

SPECIAL  
EDITION

OSLO  
NORWAY

# ONE STORY

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EXHIBITION



MariaJJ Works have been exhibited internationally including in Asia. Her forthcoming show is in Milan, where her work will be shown in the 'Jewelry Drops' exhibition

ART



MariaJJ art pieces are issued as series or collections with strong titles such as 'Dining Sets for Feminists'. Her jewelry is wearable art.

CREATION



MariaJJ works are the creations of a ceramicist at the peak of her artistry. MariaJJ Works are collectable objects of beauty and functionality that are to be found in many public and private collections. The egg is a signature motif, one that Maria feels is central to her work, and which is epitomised by her Egg Vessel, made in porcelain and hand painted in classical Meissen decoration techniques including with gold and platinum.

INTERVIEW



Maria talks frankly about her work, the difficulties of covid lockdowns, her hopes for the future and commitment to sustainability. She describes the impact that Asia has had on her work and her new-found love of Lapland where forthcoming residencies will see her work evolve in the pure light of the arctic.

INSPIRATION THROUGH EDUCATION



Through academic teaching & as a speaker at symposia, Maria is inspiring new generations of ceramicists.



ONE CITY

OSLO



“ Maria is fearless in pushing the boundaries of ceramics, saying that her designs are “functional art products with a modern twist on dark humour” that also serve as “criticism of contemporary social issues”. With titles such as 'Dining Set for Feminists' and 'Mine is Bigger than Yours'.

Opening essay by Lianne Hackett

For Maria Joanna Juchnowska, ceramic artist, designer, curator and founder of Mari JJ Design, the moment is “Now” in a “lifelong adventure” in ceramics in which “practice, persistence, patience, mental strength and dedication” are key. Her beliefs echo those of designer April Greiman that ‘Design must seduce, shape and perhaps more importantly, evoke an emotional response.’

Maria is fearless in pushing the boundaries of ceramics, saying that her designs are “functional art products with a modern twist on dark humour” that also serve as “criticism of contemporary social issues”. With titles such as 'Dining Set for Feminists' and 'Mine is Bigger than Yours', the humour is clear spoken. The work is accomplished, fragile and yet strong and utterly hers. One commission from a priest for an Eucharistic set led to the Holy series. The priest left the church, but Maria continued to make a series of religious pieces to serve in a place of religion that celebrates the female reproductive organ up til today when she is enhancing the collection with gold painting.

Stylistic rendering of the female ovary is a signature motif as is the egg, a symbol of eternal life. Maria speaks of being “fascinated by the egg, as a shape, as a life force”. In homage, she created the first Egg Vessel in 2017. Early prototypes were made at Meissen Manufaktur in Germany during her time there from 2017-2018. Working in porcelain and hand-painting in classical Meissen decoration techniques including carat gold and platinum, the prototypes were followed by a large body of work made at the Franz Collection in China’s ceramic



EGG VESSELS REBIRTH  
PHOTO CREDIT H. PARK

BY MERCI MAGAZINE

“The idea of working as an artist, designer and curator gives me more freedom to do what I think is best for me at each present moment of my life ...There is always something new to learn. Ceramics as a medium can be hard to define as it fits all three categories of art, craft and design. I like to navigate between the three and learn from each field.”



Egg Vessels White on blue 4  
Photo credit P. Seweryn



Egg Vessels Royal Green 3  
Photo credit P. Seweryn



Egg Vessels Royal Green 2  
Photo credit P. Seweryn

capital Jingdezhen from 2018-2019. Editions of the Egg Vessel are now central to her work. The third edition, 'Deep Ocean' (2020), was made as tribute to the beauty of mother nature mirrored in the unknown depths of our planet waters. Pieces from the collection were shown in October last year at Seibu Shybuya Tokyo in the Inner Space exhibition co-curated by Design Pier and Merci Magazine as part of DesignArt Tokyo.

Damage as tragedy can lead to renewal. Exploring the ancient art of Kintsugi was the result of damage to a piece from the Ferrari Red Collection created in Jingdezhen China in 2019. Broken in transit, Maria mastered the Kintsugi restoration technique in which cracks are made both obvious and more beautiful by the application of powdered gold pigment, calling the result "better than the original piece". The attention that this piece attracted led to an exhibition in Norway and a bronze award at the 2021 A` Design Award competition.

Maria's latest adventure has taken her to the edge of the world. Last year (this year 2022), she was invited to attend the 12th Ceramic Symposium at the Arctic Ceramic Centre in Posio Finland - the most northerly-located ceramics centre in the world - by the centre's acclaimed creative director, Suku Park. She remained in Posio for an ACC residency that enabled her to explore working with stoneware slip from local ceramic factory Pentik, adding colour stains to the slip and firing using wood-firing technique.

