

1.

In Banani, a town just below the cliff where my house was, there is a family of women ceramicists who have been making ceramics for generations. There, the clay is a woman's job, while the men do the tailoring, metalworks and foundry work. There are no exceptions. That is always the way the work is divided. A woman from Banani showed me where to find the different sculpting clays: yellow, white, red and blue clays. There were different types and they could be prepared in different ways, using dried animal excrements and chamotte, or bits of old broken ceramics. It's like making bread: it is kneaded, left to ferment and then kneaded once again... They don't use a potter's wheel there. Instead, the clay is shaped using a mould and a counter-mould. There is very little humidity, so the material they work with is very dry. Later, the same woman taught me how to make a kiln using very little firewood, a few twigs and straw. From her, I also learned how to make the elementary colours, and finally, several things that are done with cold clay, like how to remove cracks from the pieces once they are finished and how to varnish them, using a plant-based resin.

The first ceramic piece I made in Mali was a small skull. When it dried it became even smaller, and I thought it looked like the skull of a child. Then I put a Pinocchio-like nose on it. When a friend of mine saw it, she said: "Lies survive death". I remembered that statement and decided to call this piece Dead Pinocchio. It managed to survive by miracle, because, having been fired at relatively mild temperatures, these pieces are fragile. From that point on, I made about twenty more ceramics, including a self-portrait.

I started working with clay because it was impossible to paint with the wind in Mali. That was probably the case, but I'm more certain that working with clay was simply a way for me to continue to paint.

2.

For many years, I used to spend four months at a time in Mallorca, painting during the long summers from July to November, another four months in Africa and another four in Paris. Sometimes I would stay for an extra month in Africa and then I felt I'd need a 13-month year so as not to fall behind. I did that until I stopped going to Mali. During the pandemic, I spent more time in Mallorca than I did in Paris.

I've got separate ceramics and painting studios. I don't make ceramics in Paris. There, I make plaster sculptures and most of all, paintings; as well as engravings and lithographs. In Mallorca, I decide whether I'm going to the tile factory, although I usually spend more time painting. When I get into a somewhat regular work pace, I devote one out of every three days to clay and the other two days to painting. But I seldom maintain that discipline.

The teulera, or tile factory, is the one in Artà, at Can Murtó. In the foreground, on the right there is a tripod with a photographic camera. Those open holes in the ceiling through which you can see the sky are exactly the way I found them. What's more, every once in a while, the owner would come in inebriated and shoot at the ceiling, opening up new orifices through which water could come

inside. Below on the left are a bunch of works that look like skulls piled on top of each other; the vases are like dead heads. The paint is muddy. Clayey paint.

I warped the canvas and then painted based on the volume [...] I had experimented with drawing first and shaping it later and realised the results were bas-reliefs. The other way, they're still paintings. Leonardo used to advise his students to decode dampness stains and clouds. It's the same system I use for new paintings. I observe the lumps until the images emerge.

3.

I realised early on that I was very interested in working with clay. I worked the same way they did in the Neolithic period. At the end of the 20th century, there were still potters in Mallorca, like when I was a child. I found one of them and started using a potter's wheel and a more plastic clay. That in itself was like a 5,000-year leap forward in terms of clay shaping technique. With that Mallorcan potter, I began to imagine a piece that I could shape from both the inside and the outside at the same time. I began to envisage that, in a way, it could also be a sort of painting, a sort of fresco that requires no architecture or that is completely independent of the building.

I had begun by creating pots that I shaped from the inside, which connected me with a sort of prenatal state. There's a poem by Dylan Thomas that speaks of his memories from before he was born. He says they're behind a wall "as thin as a goldfinch's bone". I began to work like this in around 1996 or 1997, in

a remote region of France, with a Czech ceramicist and his wife. I started by making large ceramics and had Cecile get inside them. We were creating a sort of body and counter-body. Those were my first experiments using clay with the entire human body. The clay slabs were always shaped from both the back and the front.

What I really like about clay is improvising.

When I lived in Barcelona, you could get pigments at the drugstores in the city centre. I knew all the shops that sold the products of the main importers of pigments from the mines of Riotinto. They had some amazing pigments of rusts and blood-reds, very similar to those of Iberian pottery.

I've made my own colours all my life. Fortunately, I now have an assistant who helps me with it. For many years, I spent hours of my days creating colours. With ceramics, it's similar: when you finish something and put it in the kiln, the result is always a matter of chance. I quite like this part of the physicality of the material. I guess it's a sort of resistance to the vital angst of knowing that clay is like a loaf of bread; in a way, it's similar to flesh.

