures displayed on a plinth or on a stand, and combined works made of a leather head to which a ceramic mask is attached. In contrast to her often highly coloured textile works or her drawings, the glazed surfaces of her ceramics resemble animal skins; indeed they sometimes incorporate leather or fake snakeskin. Spontaneous and quickly worked in quite a crude way, her ceramics still look malleable, soft and vulnerable.

Grouped together for display on plinths and structures designed by the artist, they form a theatre of the absurd. Isolated, they radiate a sense of solitude and abandon, and yet they keep an inner sense of humour. In 2009 she enrolled in an evening class to explore how she could turn her paper sculpture into solid objects – and her work with clay began. Here the [Vitamin C: Clay and Ceramic in Contemporary Art](#) featured artist tells us why she works in the medium, what particular challenges it holds for her and who she thinks always gets it right.



Chubber 2013 Caroline Achaintre - Courtesy of Arcade, London. Photo: Andy Keate.

**Who are you and what's your relationship to clay and ceramics?** I am an artist who started to add clay and ceramics in 2009 to my practice. I started making paper mask-like objects from discarded drawings and prints but decided paper's lifespan wasn't long enough and thought I should try clay. I haven't trained in ceramics, but I have been using them for eight years now and I have learned a lot. For me they sit in that interesting middle ground between art and craft.

**Why do you think there's an increased interest around clay and ceramics right now?** I think there is more interest in process-based work now. After post conceptualism maybe some sensuality got lost, and now we're allowed again to let the material speak, to let the process be the goal.



Sinus 2015 - Caroline Achaintre - Courtesy of Arcade, London. Photo: Andy Keate.

**Ceramics is sometimes regarded as decorative, rather than fine arts. Does the distinction bother or annoy you?** I'm not even sure that's true anymore, quite a few ceramics made by artists are anything but decorative, they can be quite visceral or willingly abject. I think the decorative is more often associated with functional ceramics, but luckily even there the distinction is not made so much anymore. And decorative doesn't have to be negative anyway, it is also a tool. Perhaps now we are learning from Japan, where they seem not to make the distinction between art and craft in relation to their ceramics.

**Whose work in this field do you admire?** Not one individual piece comes to mind, but for example I like Jessica Jackson Hutchins - the pieces where she combines entire sofas with ceramics - they're great energetic pieces. I love Norbert Prangenberg's ceramics. And of course the Memphis (and other) ceramics made by Peter Shire.



Ponto 2012 - Caroline Achaintre Courtesy of Arcade, London. Photo: Andy Keate.

**What are the hardest things for you to get 'right' and what are your unique challenges?** To make the work look effortless, not forced. I want my pieces to appear full of life, not constructed, but as clay imprints any touch this is either achieved easily and quickly or not at all.

**What part does the vulnerability of the material play in things?** It depends which vulnerability we are talking about, the one before or after the firing. The unfired clay is very specific in what it likes or doesn't like, so one has to react and work with that. That gives clay its specific quality and defines the outcome, so those characteristics I would see as an attraction. The vulnerability of the fired clay in terms of sculpture can be simply annoying as it can break easier than most other materials. Especially as I still associate my pieces with paper and like them to be quite thin. I can see that this visible fragility has an appeal, but is simply a nightmare in terms of handling and especially transporting.



Sheballs 2011 - Caroline Achaintre Courtesy of Arcade, London. Photo: Andy Keate.

**Is how you display a piece an important element of the work itself? Do you ever suggest how something might be displayed?** How I display my pieces plays a crucial part, especially if I group my ceramics. The display furniture I design for my 'characters' becomes their habitat. Usually the display is a dialogue with the exhibition space, and the same pieces shown in a different space would be shown in a different way. I usually don't tell a buyer/collector how to display them but prefer him/her to find their own way. They like the company of other artworks and it results in interesting dialogues.

**What's next for you, and what's next for ceramics?** I have been invited to make work in response to the amazing Museo del Alabado in Quito, Ecuador. There I fell in love with the Valdivian Sculptures made from clay and stone around 3000 to 1500 BC. They are ancient and futurist at the same time, looking backwards and forwards, just like clay!

# Art Viewer

## Pre-capital at La Panacée

September 16, 2017

**Artists:** Caroline Achainre, Elise Carron, Eric Croes, Mimosa Echard, Aurélie Ferruel & Florentine Guedon, Yann Gerstberger, Bella Hunt & DDC, Matteo Nasini, Samara Scott, Markus Selg, Santo Tolone, Natsuko Uchino, We Are The Painters

**Exhibition title:** Pre-capital

**Curated by:** Charlotte Cosson, Emmanuelle Luciani, Nicolas Bourriaud

**Venue:** La Panacée, Montpellier, France

**Date:** May 20 – August 27, 2017

**Photography:** all images copyright and courtesy of the artists and La Panacée, Montpellier

**Note:** Exhibition booklet can be found [here](#)

The art world is all about “post” : postmodern, post-Internet, post-human... During the race towards progress, our eyes stare at the after, at the new, at what perforce seems better. Following Hegel, who gave meaning and purpose to History, and in line with a technological development governed Occident, the theorists and artists of postmodernism[1] never stopped echoing their present while ignoring a passed reduced to a toolbox of decontextualised shapes.

Always thinking “the after” is like getting in line with a revolutionary past made of artistic movements always replaced through radical changes. This very European – and typically French – way of looking at History makes it easy to forget that systematically, major and minor trends coexist within an era and very often the next sees the repressed resurface in lieu of the norm. A good example is the market economy : timidly born in the XVI<sup>th</sup> century, it only replaces the “material life” during the XVIII<sup>th</sup> and since then has become little by little the mainstream way of life.[2]

Caroline **Achaintre**, Elise Carron, Eric Croes, Aurélie Ferruel & Florentine Guedon, Yann Gerstberger, Bella Hunt & DDC, Matteo Nasini, Santo Tolone, Natsuko Uchino and We Are The Painters work with wool, clay, lime, natural pigments, canvas, bronze, leather... They transform the raw material themselves, far from the manufactured objects feeding our daily lives and western museums since Marcel Duchamp's *urinoir*. They thus get in line with traditional craftsmanships often lost in megacities. Their art comes from rural and ancestral knowledge; it couldn't come from a capital city. It portrays itself as a non-capitalist art.

The artworks exhibited here are at human scale, far from the gigantism characterizing the consumer society. They develop in an organic way in contrast to sharp angles and to the cold synthetic materials featured by modernity. As in Jacques Couëlle's architecture, where all is roundness and warmth, those works think a habitat respectful of a humankind reconnected to its natural dimension. They propose a living together that would ease the differences between artists and artisans, rich and poor, "nature" and "culture". It is therefore no surprise that we find precedents to this approach among the theories regarding humility and the vernacular traditions, developed by Yanagi Sohetsu when opposing the massive industrialisation of Japan, or in the Italian practices, grown from a nation that remains highly agricultural since the economic-industrial boom of the Glorious Thirties which didn't shine as much there.

The artists exhibited here develop a philosophy of the link that could tie them together in a community. This alternate living together concurs with the one of the "cultural creatives"[3] who often chose a way of life respectful of the environment. However, the way "pre-capital" artists work is not ecological by ideal, but by necessity. They will still be able to work after an electric and/or stock market crash. Those artists answer, sometimes unconsciously, to the necessity of "paying the entropic bill"[4] of modernity's massive use of Earth's energy resources.

Those artists in quest of ancestral craftsmanship are not naive enough to think it would be possible to come back to a "natural state", perfect and prior to the coming of mankind [5]. Mimosa Echard and Samara Scott put into their work the garbage gathered by consumption. They therefore emphasise the obligation for the upcoming society to take into account several centuries of accumulation. The "pre-capital" artworks thus tap into the source of humanity to glimpse fearlessly into a future assuming our present.

**-Charlotte Cosson & Emmanuelle Luciani**

[1] Paradoxically given the ontological immobility in which they are

[2] Braudel, Fernand, *Capitalism and Material Life*, 1979

[3] Ray, Paul H., Anderson, Sherry Ruth, *The Cultural Creatives: How 50 Million People Are Changing the World*, New York, Harmony Books, 2000

[4] Rifkin, Jeremy, *The Zero Marginal Cost Society: The Internet of Things, the Collaborative of Commons, & and the Eclipse of Capitalism*, St. Martin's Griffin 2015

[5] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *Of the Social Contract, Principles of Political Right*, 1762.





## Soutien à la Casa del Alabado de Quito <sup>[es]</sup>

**Une délégation du Service de coopération et d'action culturelle de l'Ambassade a été reçue au musée d'art précolombien « Casa del Alabado » de Quito.**

Soutien à la Casa del Alabado de Quito.

Une délégation du Service de coopération et d'action culturelle de l'Ambassade a été reçue au musée d'art précolombien « Casa del Alabado » de Quito.

Installé dans une maison du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle entièrement rénovée, ce spectaculaire musée privé présente une partie de la collection amassée en 40 ans par Daniel Klein et Mario Rivadeneira.