Any attempt to define Maria's work is futile, as it escapes easy definition. This is her deliberate choice. "The idea of working as an artist, designer and curator gives me more freedom to do what I think is best for me at each present moment of my life ...There is always something new to learn. Ceramics as a medium can be hard to define as it fits all three categories of art, craft and design. I like to navigate between the three and learn from each field."

Lockdown prompted an enhancement of the curatorial. With two colleagues, Maria founded the Norwegian Polish

Culture Organisation (NPoK), a cultural organization based in Oslo, citing business entrepreneur and thinker Harvey Mackay's mantra that 'Fresh ideas emerge where everyone can contribute freely, in a barrier-free environment' as a founding perspective. NPoK's first exhibition '2010' was shown online in 2020 due to the lockdown.

Lockdown also prompted Maria to think more about sustainability. As she did in turning to Kintsugi to make whole a broken piece so she says lockdown taught her to "always try to reuse broken stuff or turn it into something new", acknowledging that "the roots of this have more to do [than Kintsugi] with my upbringing in communist and post-communist Poland in the 80s and 90s."

Maria has participated in international exhibitions and fairs across Europe and in New York, Tokyo, London, Dubai, South Korea and China. She has been awarded laureate and finalist in international competitions with awards including honourable mention, Cheongju Biennale Craft Competition 2021, Martinsons Award, Latvia Ceramics Biennale 2021, Make Me! Łódź Design Festival 2019; Talente 2018 Munich; Future Lights 2016/17; and the Chouftouhonna International Festival of Feminist Art, Tunis 2016. She works in co-operation with luxury goods brands such as Meissen GmbH and the Franz Collection. Her Mari JJ Design limited-edition collections were made at the porcelain and stoneware factories Ćmielów, Kristoff and Bolesławiec in Poland. It is an impressive resume.

Looking into the future for this multi-talented artist, designer and curator will need a One Story told in several Chapters. Maria Joanna Juchnowska speaks of her work and her brand Mari JJ Design being "of the Now". What is for certain is that the Now for Maria is in the direction North. In Finland, she has found a new artistic home. Further residencies at Hansaram in the pure landscape of the arctic will doubtless lead to work of brilliance and beauty. Maria's lifelong adventure in ceramics and deep love of our planet make that a certainty.

## ONE STORY, ONE INTERVIEW FOR ME, THE MOMENT IS NOW.

### How do you get inspired?

The inspiration comes from within. I do not seek to be inspired and I am not looking for inspiration. Simply a walk in nature, a trip to some new place, a situation, or a life situation brings to me the best topics. I treat work as a meditation, nothing else exists to the moment of creation. I am 100% focused, but that doesn't mean I can not multitask or manage busy or stressful life situations in between. The best outcomes come to me when I am the one in the process of working. Residencies or symposiums are very good for having work done effectively. I do not like working on one piece for a really long time as thoughts are running away, for me the moment is Now.

### What is the process of becoming a ceramic artist?

In my case, it is many years of work. I started at 15 years old in 2000 and from the beginning, I knew I wanted to work in ceramics and I do to this day. I stayed faithful to this medium. I had education in College for 5 years strictly in ceramics and then I continued my Master's studies in Poland and Sweden both masters in Ceramics and Glass with a focus on ceramic art and design. I continued working on various residencies and symposiums internationally and participating in exhibitions and competitions. I touched different mediums such as glass, bronze, silicone, animation, and performance but it was always connected to my previous works made in ceramics. Now after two decades I can tell I have expertise but it is impossible not to learn new things as ceramics is such a broad medium there is always going to be something to discover such as new techniques or collaboration between art, craft, and design. Those are always crossing, and it is impossible in the long run to divide them and categorize them as they always merge together. There is a huge misconception about the ceramic field and it starts with amateurs who find clay relieving to work with, and they can see fast effects by making a cup, for example, or throwing something on the potter wheel. There is much more to ceramics than being a potter and sharing the process on social media. People think that being a ceramicist is easy and they can do it on their own. Yes, they can, to a certain extent, but for example, porcelain is very demanding and the problems start when you, as a ceramicist, can't take a failure of broken pieces.

