

# FOLDED CERAMICS

Although Jeannine Marchand's works are made of clay, you can almost feel a silk fabric when you imagine striking over it with your fingertips. The organic folded wall sculptures radiate tranquility and provide a sensory surprise.

Jeannine Marchand is a Puerto Rican artist based in the American Spruce Pine in North Carolina. Art has been part of her life since she was a child. From the age of six, she and her brother took part in art classes at the Arts League in Old San Juan. Her mother was very creative, Marchand regularly visited museums with her family and she even had her own place in the garage where she worked with clay. It was therefore no surprise that she continued this passion during and after her studies. She obtained a master's degree in Fine Arts from the Cranbrook Academy of Art and today she is known for her 'folded' wall sculptures made of clay. Her art can be found in public and private collections all over the world and from now on also in Imagicasa Magazine.

## DECEIVING MATERIAL

As mentioned earlier, Marchand has had a passion for clay from an early age, which is still the material she works with the most today. 'I feel fortunate that my parents had the receptivity to nurture my interest in clay at such a young age and to support me unconditionally while I was a student, and beyond, to this day. They still help and assist me in the studio. My mom makes the wooden frames for the small ceramic "Folds" for example,' says Marchand. Although her works are so realistic, smooth

and refined that it almost seems as if they are made of real fabric, they are made of clay. Marchand told us more about the techniques and the production process used to create these extraordinary pieces: 'These wall sculptures are hand built with slabs of clay. Each slab is rolled out with a rolling pin, draped and folded to the contour of the previous one. They are clamped in a frame to dry and then they are wet sanded, sanded, fired in the kiln and sanded again. This process allows for a smooth surface, which absorbs light gently. They are mounted on wood and contained in a steel frame.'

Some works have fewer folds and others are more folded. The shape of the pieces is something that is created in an organic way in cooperation with the material. 'My current creative process is more instinctive. I go into the studio with a clean slate and measure if I feel like centering (on the wheel), rolling and folding slabs, or hand building. In any case, my work is improvised. It is a collaboration with the clay, where I am receptive to where it wants to curve, fold or cave. I'm usually not certain I like it until it comes out of the kiln or until I see it on the wall. There is always the element of surprise when a piece is finished.'

## SENSORY SURPRISE

Not only the natural material but also the wavy folds create an organic look that she herself describes as abstract. The inspiration for the folded shapes and resemblance with fabric can again be traced back to Marchand's childhood. 'My mother always had a project on her hands like sewing a dress. I grew up in a house where there was fabric draped on the dining room table waiting for my mother to sew





it into a dress. Over two decades ago, while stretching a slab of clay, half of it tore and flew across the room. When I went to pick it up, I saw how the clay looked like fabric. That moment and my personal history influenced the ceramic folds.’ The black and white photography that she worked with for a while also inspired her to work with clay like this. ‘My work had already transitioned to white refined surfaces thanks to a black and white photography class I took at Penland, where I was photographing my work and developing the photos in the dark room. Seeing the black and white photographs of my work allowed me to see the clay’s purest lights and shadows, hues of grey and sharp uninterrupted lines, volumes and negative spaces. I liked the simplicity and boldness of black and white images and wanted my work to have those qualities,’ says Marchand. She also did extensive research on flowers, ocean organisms, landscapes, anatomy and electron microscope imagery and went into nature to take pho-

tographs that would inform her work. ‘Once I had processed all the visual and scientific information, I felt ready to put them away and let my subconscious find forms in the clay.’

Marchand’s sense of shape is clean, curvilinear and symmetrical. Her monochrome folded wall sculptures radiate a soft and organic atmosphere. ‘With my work I wish to evoke a sense of quiet. They offer a space where the viewer can slow down and breathe and perhaps reminisce on memories and experiences that inform their own interpretation. I often see viewers touch-

‘WITH MY WORK  
I WANT TO  
EVOKE A SENSE  
OF CALM’

ing the surface of the sculptures. I encourage it and invite them. I want them to have the tactile experience that enhances the sensori-



al memory.’ The surprising aspect is something that Marchand is very interested in and is certainly present here. You think you understand the works, but when you touch them or take a closer look, the sensory input is surprising. ‘Out of curiosity, I strive to raise awareness of everyday sensory experiences, drawing attention to what a question or reaction evokes. It is curiosity which invites me to explore memory and emotions, finding a sensual language in the lights and shadows of malleable white clay.’

Because of the light colour and wavy shapes, Marchand’s works of art are sensitive to lighting. It is therefore also important that they are placed in a space or interior where light complements the piece and where it can ‘travel through the surface in interesting ways’. Since the work can react to light in different and unexpected ways, the artist herself prefers natural light. ‘When I built my studio, I took that under consideration and installed skylights and lots of windows. It helps me understand the work better on a daily basis. On an overcast day, the light is soft and it makes the pieces look quiet. In the summer, the light comes in really sharp and it makes these really dramatic shadows with hard lines. Sometimes it’s windy and the clouds are moving in and out making the folds appear like they’re moving. The pieces have totally different characteristics depending on the light.’ In addition to their special shapes and sensory surprise, this play with shadow and light makes Jeannine Marchand’s wall sculptures once again very unique and beautiful. (Text: Caroline Meeusen)



Images courtesy of Jeannine Marchand