Dans le cadre du programme Zarigüeya, l'artiste contemporaine française Caroline Achaïntra y réalisera une exposition d'œuvres réalisées autour des collections du musée, de novembre 2017 à février 2018. En parallèle, l'ethnographe Roman Lotocki présentera ses travaux autour des masques d'El Alabado de septembre à novembre 2017. Deux manifestations qui seront appuyées par l'Ambassade de France en Équateur. [www.alabado.org](http://www.alabado.org)





**CAROLINE ACHAINTRE  
REJOINT  
LA GALERIE ART :  
CONCEPT**

*Caroline Achaintre,  
Brutus, 2017. Courtesy  
de l'artiste, Art: Concept,  
Paris, et Arcade, Londres.*

> La Galerie Art : Concept, à Paris, vient d'annoncer qu'elle représentait dorénavant Caroline Achaintre. Cette artiste spécialiste de la laine tuftée et de la céramique, née en 1969 à Toulouse, vit et travaille à Londres. Elle a notamment participé à « Decorum. Tapis et tapisseries d'artistes » au musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris en 2013-2014. Elle a été la lauréate de la 13<sup>e</sup> édition de l'illy Present Future Prize sur la foire Artissima à Turin en 2013. Sa première exposition personnelle à la Galerie Art : Concept, à Paris, se déroulera du 13 avril au 12 mai 2018. <http://www.galerieartconcept.com>



## The Art of Knitting Pictures

Typical! You wait years for a solo show of knitted paintings to come along, then two open in the same week. Both use the material as a means of confusing the picture and its support. That aside, they are perfectly contrasted. Rosemary Trockel's Strickbilder (at [Skarstedt](#) to 4 Aug) have been central to the famous German artist's practice since 1984. They challenge the status attributed to traditionally female craft, both by presenting it as fine art, and by having the knitting done by others on computerised machines. The results shown here are rigorous, coldly analytical black and white representations of knitting patterns and political and commercial motifs. Channing Hansen is a new-to-London Californian man who shears, washes, dyes, blends and spins rare breeds of wool himself before using his own designs of stitches to make unwieldy multicoloured textiles full of holes, as if parodying the expected level of male knitting expertise. He then stretches them around his own wooden stretchers, which remain visible (at [Stephen Friedman](#) to 29 July). As if that's not enough personal input, the patterns are derived from computer coding of his own DNA. And if that's not enough knitting, the highlights of 'Playing Mas', a six artist show themed around carnival and masquerade (at [Vigo](#) to 21 July) are wool works. Zak Ové's crocheted doilies and Caroline Achaintre's hand-tufted wall rugs.



Caroline Achaintre: 'Moustache Eagle', 2008 - Hand tufted wool on fabric 240 x 154 cm

Most days art Critic Paul Carey-Kent spends hours on the train, traveling between his home in Southampton and his day job in London. Could he, we asked, jot down whatever came into his head?

## Peculiar Things Are Afoot at the Kunsthalle Basel

BY *Andrew Russett* POSTED 06/14/17 10:41 AM



Installation view of "Ungestalt" at the Kunsthalle Basel, with 2014 works by Park McArthur on the floor at center, and a 2016 piece by Caroline Achaintre high on the wall at back.

ARTNEWS

When I visited the Kunsthalle Basel this afternoon, a friendly woman at the front desk told me that she had to ask if I would like to see “Ungestalt,” [the group show currently on view at the museum](#), with or without the work of artist Florence Jung. Not one to want to miss out on something, but admittedly with a sense of foreboding, I said I’d go with the Jung. “Keeping a positive outlook on things!” she replied as she handed me a white envelope. “We like that.”

Inside the envelope was a typed and signed letter from Elena Filipovic, the director of the Kunsthalle Basel, who co-curated the show, which reads in full:

*Dear Visitor,*

*Florence Jung was invited to be co-curator of this exhibition. She used her position to influence exhibition-making decisions on every level. The infiltration of these constitutes her contribution to the exhibition although their details will remain confidential.*

*Sincerely,*

*Elena Filipovic*

That note, which suggests hidden forces, unseen influences, or a kind sort of curatorial contamination, sets the tone nicely for “Ungestalt,” which concerns works that, as its title suggests, are vaguely unformed, shifting, or somehow unrestrained. We may never know to what degree Jung was responsible, but this is a superb show.

There are ragtag-elegant fabric paintings by [Eric N. Mack](#), a projection and a video by the always elusive Trisha Donnelly, and rough-and-tumble wool pieces by Caroline Achaintre, among other things, and they are installed inventively—high and low, here and there. It’s an unusual production. Extending a series that he showed at [Asad Raza’s SoHo apartment](#) in 2015, Adrián Villar Rojas is showing a refrigerator and freezer, the former stuffed with watermelons and bottled water, the latter with a lobster, vegetables, and tricky-to-identify items covered with ice and frost. ([Judging from photos](#), the piece was once quite radiantly colored.)

## L'altérité espiègle de Caroline Achaintre

✍ Samantha Deman   © 20 février 2017   📌 art textile, Caroline Achaintre, Céramique, Dessin, Gravure



L'encre, l'aquarelle, la terre et la laine sont autant de matériaux à partir desquels Caroline Achaintre bâtit un univers singulier, où l'étrange côtoie l'humour, entre abstraction et figuration. Une démarche qui se nourrit de références culturelles multiples – née en France et élevée en Allemagne, elle est installée à Londres depuis une vingtaine d'années – : de l'expressionnisme allemand à la science fiction, en passant par le primitivisme et la scène heavy metal, voire les dessins animés ! Présentée l'été dernier au Baltic Center for Contemporary Art de Gateshead, près de Newcastle en Angleterre, la première rétrospective de son travail revient sur ses dix dernières années de création. Elle est à découvrir au Frac Champagne-Ardenne, à Reims, jusqu'au 23 avril.

Du fond de la salle, sa silhouette pollue et ses grands yeux ronds, agrémentés d'un discret haussement de sourcils, interpellent le visiteur. Réalisée en 2012, *Wanderer* (photo ci-dessus) est l'une des pièces emblématiques du travail de la laine développé par Caroline Achaintre depuis le début des années 2000. « J'emploie la technique du tuffage, explique-t-elle. Pour cela, je tends mes toiles à la verticale et me place à l'arrière avec un pistolet qui projette les brins de laine à travers le tissu. C'est très physique comme processus et c'est l'une des raisons pour lesquelles je l'affectionne particulièrement. » Une douzaine d'œuvres grand format couvrent les murs des deux niveaux de l'espace d'exposition. De nombreuses céramiques – une pratique débutée il y a six ans –, un ensemble de dessins et une série de gravures complètent la proposition. Quel que soit le support, l'artiste place au cœur de sa réflexion la question de l'autre, de l'ailleurs. Elle nous entraîne dans un « univers parallèle » qui se laisse volontiers décoder, n'exigeant qu'un peu d'imagination pour dérouler son fil narratif et convertir les formes qui le peuplent en compagnons familiers. « Mon intérêt pour l'étrange et le mystérieux m'a amenée très tôt à m'interroger sur la psychologie de personnalités magiques comme à m'intéresser à la figure du clown ; je peignais énormément de visages grimés. De fil en aiguille, je me suis concentrée sur la notion de masque, que l'on ne peut dissocier d'une évocation du primitivisme et de ses effets sur l'histoire de l'art. J'ai d'ailleurs passé beaucoup de temps dans des collections ethnologiques ; j'aime ces petits fragments exotiques venant de l'autre bout du monde. »



De gauche à droite : Big Mad (2014), DingDings (2016), S.C.R.U.B. (2015), Astro S. (2015), Caroline Achaintre.



Caroline Achaintre.

Née en 1969 à Toulouse, Caroline Achaintre n'a de la France que quelques souvenirs d'enfance. A la séparation de ses parents, elle part vivre en Allemagne d'où est originaire sa mère. Mue par une forte envie d'apprendre à travailler de ses mains, elle décide, au début des années 1990 de suivre un apprentissage en tant que forgeron. Activité qu'elle va exercer pendant cinq ans. « Même si cela ne m'a pas permis d'exprimer ma créativité, j'ai découvert comment réaliser une idée en fabricant un objet. » S'ensuivent des études d'art, à Halle (Saale), de 1996 à 1998 en Allemagne, puis à Londres – elle y est attirée par l'émulation née de la scène YBA (Young British Artists) –, où elle rejoint le Goldsmiths College, entre 2001 et 2003, après deux années passées au Chelsea College of Art & Design. Installée depuis lors dans la capitale anglaise, l'artiste mène une quête tout entière tournée vers l'exploration d'un entre-deux où règne la dualité : « L'idée du masque est centrale dans mon travail, pas tant l'objet lui-même que la notion, qui implique un questionnement sur ce qui se cache derrière une façade, sur le rapport entre le devant et le derrière, sur la possibilité d'une double identité ; mes pièces tuffées sont d'ailleurs quasiment toujours habitées par deux

personnalités qui coexistent. » Des réflexions qui trouvent aussi écho dans son travail du dessin, qui l'accompagne au quotidien – « Il y a ce qu'il y a sur et dans le papier », glisse-t-elle dans un sourire –, comme de la céramique. Pour cette dernière, elle utilise ce qu'on appelle de la terre-papier, mélange d'argile et de fibres de cellulose, dont elle affectionne la grande malléabilité, mais aussi « le côté direct, immédiat, qui mêle le hasard au contrôle ». « Cette part d'incertitude est elle aussi importante : qu'il s'agisse des céramiques, des pièces tuffées ou des dessins, elle participe à créer de l'étrange, de l'exotique, à convoquer l'altérité. »





De gauche à droite : Tummocks (2013), Welfler (2012) et Èlès (2012), Caroline Achaintre.

Caroline Achaintre considère une œuvre comme aboutie lorsqu'elle s'anime, qu'elle l'amuse ou la touche. « Quand elle prend vie, résume-t-elle. Et cela peut tout à fait être le cas d'une forme complètement abstraite. » Vient alors la recherche d'un titre, dont la sonorité revêt pour elle autant d'importance que la signification des termes choisis. « Se met en place tout un échange ludique entre ce que je vois et ressens face à la pièce et les mots qui me viennent à l'esprit. » Fantaisie et humour sont le plus souvent convoqués. Au regardeur de se prêter au jeu des correspondances ou de simplement se laisser guider, en toute subjectivité, par son imagination. Quel que soit son choix, il repartira l'esprit revigoré, peuplé de créatures fascinantes et saugrenues, parfois inquiétantes mais surtout des plus attachantes.