I recently had the experience of having 2 assistants it was just a confirmation that You just simply can't learn ceramics in only 3 years on various courses or even become a graduate from university, it is just impossible. It is a lifetime dedication every real ceramic artist will tell you the same. You learn how to work over the years and with time and experience, you become one with the material You learn how to move in the studio, lift heavy forms so as not to damage yourself after one week, how to throw and not get lifelong health problems with your shoulder or neck, or simply to work very fast when the process requires it, or slowly and patiently when you work with detailed work. Sometimes one touch too much and the whole work disappears in your hands because you overly pushed it and the material wasn't going to take the pressure any longer. It is a lifelong adventure, not a few courses to "Know How" or "DIY". Practice, persistence, mental strength, and dedication are the key. You must as well have a certain approach to the whole ceramic process, patience is very important, and obedience to material limitations is required here. There is never a situation where you "know it all" it is just impossible.

**What is the inspiration behind your egg vessels and Kintsugi Ferrari Red porcelain ceramics? Could you share some of your creative processes with us?**

Kintsugi was the result of damage to one of my pieces

from the Ferrari Red Collection I created in Jingdezhen China in 2019. I was forced to repack the suitcase quickly at the airport and one of the parts got smashed during the travel. I flew for many hours from Shanghai to Oslo and the first thing I did at the airport I opened the suitcase and heard smashed porcelain pieces. For the next hour or so I was crying like a baby as if someone had died. I put so much energy, effort, and funds to be able to make such a collection. I left the pieces under the sofa. I couldn't look at it for half a year. Then the right moment came when I finished building my home studio and I felt that this is the time to do some restoration work with the broken vessel. I had never done it before, I always wanted to but there wasn't a right moment. I followed the Japanese kintsugi technique from various tutorials and articles. I tried to work as close to the actual technique of restoration, using powdered gold pigment. I think the result was better than the original piece. It got a lot of attention and was immediately chosen for an exhibition in Norway and this year it got awarded a bronze award at A`Design competitions in the section of 'Arts, Crafts, and Ready Mades'.

When it comes to Egg Vessels the idea was born already in 2017 and it was inspired by my earlier works by the use of the similar shape of an egg. I am fascinated by it. So simple and yet complex at the same time that is hard to explain and is just a perfect shape in my eyes. I made first prototypes of the Egg Vessel at Meissen Manufaktur in Germany during my time there between 2017-2018 and continued with it at Franz Collection in Jingdezhen China in 2018-2019 where I have created a large body of works. Recently, I had just returned from the 12th Ceramic Symposium at the Arctic Ceramic Center in Posio Finland, a very unique place in the arctic circle where reindeer say "good morning and good night". I have mainly used a local stoneware slip from a local ceramic factory Pentik. I added some color stains and developed my own palette and combined pieces with the wood firing technique in the whole collection. As well I discovered a new unique technique for working with slip casts and pigments. The residency place insured me with its nature and remote location, very unique landscape, and amazing hospitality of local Finish people. It is worth mentioning that Arctic Ceramic Center is the most northern located center in the world as well as a member of the International Academy of Ceramics. Its creative director Suku Park is a well-known figure in the professional ceramic world. He invited me to join the symposium as he said that 5 pictures of my works convinced him that I would be the right person to work with Korean and Singaporean artists.

Posio is a very small place yet is full of surprises not only about the nature around, thousands of lakes and occasionally aurora, there are some new initiatives coming along very soon. Hansaram.co is led by ceramic artist Suku Park. The corporation operates art and community initiatives and in winter 2022/2023 they will open the Hansaram House, a small crafts museum and a residency for artists, activists, and private guests. House is currently under construction, the construction is ecologically built and over 90% of the building materials are free of any glues or chemicals. The main construction materials, wood, and timber are also sourced regionally. The building operates on 100% renewable energy. Hansaram in Korean means 'one person or a 'Han' person - a reference to the Korean



heritage of Suku Park and his family. It is also a wordplay of the Park family's children's names, Hans and Sara.

**In light of your many collaborations in Asia, what inspires you most?**

I started to collaborate and show in Asia in 2018 and unfortunately traveling was not possible since 2020. I wish I could go back to China for example and work more in the ceramic capital Jingdezhen. Yes, I was fortunate to have a few exhibitions there. I exhibited in Korea at Cheongju Craft Biennale and in Japan at the DesignArt both in 2021. The biggest inspiration would be the cultural heritage, people, and life in general. The big impact had on me, how Asians, in general, are using and perceive ceramics and have to with thousands of years long heritage, and how it was changing throughout different dynasties for example in China.

In Asia there is a strong culture of the tea ceremony and the smallest ceramic items can be the most valuable ones. In Europe, we drink from large cups and don't pay that much attention to the smallest objects. Somehow the size of the object determines its value over here. So designing and creating in Asia will differ depending on the needs and the cultural heritage, this is a very interesting observation I made on one of my first journeys.