In Vietri sul Mare I loved being able to use the same clay all the time, as occurred with the ceramics at Paestum, the same black manganese.

4.

For the chapel of the Palma Cathedral, we used clay slabs about fifteen metres long, but when we stood them up vertically to work on them from behind, they would collapse. This happened to us a few times. In the end, I contacted the Italian ceramist, Vincenzo Santoriello. Some months later, after many, many collapses, he even suggested the possibility of using an anti-gravity chamber. You can imagine the mental state we were in... Everything we made fell. It was really frustrating. In the end, Santoriello found the formula that would enable us to shape the large slabs of clay, not vertically, but at a 45-degree angle. It was a matter of finding a balance between horizontal and vertical. We built a sort of mobile metal frame to tilt the three hundred square metres of clay; it was a tilted fourteen- or fifteen-metre wall with constantly fresh clay that we could work with. I went around punching the back of it and used a monitor to see the result on the front. We took the back seat of a car and put wheels on it to allow me to slide around more easily.

We started in winter so the clay didn't dry out. Each day we added a new piece and I kept it sealed with plastic so that it wouldn't dry. The cracks, like wrinkles, are always in the right place. They're never decided by the artist, as they depend on a whole host of factors, like the tensions of the material itself; but the thing is, they're always in the right place. That's how I wanted it to happen, without having to provoke it myself. To achieve this, I needed to have shaped the largest expanse of clay possible before the weather began to change. The kiln, another of Vincenzo Santoriello's inventions, was modular: rather than putting the pieces inside, we put the kiln around the pieces. The different pieces were then numbered, transported by boat to Palma de Mallorca and assembled there.

5.

When it comes to the still life, my concern is working with it as organic matter, feeling it as pure matter. I like trying out different approaches to obtain what we usually refer to the baroque still life. Sometimes the elements serve as a pretext to bring about a sort of dance within the painting; in other words, the still life is an excuse. Other times, the elements are more closely tied to our roots, making them more allegorical. For example, elements like an open book, an empty wine glass and a fish, but I still use them for my own purposes. In making still lifes, my aim is not to break away from tradition. I simply want to immerse myself in it and be consistent. I don't have a destructive spirit. I simply want to revive tradition. Nowadays we can't accept that things come one after the other in a certain order; it's too obvious that they don't. We need to alter that order so that those things can breathe again and so that we can move them around without creating any problems.

We need to re-examine the painting to come up with a new set of readings. Tradition is never linear and there is no evolutionary process that leads to anything better. For me, it's important to acknowledge this.

I like to invent techniques that are useful for painting. I don't really exploit them much. They're good for what they're good for and that's it... The theme is born out of the technique... This happens a lot. First I make something and then I think it looks like fish scales. And then I paint a fish.

6.

I was friends with the dancer and choreographer Josef Nadj. [...] One day he came to me and mentioned that he had been chosen to be a guest artist at the Avignon Festival. He said he wanted to create a piece with me, but he didn't really know what. I immediately told him I had loads of work and couldn't get involved in things like that [...] I told him we could maybe do something with dancers on clay, as though they were extensions of my hands. So, we went to Vietri and asked Vincenzo to make us a clay pool with water. Nadj had some dancers come over. It was awful. The dancers began to move through the clay and it looked like those women's wrestling matches in Las Vegas; a tremendously horrible sort of erotic show. It looked like a 'Miss Wet T-shirt' contest, but messier.

Nadj and I always talk about football, so I ended up throwing fresh clay bowls to him, which he then had to shoot with his head, as though playing football. The bowls ended up getting stuck on his head, like masks. We watched the video of it and it looked really good. I realised there was no way to do this if I didn't participate. Unfortunately, I had to be part of the performance. Going on stage in public for me is an act of great vulnerability. We did a test run and got a spectacular result. The hardest thing of all was keeping Nadj from dancing. We tried limiting him to only the bare essential gestures, with no decorative movement whatsoever. It was just action and expression on a clay floor and wall. And it worked.

[There was no script] Nadj and I discussed it in very few words. We just did it; what worked we'd keep and what didn't, we'd remove. It's like a painting where you gradually eliminate what you think is hollow or meaningless. We had great rapport. We had no title and no music. At one point, I found myself putting a

sort of dart on Nadj, so it began to remind me of a bullfight. There are different tempos that resemble the stages of a bullfight. So then, I thought of seeing what would happen if I added the music of a paso doble. Obviously, it didn't work, but the name stuck.

Somehow, clay is also flesh. And it's true that there is a degree of sacrifice in Paso Doble. In any case, I never bothered to look for second or third readings of it. Rather, it was more a question of doing it out of pure desire, and that's it. As of day one, I was very adamant that none of it should be kept. So many times, I was asked for permission to preserve the final work, so that it could be fired, but in order for it to make sense, the piece could not be kept.