De gauche à droite : Fevver (2008) et Specter (2017), Caroline Achaintre.

LIVRES | MONOGRAPHIE

# Caroline Achaintre

✍ CAROLINE ACHAINTRE

📍 | [FRAC CHAMPAGNE-ARDENNE](#)

Cet ouvrage est la première monographie consacrée à l'artiste Caroline Achaintre, coéditée par le FRAC Champagne-Ardenne et BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead. Il permet de découvrir entre autres les œuvres tissées de l'artiste.



La première monographie consacrée au travail de l'artiste Caroline Achaintre, a été coéditée par le FRAC Champagne-Ardenne et BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead. Il contient des essais d'Anne Dressen, conservateur à l'ARC / Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, Zoë Gray, curatrice au Wiels centre d'art contemporain, Bruxelles et un entretien entre l'artiste et Emma Dean, curatrice à BALTIC.

## **Une invitation à la réflexion**

Caroline Achaintre travaille sur papier, textile et céramique, son œuvre est un mélange de couleurs, de formes et d'expression. Elle dessine à partir de nombreuses sources d'inspiration, incluant le primitivisme et l'expressionnisme allemand. On retrouve dans son travail le côté exotique du carnaval et l'aspect ludique de la pop. L'artiste navigue entre le figuratif et l'abstrait occupant un territoire familièrement étrange.

Son approche est basée sur la matérialité et la surface; les aquarelles aux couleurs sucrées, les fils de laine touffues et les surfaces brillantes sont devenus des signes distinctifs de son langage visuel.

Chaque page de l'ouvrage est consacrée à une œuvre en grand format et permet au lecteur de s'imprégner de l'univers de Caroline Achaintre.

## **Caroline Achaintre, jeune artiste contemporaine**

Né à Toulouse en 1963, Caroline Achaintre a étudié en Allemagne, à la Kunsthochschule de Halle, avant de partir au Royaume-Uni, au Chelsea College of Art and Design et au Goldsmiths College, tous deux situés à Londres, où elle vit et travaille désormais.

Parmi ses expositions monographiques récentes, on peut citer : « boo à c-o-m-p-o-s-i-t-e », Bruxelles (2016), « BP Spotlight » à la Tate Britain, Londres (2015), « Present/Future Illy Art Prize » au Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea Rivoli de Turin (2014) ou « Camp Coo », University of Hertfordshire Galleries and Smith Row, Hertfordshire and Bury St. Edmunds (2013).

Son travail a également été présenté au Musée d'art moderne de la ville de Paris dans l'exposition « Decorum ». Elle est représentée par la galerie Arcade Fine Arts, Londres.

Le frac Champagne-Ardenne est membre du réseau platform.

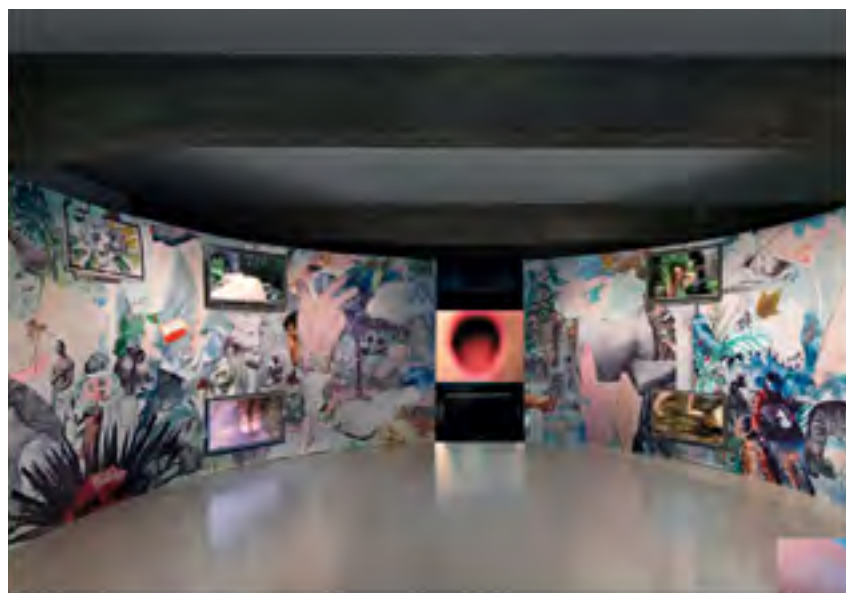
# BAZAAR Harper's



*Gegen  
den Strich*  
*Zwei französische  
Künstlerinnen  
in London und ihre  
klugen, eigenwilligen  
Parallelwelten.  
Eine Vorstellung*

*Text JULIA GROSSE*

*Todo Cuzto, von Caroline Achaintre,  
handgetufteter Teppich, 2015*



## DIE FREIHEIT IM ICH-SYSTEM

Turner-Prize-Gewinnerin Laure Prouvost schafft in ihrer Kunst neue Realitäten. Die Faszination für das Altern gehört dazu

Es gibt ein aussagekräftiges Porträt von Laure Prouvost: Sie posiert wie ein androgynes Mannequin aus den Zwanzigerjahren, Mona-Lisa-haft lüchelnd, anstelle eines eleganten Hutes liegen zwei fette, tote Fische auf ihrem kurzen blonden Schopf, verstörend, absurd, surreal, verzückend. Solche Gefühle ziehen sich durch Prouvosts gesamtes hochdekoriertes Werk. 2011 gewann sie den Max-Mara-Preis, 2013 wurde sie für ihren Film *Häute* mit Großbritanniens wichtigster Kunstauszeichnung, dem Turner-Preis, ausgezeichnet. London ist ihre Wahlheimat seit vielen Jahren, hier studierte sie am Central Saint Martins College und lebt hier mit ihrem englischen Freund und der kleinen Tochter.

In *Häute* inszenierte sie eine imaginäre Teestunde zwischen dem Dadaisten Kurt Schwitters und ihrem (fiktiven) Großvater. Die englische Sprache spielt dabei eine besondere Rolle oder genauer, ihre Tücken für die bei Lille geborene Französin. „Mein Englisch war miserabel, als ich das erste Mal in London ankam. Also habe ich meine eigene Art von Sprache entwickelt, in der ich häufig Dinge missverstanden habe. Ich habe damals alles durcheinandergebracht wie zum Beispiel, dass der Bruder der Onkel ist und so etwas. Aber genau das liebe ich, weil es plötzlich eine eigene Freiheit für neue Kombinationen und Verbindungen gibt. Man kriert sein eigenes System.“ Daher rührt

auch der Titel ihres Werks *Häute*, meint „Do you want some tea?“ und behandelt Englisch als Fremd- oder auch als Kunstsprache, als Zauber des multikulturellen Londons.

Prouvosts raumfüllende Installationswelten aus Video, Skulptur und Zeichnung sind Aufforderung zur Überforderung: Die Filmbilder prasseln viel zu schnell auf den Betrachter ein. Die Künstlerin berauscht, verführt. Mal erotisch wie im Film *Soufflé*, in dem junge Frauen süße Beeren verzehren und Prouvost dazu ostentativ in die Kamera atmet. Oder sie bietet dem Betrachter an, in der Ausstellung zu rauchen: „Du kannst hier ruhig rauchen. Sag ihnen, ich hätte es dir erlaubt!“ Doch Vorsicht – die 1978 geborene Künstlerin mixt Fakt und Fiktion. Für ihren „Großvater“ hat sie eine besondere Biografie zum Kernstück ihrer Arbeit gemacht: als Tunnelgräber zwischen seinem Wohnzimmer und Afrika. Über ihre Faszination für das Alter schrieb sie im *Guardian*: „Die älteren Generationen wissen mehr. Sie haben gelebt. Sie haben einen inneren Frieden, der mit dem Alter kommt.“ *Hopefully.*



*All behind us'll go deeper, deep down and the will we...* heißt die Ausstellung von Laure Prouvost im MKK Frankfurt, bis 6. November 2016. LINKE SEITE: *Grandma's Dream*, Extra City, Antwerpen, 2014. OBEN (v. l.): *Furfromwords, car mirror, eat raspberries when swimming through the sun, to swallow sweet amella*, Collezione Maramotti, Reggio Emilia, Italien, 2013. *A Way to Leak, Lick, Leak, Faberbrat*, Los Angeles, 2016 und *It, Heat, Hit, Videos*, 2010

## MEISTERIN DER MASKERADE

*Wie schön, diese Wandbehänge und Keramiken. Obacht! Die Werke von Caroline Achaintre sind geschossen scharf und entwickeln starke Gestalten*

**S**chneiderei? Wer vor Caroline Achaintres Studio im Osten Londons steht, könnte meinen, hier befände sich ein Sweatshop, in dem zwanzig Nähmaschinen gleichzeitig rattern. Ein irrer Krach. Tatsächlich schießt hier die Künstlerin Caroline Achaintre mit einer Art Pistole Wollfäden durch die Leinwand und kreiert großformatige Wandteppiche, vor denen die Kunstwelt auf die Knie geht. Leuchtend bunte Gebilde, die aussehen wie abgestürzte, schöne Fabelwesen. „Am Schluss fixiere ich die Rückseite immer mit Latex. Wenn ich dann am nächsten Tag ins Studio komme, riecht es wie in einer Turnschuhfabrik...“