**As a curator, designer, and artist, how do you manage your brand?**

Throughout my life, I have learned that everything happens for a reason. This is karma. My design decisions are also informed by this belief. I am aware that even a little mistake can affect an entire project. This awareness leads to better decision making.

**Is there anything that has inspired you the most for your design and art creation during the global pandemic?**

Yes of course I did things that normally I would never do. I moved my studio close to my house, because of the lockdowns we couldn't go anywhere so I dropped renting an expensive place that I couldn't go to and used what I had at hand. I restored old storage only from recycling materials. The place became my new workshop, it has its limitations, of course, it's not perfect and I can't do everything there but it is enough for now and I can work there whenever I want. The inability to exhibit in real life has pushed me to start a new initiative from the scratch. I and my two colleagues have founded a new cultural organization based in Oslo. Norwegian Polish Culture Organisation NPoK was primarily inspired by earlier curatorial work I have done with the same group of people and the feeble reaction of institutions during the first phases of the pandemic. This year we are focusing on growing the actual organization and

Being detail-oriented means paying close attention to all aspects when working on a task or project. I advocate an approach where each step is completed as flawlessly as possible before moving on. For me, this is the way to produce high-quality work with little or no errors.

CREATION BECOMES AN  
INSPIRATION TO  
OTHERS



Wood Firing at arctic Ceramic centre picture credit H. Park

soon accepting new members from all over the world for collaborations such as exhibitions etc. We as well planning on giving the workshops to youth this year supported by Sparebankstiftelsen in Norway.

Sense of belonging changed during the pandemic, because of the location where we were forced to live. When it comes to art and design I started thinking even more about sustainability. That is when I did Kintsugi which I talked about a bit before. I do not like throwing things away in my studio. I always try to reuse broken stuff or turn it into something new but that has something more to do with my upbringing in communist and post-communist Poland in 80 and 90. Now it's different we throw out absolutely everything. Especially in Norway, it is a clash for me as Norway presents itself as an extremely "pro-green and eco" country, but believe me, you would be shocked what you can find in Miljø Station (recycling Station). Awareness is changing slowly here but in my opinion, there is still a lot to do in this department like small things not just big ideas of electric cars and zero emission. 'We are also planning on giving workshops to youth'.

**Are there any upcoming exhibitions?**

Yes, I have a few running already and planned. In October my jewelry pieces will be shown during Milan Jewelry week at the "Jewellery Drops" exhibition. Recently the exhibition of the 12th Ceramic Symposium was open in Lapland Finland, it will run till the end of this year. In 2022 I decided to be represented by one of the art Galleries in my country of origin Poland. Gallery Vivid is active in promoting my works and they are making showrooms all over Poland. Of course, I have a few plans for the next year but it is better not to spoil it at the moment, so there is always something waiting for me around the corner.

“

Through academic teaching & as a speaker at symposia, Maria is inspiring new generations of ceramicists. In 2020, she became Visiting Professor, Eugeniusz Geppert Academy of Art & Design, Wrocław and, since 2017, guest lecturer, Parsons New School of Design, New York and at JCI Jingdezhen Ceramic Institute, China. She has spoken at symposia including 'Working with art internationally', Norskekunsthåndverkere, Oslo & 'EcerS European Ceramic Symposium', Budapest and leads on mentoring & art advice for 'Exploring Ceramics', Oslo.

Maria Joanna Juchnowska Artist, designer, curator, founder of Mari JJ Design brand based in Oslo Norway- launched in 2010, in Stockholm Sweden.

Participated in many international exhibitions and fairs in New York, Tokyo, London, Dubai, South Korea, China, and across Europe. Laureate and finalist of international competitions: Honorable Mention at Cheongju Biennale Craft Competition 2021, Martinsons Award 2021, Make Me! Łódź Design Festival 2019, Talente 2018 Munich, Future Lights 2016/17, Chouftouhonna Feminist ArtFestival 2016, Nachtmann Design Competition 2011.

Cooperated with high-end companies including brands of luxury goods such as Meissen GmbH, Franz Collection in Taiwan/China. Since 2007 implemented Mari JJ Design limited-edition collections at porcelain and stoneware factories: Ćmielów, Kristoff, Bolesławiec in Poland.

Maria Joanna Juchnowska is a member of the following organizations:  
IAC International Academy of Ceramics  
Norske Kunsthåndverkere  
Norske Billedkunstnere  
Artaxis International Ceramic Artist Association

Maria Juchnowska is one of the founders of the recently established Norwegian Polish Culture Organisation NPOK

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Photo courtesy of MARIJJ DESIGN

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