7.

I draw a lot more than I write. I've got four or five-hundred notebooks with writings, drawings and watercolours. About twenty years ago, we thought of publishing facsimiles, but I wasn't too sure about the idea. Today you have the option of making a sort of virtual reproduction, where you can browse through all those notebooks. I think it's an interesting corpus. Someday I'll do something with it all.

I've always really enjoyed writing, but I've always had a linguistic problem. Between Spanish and Catalan, I was never really sure which of the two languages to write in. If I were ever to decide to write something in earnest, I'd have to do it in Catalan, because it's my native language. But written Catalan

is hard for me; I was late to learn it. I speak Spanish poorly. In fact, my French is better, although I don't speak that well, either. And English, even worse. In a word, I don't speak or write well in any language. Maybe that's why I draw. Maybe that's been a good thing, as it's ridded me of the urge to write.

I write little, and anyway, it doesn't matter what language I use. As long as it can be understood, it's fine.

8.

I have always considered painting to be a form of ceramics and ceramics to be a form of painting. It's hard enough to tell one from the other. I could point out their differences, but I don't see them as being significant. Using ceramics as my base, I can come to make sculptures or works that take up public space. I don't feel there's much of a difference between sculpture and painting, either. It's the same rhetoric that was used in the 1950s to differentiate the abstract from the figurative. It's just silliness, like the male/female distinction, a differentiation that is of little interest. Reality is far more ambiguous. What I like is precisely the ambiguity between painting, sculpture and ceramics, the ease of shifting from one to another. In any case, it isn't really up to me. Rather, it's decided by the works themselves. The clay I use for the ceramics comes from right here, from my hometown. It's funny that it's a clay that I've known virtually since I was born.

I adore the earth and I am increasingly interested in ceramics, which is painting itself. Paradoxically, it's less valued than painting because of its presumed

fragility, but I use the same material that the Greeks used. None of their paintings have survived, but we know their pottery well. I work with clay and manganese, the same clay that the Sumerians used 3,000 years ago. Clay and ceramics are the oldest form of painting in the world, the generic form of painting.

Painting comes from clay. That's something Picasso and Miró discovered, and I was lucky enough to discover it at a slightly younger age than they did.

I realize that ceramics, if that's the term we decide to use to describe my clay works, are a revision of my painting, in terms of both my themes and my techniques.

With ceramics I learn things that I later apply to my paintings. The same thing happens with engraving and sculpture...

Sometimes my ceramics come out with images from my paintings or vice versa. I have a certain tendency to produce one thing as a caricature of another; my paintings are caricatures of my ceramics and vice versa, and I don't know which of the two is mocking the other. It's merely a way of moving forward.

9.

My relationship with bulls has nothing to do with whether I like them or not. I don't know if Cézanne liked to eat apples or oranges; he simply painted apples because they didn't move; just as I painted bullfighting scenes because they worked well. They were like my soup paintings, but the other way around; they had a centripetal force, rather than a centrifugal force. When I started painting bulls, I never went to bullfights. I guess I went later, to see if they actually looked like my paintings. I also went because I was friends with the bullfighters Curro Romero and Luis Francisco Esplá, and they used to take me along here and there.

I really like the contrast between light and shadow, the space of the bullring as a whirlpool, the theme of death and the presence of the clock. It is amazing that the bullfight can be so visually artistic. As to colour, the colours of the bullring, the capes, the bullfighters' suits... are usually highlighted, but actually, the most important elements are dark. For one thing, almost all the bulls are black. The gates they come through as they enter the ring are also very dark.

At the end of the bullfight, before the ring can be cleaned, what you see the most are the curved marks left on the ground where the bull's body has been dragged away. You also clearly see the footprints left by the bullfighter every time the bull passes by at his side... It depends on the surface, but the memory of the bullfight remains on the ground, where it can be seen by anyone who knows how to read the markings.

The bullfight is a metaphorical form of the act of painting and both of these acts can be described as rituals.

I would stand in the middle of the painting, turning around, performing the same movements that the bullfighter makes. The sand in the bullring, full of footprints, would become the space to be painted. The bullring would invade the entire space, because the audience would be almost outside of the painting. The painting would go beyond its borders.

Much like in bullfighting, I believe you don't paint with ideas. The painting happens far beyond the ideas, contradicting them. And at the same time, it produces ideas. That explains how such silent arts can generate so many words. That is how painting and bullfighting are similar: in the verbosity that comes with them, as if their own silence were so unbearable that it needed *paso dobles* and endless pages.