Gerade eröffnete Achaintre eine große Einzelausstellung im Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art und war heil-froh, dass ihr Studio, die Schule der Tochter und die Wohnung so nah beieinanderliegen. „Mein persönliches Bermuda-dreieck“, sagt die Künstlerin, 1969 in Toulouse geboren, die dann in Fürth bei Nürnberg aufwuchs und Ende der Neunzigerjahre zum Studieren nach London kam und blieb. Trotz Brexit und absurden Lebenshaltungskosten ist es ihre Stadt. „Ich hatte immer eine große Affinität zu England. Die Musikszene, Subkultur und Kunstwelt um die Zeit der Young British Artists (YBAs) haben mich hierhergezogen.“ Natürlich wählte sie im Juni gegen den Brexit. „Ich war von dem Ergebnis total enttäuscht, gerade in London fand ich die Integration so einzigartig. Vor allem die Kunstförderungen werden leiden, da es ja viele europäische Allianzen gibt. Aber ich werde England trotzdem treu bleiben.“

Als sie 2002 am legendären Goldsmith College Kunst studierte, begann sie mit kleinen, intensiv leuchtenden Tuschezeichnungen. „Und irgendwie reizte mich die Idee, diese Arbeiten in einem sehr viel größeren Format darstellen zu können. Außerdem war ich auf der Suche nach einem eher ‚hübschen‘ Medium.“ So kam Caroline Achaintre zu Fasern, Stoffen, Wolle und Keramik.



Die Künstlerin Caroline Achaintre in ihrem Londoner Studio (links). Mit einer Garnpistole schießt sie die Wolle von der Rückseite des Rahmens in ihre Wandteppiche. **OREN Golden, Keramik, 2016, Installation im Castello di Rivoli, Turin, 2017. RECHTE SEITE: Mother George, handgefertigter Teppich, 2017**

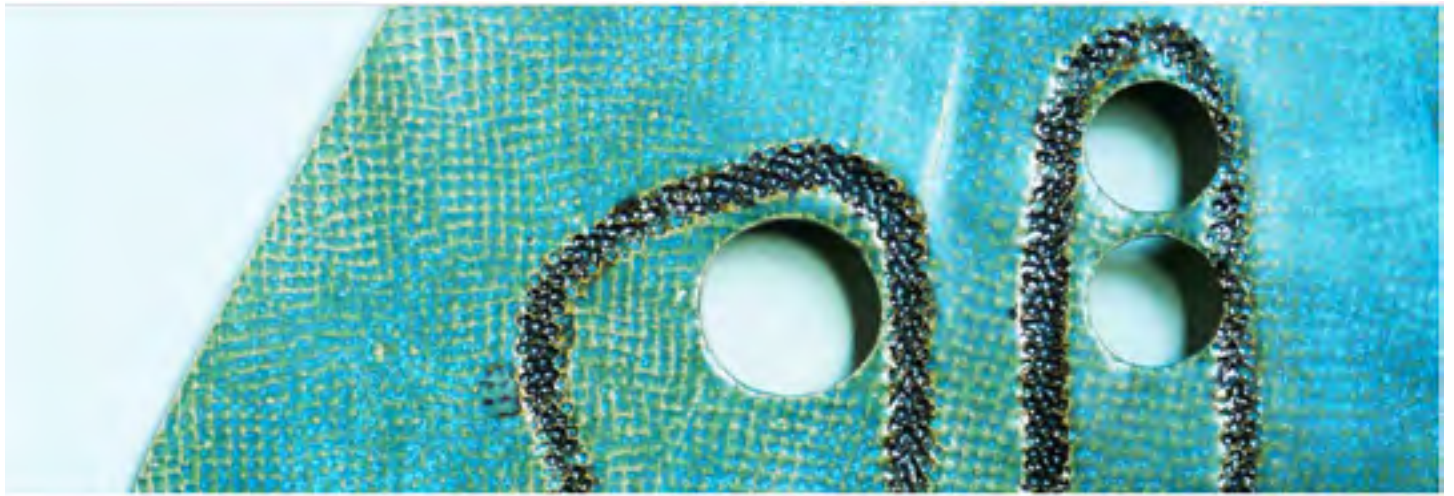




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# frieze



## Caroline Achaintre

BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead,  
UK

BY BETH BRAMICH

The French/German, London-based artist Caroline Achaintre has been exploring the peculiar psychology of the mask for more than a decade. This has led her to some unusual places – from the costumes and characters of the European carnival and commedia dell'arte to catwalk fashion, S&M dens and schlocky sci-fi and horror films. Her work is heavily indebted to the German expressionists' appropriation of primitive forms and the playful permissiveness of pop. Her first major survey, this exhibition brings together 63 works, including hand-tufted wool wall hangings, ceramic sculptures, prints and watercolours.





Caroline Achaintre,  
2016, exhibition  
view, BALTIC  
Centre for  
Contemporary Art.  
Photograph: John  
McKenzie © BALTIC

Drawing is where Achaintre's practice began and the 20 delicate, yet remarkably intense, watercolours here highlight her interest in the uncanny. These small pictures feature ambiguous figure-forms, as in *Inside Your Head* (2005): a candy-coloured Rorschach inkblot from which emerge the crude features of a devilish clown face with black holes for eyes. A later work, *MeYou&theOtherTwo* (2012), is an example of the artist's use of wax alongside watercolour to layer one figure on top of another – a doubling that speaks to her ongoing interest in the co-existence of dual or multiple personalities.

Achaintre began working with wool in the early 2000s, as a way of translating the speed and spontaneity of her mark-making to a larger scale while retaining its vibrancy and intensity. Hand-tufting might sound like a demure pastime but, in fact, involves a high-powered air-pressured gun, with which the artist fires great shaggy loops of thread through a stretched canvas – a process she describes as 'painting with wool'. A highlight from the dozen works collected here – each occupying their own wall and varying in size from two- to four-metres-tall – is *Moustache-Eagle* (2008). There is a dynamic verticality to this

image of a majestic bird of paradise opening its wings to reveal a drooping Frank Zappa moustache. This hybrid is bird, man and mask all at once, with two eyeholes suggesting a mind behind the feathers and fur.



Caroline Achaintre,  
*Double Wurst*,  
2015, installation  
view, BALTIC  
Centre for  
Contemporary Art,  
2016. Photograph:  
John McKenzie ©  
BALTIC

The promiscuity of Achaintre's approach, from her sources to her techniques and her playfulness, lends her work its vitality. Though she began working with ceramics a little over five years ago, the 25 wall- and plinth-based pieces demonstrate her complete embrace of the immediacy and malleability of the medium. As with her instinctive application of the wool gun, Achaintre discovered that by quickly folding, gathering and puncturing sheets of paper clay it was possible to capture an expression – like the small hole in *M. Ennuie* (2016), a barely opened eye or lips pursed in a listless sigh – that conjures a character. And, while the uncanny animism of the wool works is accentuated by their furry finish, it is also heightened by their contrast with the lustrous ceramic glazes, which masquerade as flesh – of snakes and crocodiles as well as other leathery glosses.

A distinctively unsexed new textile work, *Lord Lard* (2016), is a corpulent man-mountain. Despite being little more than a large triangle with eye holes, he projects a real emotional charge. Like a cross between Jabba the Hut and a witchdoctor, he thrums with potency as his low hanging tufts drip menacingly off the wall and onto the gallery floor.



Caroline Achantre, 2016, exhibition view, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art. Photograph: John McKenzie © BALTIC

Grimacing, gaping and pouting, Achantre's creations are bursting with personality. The theatrical, alien world her characters occupy maintains its intensity through the dynamic relationship between their abstract and figurative qualities, both mask and man, never quite resolving into one thing or the other, but existing as their own idiosyncratic selves.

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**BETH BRAMICH**

# Aesthetica

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Q+A with Caroline Achaintre, BALTIC



Caroline Achaintre (b. 1969) works across a diverse range of media that includes textiles, ceramics, prints and watercolours, using techniques typically associated with the applied arts. Opening a new exhibition at Baltic, Gateshead, Aesthetica talk to the artist about her influences, labour-intensive practice and bold contributions to the arts industry.

**A:** Your work seems to draw up many interesting parallels, for example between ancient and modern or geometric minimalism in contrast with technology. Could you talk about how these dichotomies have informed your practice, in both conceiving ideas and in their execution

**CA:** My inspiration comes from ethnological collections just as much as popular culture, especially the aesthetics of music, album covers, or for example handbags, their surfaces and the faces I see in them. Those influences coexist with each other, but they also relate to each other. Geometry, Primitivism, Anthropomorphism, Futurism, Science Fiction, it is all connected.

**A:** How do you feel that you relate personally to the works? They seem to enact striking tribal masks do you feel as an artist that you must be able to see part of yourself in the artwork or can it be devoid from your personal background/context as a work in its own right?

**CA:** The work is always personal, even if it does not necessarily talk from one's direct background. I create my own world in a way, characters that coexist with each other, sometimes within one piece. I am interested in the idea of looking in and out simultaneously, which often results in mask-like pieces. It is a fusion of the mask and the bearer of it, they are both real. There is more than one persona within one being. Within the world I create there are certainly aspects of my own persona, but in not such a literal way.

**A:** Many of your pieces seem to be labour intensive, requiring technicality and perseverance. Could you talk about the actual processes involved?

**CA:** My wall hangings are hand-tufted, the process is very physical, but less labour intensive as for example weaving. I use an air tool connected to a compressor and with air pressure I shoot wool from the back through the canvas. It's an additive way of working, I shoot one line of wool into the canvas and it immediately expands, so I have a line. It's kind of a three-dimensional woollen painting. My ceramic sculptures are made in a more spontaneous way; I try to capture expressions in clay, which has to happen fast.

**A: How important do you think other artists and contextual influences are on your practice?**

**CA:** Well, there are a range of artists I admire, such as Mike Kelley, Rosemarie Trockel, Kai Althoff, Carol Rama just to name a few, but there are no direct references.

**A: Could you talk about the influences in your work, perhaps commenting on the references to German Expressionism, "Primitivism" and post-war British sculpture?**

**CA:** I can relate to the directness of Expressionism, the dark side within it, the portrayal of 'angst'. Especially when I was working intensely with linocuts I looked a lot at Emil Nolde's work.

**A: How do you think that colour contributes to the reception of the works? Is the choice of colour something that you consider within the initial ideas for the art?**

**CA:** Colour is an important part of my work, it sets the tone for the world/character the piece is from, often bright, but sometimes also muted and subtle. Again, I play with associations, also through colour. The tufted piece *Ray-Inn* radiates sun rays, whereas the ceramic sculpture 'Mola' looks like it comes from the bottom of the sea.

**A: What is it about texture that you find so interesting as an element to consider? How do you think your audiences respond to the sensual aspect of the sculptures?**

**CA:** I want my pieces to be non-neutral. Texture supports that, as it can emulate surfaces such as skin and fur. My shaggy wool hangings certainly have an eerie feeling to them, often they look like fur or hair and have an animist quality. Wool has an aura, although I am not into New Age, it really has. Those wall hangings are very intense, they have such a strong physical presence. My clay sculptures operate on a more seductive level, its luscious glazes can be very seductive. I like emulating surfaces, such as snake or fish skin and in conjunction with its shininess the ceramics seem moist and alive.

**A: If your works collectively had a specific tone, what do you think that would be?**

**CA:** Intense and playful.

**Opens today until 30 October. For more information: [www.balticmill.com](http://www.balticmill.com)**



Culture › Art › Features

## Caroline Achaintre, artist: 'It's the first time I am in a studio and it's warmer inside than outdoors'

Karen Wright meets the artist in her modest studio in Homerton, east London

Karen Wright | Thursday 4 February 2016 16:31 GMT | [0 comments](#)



On the fringe: Caroline Achaintre in her studio in east London. *Teri Pengilly*

Caroline Achaintre moved into her modest studio in Homerton, east London, three years ago. "I am happy it is well insulated. It's the first time I am in a studio and it's warmer inside than outdoors." It is a cluster of 50 studios under a block of modern flats. Achaintre admits it is isolated; there are no communal spaces to meet in. "It means you crack on with your work. I have a nine-year-old kid and her school and my house are close by. It is my Bermuda Triangle".

Achaintre was born in Toulouse in 1969. Her parents split up when she was young and her German mother took her to live in a small city near Nuremberg. She studied first at the Kunsthochschule in Halle (Saale), in the former East Germany, where she was awarded a DAAD scholarship.

She chose to use it to come to London to study, drawn, she says, by the YBA art scene and music. She was attracted to heavy metal bands including Slipknot, clarifying that she was interested in the "clowning", where the musicians were "applying one face on top of another".

Growing up in Germany she became interested in German Expressionism and primitivism, channelling her initial artistic energy into producing watercolours and large wall painting.



Studying first at Chelsea College of Art and Design and then at Goldsmiths College, she was frustrated at her attempts at painting and "I wanted to find a domestic medium".

She decided to try to make a carpet of her work. She approached the textile department, discovering an old tufting gun with which she began to experiment, and discovered the medium and materials that she has now made the centre of her practice.

In the studio there is a loom set up with a tufting work in progress and I admit to a fascination with the technique.

She jumps up and gamely gives me a demonstration of the noisy procedure. Shooting the threads through a canvas, working from the back to the front, she is basically working blind. She mixes the lengths of threads, producing an uneven surface and allowing accident, something that appeals to her, inspired by her professed love of expressionism.

The dominant although incomplete work on the loom is destined for ARCO, an art fair in Barcelona, her work now being eminently collectable. With a forthcoming solo show at the Baltic in Gateshead and her inclusion in the British Art Show 8, she is an artist to watch.

Achaintre is engaging to speak to and animated. With an infectious laugh she tells me: "I have to put latex on the back of the almost finished work so the wool stays in place. I come in the next day and the whole studio smells like a sneaker factory. I like that."

*Caroline Achaintre in the British Art Show 8 opens in Edinburgh on 13 February and runs until 8 May ([britishartshow8.com](http://britishartshow8.com)) ●*





## The Artist in Her Studio

Caroline Achaintre at Tate Britain

Above: Caroline Achaintre *Mole* 2014, glazed ceramic. Left: Caroline Achaintre photographed in her studio by Victoria Siddle, June 2014

A display of Caroline Achaintre's recent works, curated by Isabella Maidment, runs at Tate Britain from 13 October to 3 May. BP Spotlight. BP Displays supported by BP for 25 Years. Achaintre talked to Mariko Finch.

'I work with the mask in the widest sense, using ceramics and textiles. My tufted works always depict more than one being. There is the façade of the surface, and then the question of who is behind it. I was interested in the psychological aspect of what you see in these objects: they have anthropomorphic features, but they are not abstract, and not yet figurative; a multilayering of multi-personalities, as in *Moustache Eagle* from 2008.

'My interest in masquerade drew me to a lot of ethnological collections and so-called "primitive" art when creating these works – stark expressions and minimal information forming a face-like image – and this, along with an interest in the German expressionists, helped to inform my process.

'I began making small drawings, but wanted to work on a larger scale while maintaining the level of intensity. I wanted them to be domestic objects, something eerie and uncanny in the family environment by using lots of fibres – almost like pixels – to get this three-dimensional plane. You feel attracted to it and repulsed at the same time.

'These drawings developed into a new body of ceramic works. I try to emulate other materials for the surfaces of the ceramic pieces, such as shed snake skin. Sometimes it needs only a tiny bit of information to become more than a sheet of clay.

'It's a very spontaneous process, often a really quick gesture of gathering the clay so it warps. I pretend it's a piece of paper as that's how I used to make them, before they became too delicate.'

FOCUS:  
STUDIO VISIT

Caroline Achaintre

Theatrical textiles  
and characters in clay

by Isobel Harbison

Caroline Achaintre's studio in east London is in a purpose-built complex on a stretch of green belt between Hackney and the city's Olympic Park. Each small studio wall introduces me to different aspects of the artist's work. We mosey around the room together, leafing through watercolours, picking up ceramics, inspecting her tufted wool works and scrutinizing gallery plans for future exhibitions. Our conversation progresses from specific pieces to her diverse inspirations, many of which come from different pockets of 20th-century design.

Along the white wall opposite the door are pinned a cluster of drawings, sketches and photocopies. Individually, the pictures are ambiguous but their collective effect is bright and exuberant. They are the starting points for several new works by this French/German artist that, in their finished form, will combine the virtuosity of a Baschus pioneer, the audacious thrust of postmodern design and the punch and bawdiness of a carnival costumer. In preparatory sketches, parallel and crosshatched lines of coloured marker pen on paper make patterned rounds with clear outlines, occasionally broken up by frenzied scribbles. These preparatory shapes have been distilled from images found in books of non-eroded fashions and the European carnival tradition. One photograph, pinned between her drawings, shows a person in a costume of thick, hanging ropes, face obscured, like some otherworldly creature emerging from a swamy phantasmagoria.

The costumes or disguises that fascinate Achaintre are often oversized, melodramatic and faintly absurd hybrids of man and animal. Borrowing brassy colours, dramatic textures and disruptive patterning from their sources, these drawings are reanimated by Achaintre into new figures in watercolour, clay, furniture or fabric. It is this transition from source images, in which living forms become dramatic abstractions, that results in the extraordinary quality of the artist's figures, which are simultaneously illogical and intensely present. This tenuous balance reappears consistently through Achaintre's works, which she refers to as characters. While her compositions or installations are, strictly speaking, non-narrative, displayed together they resemble troupes of gregarious actors caught mid-improvisation.

Pinned beside the sketches are some images of Achaintre's recent clay works, which resemble human heads clad in the surreal armour of carnival masks. *Toup Afre* (2013) is an oblong piece rounded at both ends and made to hang vertically like a long face, with two slits for eyes cut close together beneath a deep

brow created by an overhanging fold. Another exaggerated horizontal fold lower down suggests ageing human jaws – the careful tucks are modelled with the sharp eye of a fine cartoonist. *Toup Afre* is a funny work if your humour is deadpan: painted in black and white verticals, its serious expression is emphasized but also undermined by the dead patterning of a jester or clown's striped fabric.

In her 2012 installation at Eastside Projects, Birmingham, the design of one plinth was borrowed from the Memphis Group's early 1980s cabinets: a zigzagging shape painted white, black and lime green. Achaintre's display furniture at her 'Camp Cos' exhibition in 2013 was influenced by the rudimentary dynamics and form of Tetris pieces, the shape-shifting tetra-cubes from cult 1980s puzzle video game. These serpentine plinths ascend from the floor echoing the steady zigzag pattern that the animated tiles originally formed on the computer screen. The artist couples these two influences – Memphis Group furniture and Tetris – as inspirational postmodern designs. They appeal to her, she explains, because the exhibition furniture provides the clean lines and modular units to counter-balance the uneven contours of her hardened clay. Also, crucially, the designs are 'less polite' than their austere and humourless modernist counterparts. These unusual support structures lend her clay works dynamic bodies of their own, and offer greater potential for playful choreography than the traditional, minimal plinth.

We sit down. Achaintre reaches for one of the picture books that weigh down her shelves. She flicks through a well-thumbed volume on 1980s and '90s Russian design to find an image of a dramatic fur coat, photographed mid-flight on a fashion runway. It was made from some exotic animal pelt and extended from the model's shoulders like the outstretched wings of a bald eagle whose feathers are on full display. *Aviation* (2013), one of Achaintre's tufted pieces, is a dramatic re-creation of this stylish wingspan. Made for her U1 Galleries show last year, it was suspended in the centre of the space's high atrium, its front and back exposed. The browns and tans, greys and pinks of the tufting are plotted and woven, the broad shape fanning out and extending downwards so that the thrust is vertical, as if the piece were taking flight. Both the original bird and its extravagant fur interpretation give way to Achaintre's new work, a site of dramatic action.

The beginnings of another tufted piece flank one wall of the studio. Black threading has begun: the artist's tufting gun firing lines

of it like brushstrokes through a large marked-up and stretched canvas. Achaintre crops the colours and threads as the work progresses. This is one of several such pieces planned for the artist's 'Spotlight' show at Tate Britain, which will open in October this year. She has built a 1:5-scale model of its large neo-classical gallery, the height of which will present the most immediate challenge. She will think about the vertical thrust first – how the display architecture can elevate her rambunctious characters without breaking their momentum or flattening their fizz, and then she will consider her individual works, old and new, before fine-tuning the ensemble.

In the centre of Achaintre's studio is a cabinet storing her watercolours. Like the clay and tufted works, they are composed in sections with foreground shapes, forming face-like abstractions, which veer forward against patterned backgrounds. Their careful prismatic schemes are achieved using water-resistant gams, traces of which sometimes remain beside dried-up pools of looser, murkier colours. This is where her practice began, from where her experiments with tuft, clay and furniture developed a decade ago, with their formal contradictions, varying tempos, broken boundaries, verve, wit and character. Her solo exhibition at Castello di Rivoli in Italy later this year will include a selection of watercolours around which she will make and arrange other pieces. Achaintre's garrulous tongue will, once again, take to the boards.

Caroline Achaintre lives in London, UK. In 2013, she had solo shows at U1 Galleries, Hatfield, UK, and Smiths Row, Bury St Edmunds, UK; her work was included in group exhibitions at Peer, London; Musée de l'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, France; The New Art Gallery, Wigan, UK; La Loge, Brussels, Belgium; and AGO, Toronto, Canada. Earlier this year, Achaintre had a solo show at Arcade, London. In October, her work will be the subject of a 'Spotlight' at Tate Britain, London; and in November she will have a solo show at the Castello di Rivoli Musée d'Arte Contemporanea, Turin, Italy, as part of the Illy Present Future Prize.

- 1  
*Breuss*, 2013,  
hand-tufted wool, 5 × 3.9 m
- 2  
*Moon*, 2014,  
ink on paper, 30 × 21 cm
- 3  
*'Camp Cos'*, 2013,  
installation view, Smiths Row,  
Bury St Edmunds

Illustration: Charlotte and Christopher; Photo by Lisa van der Meer; Photo: David Laundy; Photo: David Laundy



*Achaintre's compositions resemble troupes of gregarious actors caught mid-improvisation.*



Inspiration: the artist and Louise Bourgeois. Photo: Steve G. Edwards. Photography: Doug Hibbard. © 2014 courtesy the artist and Haunch of Venison, London.

# A Potted History

Contemporary artists and ceramic traditions

Amy Sherlock



Jesse Wine *Chester Man II* (2014). Courtesy: The artist, Mary Mary Glasgow and Lambworks, London

Through a narrow doorway and up a scuff-marked staircase, the contemporary art galleries Mary Mary and Kendall Koppe occupy two floors of a former hotel in central Glasgow. During the city's art festival earlier this year, a brief and serendipitous confluence between the programmes at the two spaces reflected the contemporary art world's current weak knees over all things clay. 'Chester Man', the young London-based (Chester-born) sculptor Jesse Wine's first exhibition at Mary Mary, consisted entirely of new ceramic works: on a series of squat plinths, gilded, rubbery-wrinkled elephant legs framed large, crumpled anthropomorphic heads and oversized platters loaded with Sunday portions of comfort dinners. They remind me of the shallow Majolica salvers of 16th century French polymath potter Bernard Palissy, teeming with amphibious marsh-life, laid out like a Gilliam's picnic. But if Palissy's platters look, unsettlingly, still-spinning, Wine's, under a swamp of glaze, look regurgitated or otherwise expelled — an unambiguous, if unintentional, statement about the gulf between this work and the clean, functional presence that

ceramic wares usually assume at the dinner table. Wine pushes his clay hard, almost to the brink of collapse. Like the wounded eye-slits of his mummified *Chester Man II* (2014), his figures (or self-portraits) express intensely felt humanity. The pinched, smoothed and overworked clay serves as a reminder of the pain, and the pleasures, of being subject to a world whose forces and caprices are beyond your control.

Clay lends itself to approximating bodies. The Adamic 'for dust you are and to dust you will return' of the Abrahamic faiths (Adam being the Hebrew word for earth) is just one iteration of a creation myth found in cultures throughout history in which man is brought forth from the ground. And, in the same way that we think of bodies as vessels for something beyond the material, we also anthropomorphize pots — we talk about the firmness of a lip, the swell of the belly, a rounded shoulder, a turned foot. Clay bears the trace of bodies, of souls, of weight.

On the floor below, Kendall Koppe's beautiful, nimbly curved exhibition laid bare these corporal associations, pairing the minimal, Modernist vessels of potter Lucie

Rie with the rigorously composed black and white images of American fashion photographer George Platt Lynes. Taken between the 1930s and '50s, Lynes's intimate images of naked, often paired, chiselled male forms were too homoerotic to be exhibited publicly during his lifetime. Rie, who trained in the 1920s at the Vienna Workshops' Kunstgewerbeschule (School of Arts and Crafts, now the University of Applied Arts), fled to London to escape Nazi anti-semitism in 1938, setting up studio in Albion Mews, Baywater, where she lived until her death in 1995. Her use of the clean lines and simple forms of continental Modernism set her apart from the British studio pottery tradition still dominated by the Orientalist-vernacular syncretism of Bernard Leach and his St Ives-produced Standard Ware. Leach supposedly advised Rie that her pots were too thin-walled, their narrow feet and fine lips — often pulled off-centre to create a gently posturing dip — lend them an air of studied precarity, as if they had been caught on the wheel at the very moment at which they were about to collapse. Like Wine, Rie took clay to



## Recent exhibitions have served as welcome reminders of clay's significance to the west coast moment of the 1950s and '60s.

its edge. Her pots, arranged at Kendall Koppe on a long curved plinth, seem to share the muscular tension of Lyles's sculptural torsos and the sense of aching contained desire of their restrained, highly formal compositions.

Can a line be drawn from Rie to Wine? Is it necessary or interesting even to try? Rie, though her work was exhibited widely in institutions including New York's Museum of Modern Art, always identified as a potter: from her fledgling efforts on the wheel in Vienna, she was, as she once said in an interview, 'lost to it'; her long career was a love story with a single medium. Wine does not feel similarly beholden to a particular material tradition. As for a number of young artists working in or with clay — other London-based examples might include Caroline Achaintre, Aaron Angell, Agnes Call and Jonathan Trajtc; in Glasgow we could add Laura Aldridge, whose 'Openaries', a series of public kiln firings, was also part of this year's art — ceramics is a medium rather than a discipline, used with varying degrees of technical skill and very rarely exclusively. We expect, and maybe desire, young artists to be capricious, or promiscuous, with their materials — trying, liking, moving on. It is perhaps unsurprising that they are unstable or unwilling to contextualize themselves in the lineage of Leach or subsequent patricial generations of British ceramists (the Postmodern 'New Ceramics' of 1970s Royal College of Art graduates Alison Britton, Elizabeth Frisch, Carol McNicol, Jacqueline Pasquier et al.; Edmund de Wail's and Julian Stair's ongoing, almost Flaminic, inquiries into the vessel form).

Some of these artists engage with the legacy of British studio ceramics if only to disown it. Angell's Troy Town Art Pottery,

based at alternative art school Open School East in Dalston, London, is a ceramic workshop that hosts short residencies where practicing artists are invited to come and work in clay. (These have included Achaintre, who made some of her most recent pieces at the studio.) Troy Town has a strict 'no vessel' policy and, instead, encourages artists to explore pottery as a valid sculptural means rather than a functional end. This anti-craft position, as Angell himself admits, is contrarian and willfully simplistic. It is complicated both by his adoption of studio convention (in which he oversees and gives technical help to resident 'apprentices') and his evident fascination with, and aptitude for, ceramics technique, especially the particular alchemy of glazes, most of which he now mixes on site. Angell's own weirdly wonderful work is steeped in the folk and the folkloric: his sculptural dioramas are like mushroom-induced visions of a bucolic England of myth and monster.

These contemporary British artists might more closely relate to the sculptural ceramic movements coming out of the west coast of the United States from the late 1950s on. California clay had its roots in the 'Abstract Expressionist Ceramics' (so called after the title of a 1966 exhibition at the University of California at Irvine) championed by Peter Voulkos and his students — whether formally enrolled or not — first at the Otis Art Institute and then at Berkeley, in the late 1950s and '60s. Voulkos may be the closest thing there has ever been to a hero-potter. There are videos of him in the studio pummeling grey boulders with his shirt off, or piling adroitly thrown forms into tall totemic stacks. ('Direct onslaught' is how Ken Price, a former student, once described

Voulkos's technique.) He heaves the clay as if he were engaged in some kind of Prometheus buntle with it — fighting the gravitational weight of tradition to elevate clay to 'high art'. Pottery was always an uphill struggle, largely overlooked by the (mostly east coast) critics of the time. Still, the boulder didn't roll back down the hill entirely. Voulkos and the (almost exclusively) male students who worked with him

— Billy Al Bengston, Michael Frimkess, John Mason, Jim Melchert, Ron Nagle, Stephen de Staebler, as well as Price — were at the heart of the period's booming California art scene. Recent exhibitions such as 'Grapeskin', curated by artist Ricky Swallow at David Kordansky Gallery in Los Angeles last summer, as well as 'Clay's Tectonic Shift' at Scripps College, Claremont (part of the Getty Foundation's compendious 2011–12 survey 'Pacific Standard Time: Art in LA 1945–1980') have served as welcome reminders of clay's significance to that west coast moment.

The suggestion that clay needed liberating betrays a certain level of insecurity. There is, perhaps, no more telling declaration of the medium's ambivalent possibilities than the 'Plumbers Tool Print' series that Mason began making in 1971. Rough-edged tablets of clay, each bearing the impressed outline of a long, wrenching or tightening implement, glazed with a single glassy wash of colour, they suggest by turns that clay is masculine tough real or, conversely, soft as handicraft's stand-in. And the emphatic correlative: a craftsman is not a workman. Ambivalence towards clay is important: it perhaps accounts for Mason's later 'Hudson River Series' (1978), large-scale, rigorously Minimalist arrangements of commercially manufactured firebricks,





Opposite page: John Mason Red Pipe Wrench, Negative Form from 'Punches Tool Print Series' 1971-2010. Courtesy David Kornfeld Gallery, Los Angeles; photograph Fredrik Nilson. This page top: Aaron Angell Swan Potable One © Remember John Barleycorn Ltd 2013. Courtesy the artist and Paul Tuttle, London.



This page above: Paul Soldner, Peter Voulkos and John Mason at Soldner's City Art Institute MFA show 1966. Copyrights Soldner Descendants Trust

which were cast coast endorsed by none other than Rosalind Krauss, or Voulkos's own foray into bronze. (His efforts were succinctly dismissed by Glenn Adamson in his 2007 book *Thinking Through Craft* as, 'a transparent bid for art-world acceptance'). It creeps into these artists' conflicted evaluations of their own work, typified by sculptor Robert Arneson's declaration, quoted in the *San Francisco Chronicle's Sunday* magazine in 1979: 'The problem with ceramics [is] everything looks like a knick-knack [...] but it's important to make something [...] majestic.'

Early on, Arneson had been a follower of Voulkos, but with his 1963 sculpture *Punk John* — a hand-built ceramic toilet filled with scatological contents — he effectively launched a new aesthetic school, which would become known as 'Punk Ceramics'. As Angell reminded me recently, the one ceramic item that we all use daily is the toilet bowl. Arneson knew that, of course, and he made a career of playing up the shittiness of clay. It cannot have escaped Arneson's notice, as I'm sure it hasn't escaped Angell's, that the 21st century's most radical clearing of art from craft, the first and irrevocable dismissal of the idea of artist as maker, involved a ceramic bathroom fitting. The message of Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917) was that everything has already been done (as Angell says of the vessel form) and so everything is equally worthy of re-consideration. This thought frees art from accountability to tradition but, equally, means that there is hope for the pot yet.

Amy Sherlock lives in London, UK, and is reviews editor of *Frieze*.

FriezeMasters 2014

Caroline Achaintre *Mooner*  
Arcade, London 24 January – 1 March

Two blots paired, one blot below them. Two eyes and a mouth. It doesn't take much to trigger an instance of representation, and when what you're representing is the human face, it's a moment fraught with the possibility of misrecognition as much as recognition – masks are always strange. Caroline Achaintre's drawings in ink on paper exploit these tensions with abandon, and while the means appear minimal compared to Achaintre's recent technique – heavy wall-weavings and sculptures – these drawings are by no means slight or subordinate.

Achaintre's work is often discussed for its revisiting of aspects of primitivism and expressionism (and the awkward status of these tendencies in the story of modernist art) and how she blends these with more contemporary subcultural strands of sci-fi, gothic and psychedelia. Comprised of no more than coloured ink and masking fluid, however, the works in *Mooner* are stripped of some of the burden of history that attaches to her sculptural work, the better to focus on the hallucinatory strangeness of what emerges from the pools, dribbles and bleeds of ink.

*Three* (2011) sets up the eyes-mouth-face trigger in its most apparently basic form. It can't help but induce visions of other things – eg, two discs of blood-red floating like ill suns above a fragmenting black hole. This involuntary illusionism conjures up faces that are themselves always something other, something elsewhere – *Sun High* (2014) has a spreading oval ring of washed black in a spattered field of twilight blue, yet the aperture contains a set of pinkish triangles against a pale-green ground that suggest nose and mouth, but also a teetering pyramid. Achaintre's prowess lies in how the apparently spontaneous and accidental dynamic of the ink is harnessed to producing figures that are themselves almost accidental apparitions, both there and not there: *LL Or* (2011) is little more than a squashed ovoid of bleeding black ink, with two openings onto a spattered blue background, both staring visage and the image, perhaps, of a rock that resembles the same. *Moment* (2012) pushes this ambivalence hardest: a custard-coloured head-shape is populated with busy, jagged concentrations of reds and purples, floating against a field of mint-green diamonds.

These doublings, between thing and face, between something else and what there is, are a bizarre, knowing regression to the most basic questions of representation. Achaintre's preoccupation with such atavism is leavened by the queasy retro of the patterns that float through and in these little fields and which in some cases almost eclipse them: candy-stripe pinks and mints recall 1980s graphic styling, which was itself already aping the dynamism of early constructivist art. It's true that such historical throwbacks have been something of a characteristic of British art, and Achaintre won't be the last to deploy them. But her claustrophobic collapsing of multiple histories back onto this simple motif of the human face isn't mere playful quotation. Perhaps, in the context of debates about the anthropomorphising of the inanimate that have gained currency in the last few years, Achaintre's weird mask figures, taking shape or fading away, ponder a very contemporary sense of loss and estrangement: not finding ourselves in the things we make, but discovering something quite unlike us, staring back. J.J. Charlesworth



*Sun High*, 2014, ink on paper, 40 x 30 cm.  
© the artist. Courtesy Arcade, London.

10 décembre 2013 - 23:30

## Neo Craft : de sacrées poignes d'artistes

A l'heure de l'art digital, les artistes du Néo Craft mettent les mains dans le cambouis et ressortent des pratiques d'un autre temps.

TRACKS NEWS / 10-12-13 / NEO CRAFT : DE SACRÉES POIG...



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▶ Neo Craft



# Caroline Achaintre

Elle pratique la méthode ancestrale du tuffetage dans sa version moderne grâce à un pistolet utilisé par l'industrie textile. Née en France, élevée en Allemagne et vivant aujourd'hui à Londres, Caroline n'a pas peur de franchir les frontières.

Travaillant à partir de dessins et d'aquarelles, elle peint littéralement ses masques avec de la laine, reproduisant les coulures et les couches que l'on retrouve habituellement dans la peinture à l'huile. Pour son exposition *Decorum*, le Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris dépasse les clichés associés aux arts décoratifs, qui seraient moins nobles que les arts appliqués, en exposant des créateurs fascinés par la fibre et le poil. Beaucoup exploitent de nouvelles technologies, comme le tissage numérique de l'artiste américaine Pae White. Ses volutes de fumée sont tirées d'une photo transmise à un métier à tisser contrôlé par ordinateur. Pour l'occasion, le musée a aussi sorti du placard des œuvres d'artistes phares de l'art moderne, de Picasso à Corbusier, en passant par Miro ou Francis Bacon.



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## Hobson's Choice

Paul Hobson, Director of the Contemporary Art Society, recommends his favourite exhibition of the week.

*It has been suggested to me by a wit more brilliant than mine (you know who you are!), that my Director's Choice should be re-titled as 'Hobson's Choice'.*

*Now, why didn't I think of that...*



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## Caroline Achaintre: Trip-Dip

15 January – 18 February 2012

Arcade, 87 Lever Street, London EC1V 3RA

Thursday - Saturday 12 - 6pm and by appointment

[www.arcadefinearts.com](http://www.arcadefinearts.com)

*"Arcade has just opened its second exhibition by Caroline Achaintre with the wonderfully onomatopoeic title 'Trip-Dip'. Drawing is the foundation of Achaintre's practice, which ranges across watercolours, ceramic sculptures and the most fantastically unexpected hand-tufted wall rugs. Achaintre's primary motif is the human head, creating playful mask-like sculptural pieces which literally clown around in their primitive, carnivalesque and fetishistic origins as well as dynamic watercolour paintings and drawings saturated with bleeding colour. In recent years, she has displayed her sculptural pieces in cabinets, evoking museological situations, or standing on the floor attached to angular steel structures that suggest figurative elements reduced to a form of armature. In the case of this exhibition, a dozen or so glistening ceramic pieces - some of which look like they are made from ice-cream and leather, in perverse combination – hang around on the walls for unspecified pranks, or in embarrassingly overt forms of display in modular structures whose interior voids have been painted with diluted colour extending the formal auras of these totemic pieces. There are fewer things I find more satisfying than her unique hand-tufted wall rugs which, like her ceramics and watercolours exploit to the fullest the specific properties of this highly particular media. Being something of a prankster myself, I loved this show!"*

Image: © Caroline Achaintre, She Balls, 2011, ceramic, 29 x 20 x 8cm, courtesy the artist and Arcade

# FANTASY OR FEAR? IN CONVERSATION WITH CAROLINE ACHAINTRE

by gavin wade



Caroline Achaintre's sculptures tread the lines between the primitive and the carnivalesque, and between craft purity and horror schlock. With a nod to the long lost divide between abstraction and figuration, the London based artist has been crafting a series of anamorphic ceramic works that build on the visual explosions of her rug works that appear as mutated eagles or aboriginal Frank Stella paintings. The recent wall mounted clay and rug works exploit the power of the mask form, provoking menacing, sexual and uncertain undertones of ritual and routine - a mirrored reality of fantasy or fear.

**Gavin Wade** Are there daily rituals you have in relation to art production?

**Caroline Achaintre** I like an early start. I have an energy burst in the morning. Usually I start with sketches, before moving on to something else.

**G.W.** I was just reading an Oscar Tuazon text for a show called *Scott Burton* where he quotes Burton as saying: "The base, or pedestal, is a specialised form of table." It made me want to ask about what becomes the table or base for your works? Does the human body become a substitute plinth for your works?

**C.A.** Yes, projecting yourself into something other, or behind it. The potential bearer becoming the other.

**G.W.** Do you intend the spectators to project themselves into the work, or do you imagine that it is you that 'wears' the work, or becomes the forms?

**C.A.** The spectators or other imagined people. I don't reflect myself in my work consciously.

**G.W.** In the same text Tuazon quotes Brancusi coming up with the name "pragmatic sculpture" for his works, prompting the question of what we should call your works? Can they be pragmatic? Are they whimsical, or horror sculptures?

**C.A.** Certainly not pragmatic. I am pragmatic, but my work isn't. Intense, simultaneously seductive and repulsive, whimsical I like! Grotesque! My work seems to always work in pairs, rigid and viscous, horrific and beautiful, figurative and abstract... I believe in duality. The tufted pieces nearly always have a dual character, usually two of them living in-being the piece. Co-existence. I like the idea of viscosity, the condition between solid and liquid. Not being solid anymore and not liquid yet. In-between conditions, like being between two rooms. Unsettled. Uncomfortable. Just as my art practice sits between art and craft, which is certainly uncomfortable for many.

**G.W.** Thomas Demand talking recently, when questioned about beauty, said that he sees beauty "in the conscious handling of defects, or in leaving them as they are, and in acquiring an intuitive certainty about cutting certain things out and keeping things." Do you see a position of beauty through defects in relation to your sculptures?

**C.A.** Defects, yes, and the ability to be loose enough to allow spontaneity and free associations, just enough effort to be/make something and not fall apart. The frozen gesture, fragility and charisma.

**G.W.** Do you consider the works to emerge from poetry or contain poetic seeds? Or is there a different type of thought feeding into the making and receiving of the works?



**C.A.** Maybe not really poetry, but the fantasy of the other, the exotic. And the humour, the personal play.

**G.W.** Is this an exploration of release then from reality? Is the anthropomorphism of the different sculptural forms that you make a very conscious strategy to make the work animate?

**C.A.** Yes, although "strategy" is a strong word. The work is finished or 'successful' when it animates, amuses or touches me. When it becomes alive – that can also happen to complete abstract, non-anthropomorphic shapes or things, even to words.

**G.W.** Back to the issue of your work straddling the space of art and craft, I see the works as using certain forms of presentation and methods of making from craft, but are there particular moments in craft or design history that you also borrow from or feel are important in relation to how you might understand reality? What questions do you want these craft processes to provoke?

**C.A.** Well, I love Ettore Sottsass and the Memphis group. There is a lot of craft I like, but it is actually rarely a source of inspiration for me. Of course African masks carving an intense textile prints. I love complex patterns and rapports. I feel very attracted to a whole consisting of lots of repetitive particles. With the provocation do you mean my own craft process? Craft processes talk often about time and intensity, the personal and subjective – I like that. Craft is not neutral – people are either attracted or repulsed by it – especially in an art context, I like that even more.







**G.W.** You have cited German Expressionism and post-war British sculpture as influences on your work. What aspects of these varied movements fuel the work?

**C.A.** This goes back to the idea of primitivism, and the tension between abstraction and figuration. How little is necessary to make the object figurative and how far can you push the abstraction. The geometry of fear.

**G.W.** This notion of the primitive fascinates me as it seems a very sophisticated position. Do you see the works as directly borrowing from so called primitive forms, or from primitivism filtered through 20th century art and culture? I'm wondering how muddy is the position of the primitive form or aesthetic now?

**C.A.** Good question. I take my interest for a revived primitivism from the 20th century and the attraction to the other, the exotic, the raw form. As a result of colonialism there are now many ethnological collections all over the western world, which are – even though not politically correct – extremely fascinating. Fractured objects in modernist or post-modernist settings. The overlap of the two worlds is the main source of inspiration there.

**G.W.** When you say geometry of fear then I think of prisons and the tension between constructivism or modernism and state control and further, perhaps the relationship of the pursuit of an abstraction of form and thinking and the abstraction and failure of capitalism to deliver a promised future. Is this where the primitive form, and the hand made, the craft, become



useful or essential again? Against this current backdrop of economic abstraction?

**C.A.** Wow! You think much more politically than I do. I associate this phrase, and title, with British sculptors from the 50s like Henry Moore and Helen Chadwick etc. But more than anything I like the sound of the title. Talking about animism, it simply relates shapes to feelings.

**G.W.** Relating shapes to feelings sounds much needed somehow, instead the current situation of shapes to economic value. There is a directness to that, a simple but forgotten agenda that has been written out of social policy. Feelings are always the hardest thing to evaluate. This valuable subjectivity is somehow at the crux of your work though I suspect. How does this 'shapes to feelings' idea relate to your choice of materials?

**C.A.** Both materials – clay and wool – have some kind of aura. I am not into New-age, but somehow this aura is true. My tufted wall pieces radiate warmth – wool does anyway – but it is also the intensity of a whole that consists of so many individual elements. This builds a nice contrast to the darker self of those pieces. Again clay, used in a non-industrial way, has this subjective energy as so obviously someone just manipulated the material by hand. It is the expression, the directness that is put into the making that transports the message, not the planning. It embraces the accident, although it needs control, too, again a nice tension field to sit in. Actually that applies to my watercolours as well – a prepared field with unlimited possibilities



inside. This freedom and openness in the process is what makes the work playful and subjective for the spectator later – a lot can be projected onto the work, hopefully even the person themselves. All of that is non-verbal.

**G.W.** Your tiles have a vivid energy about them. How do you answer when people ask you about one of them? For example what are “She-Balls”?

**C.A.** My tiles are made in the same free association flow as my sculptures, in an almost dadaist way, the sound is at least as important as the meaning of words. “She-Balls” is a homage to bold woman and silly titles!

**G.W.** Like the title of your show at Arcade earlier this year: *Trip-Dip*. I love that title. There is something, again, perhaps verging on the primitive between language and form here. How did you arrive at the idea of an onomatopoeic form?

**C.A.** A quick and playful process. In a way I visualize the words – although in the end it is the sound that decides if it is right. And you are right, that also fits into the primitive, expressive corner I feel very drawn to – simplicity, rhythm and even rhyme. And look at the beauty of those words – “rhythm and rhyme” – fabulous. The letters start to move instantly.

**G.W.** Is there a narrative forming between your works? There are such a rich cast of characters across your practice and when they come alive in exhibition then there is a co-existence

of the different characters ranges, and lives perhaps?

**C.A.** There is certainly a narrative between my characters, which is only partially under my control. The single sculpture is an object and a subject at the same time. In an animistic way I try to give those fragile, hollow objects a life/soul of their own. Again the duality of the subject/object, but it also has attributes of ambiguous materiality. This dialogue of materials within a sculpture itself (as in black gloss glaze and black patent leather or simply leather and ceramic) assists its personification. The characters come into existence through their counterparts, so again a combination of planning and experimenting. Uncertainty is an important part of the works, ceramics, drawings or tufted pieces, just to create the strange, exotic object, the other.

pp.134-135 from left to right: Caroline Achaintre, *Onix*, 2011, ceramic, 30 x 19 x 3 cm; *Eben*, 2012, ceramic, 31 x 31 x 3 cm; *Netter*, 2012, ceramic, 30 x 19 x 1,5 cm; *The Fall*, 2012, ceramic, tufted tile, 37 x 22 x 1 cm.

continued pages

p.130 Caroline Achaintre, *Trip-Dip*, 2012, exhibition view at Arcade, London.  
 p.131 Caroline Achaintre, *Shopper*, 2012, ceramic, 10cm, 9 x 31 x 19 cm.  
 p.132 Caroline Achaintre, *Pop-Dip 2*, 2011, watercolour and ink on paper, 30 x 30 cm (detail); *October*, 2011, watercolour and ink on paper, 30 x 20 cm (detail).  
 p.133 Caroline Achaintre, *Onix* - *Onix*, 2011, hand-tufted work, 30 x 20 cm.

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Caroline Achafre, *She-Balls*, 2011, ceramic, leather, 44 x 17 x 10 cm Courtesy: Arcade, London © the artist.



Caroline Achaintre, Trafalero Lebenskunst, 2011, ceramics, leather, 50 x 20 x 23 cm Courtesy: Arcade, London © the artist.