



"What does clay do to me when I don't try to control it but on the contrary surrender myself to it"

This question has been the guiding light for Alexandra Engelfriet in her explorations of clay throughout the last 25 years. Repetition and her own physical, bodily interaction with the material are recurring features of her work. By engaging physically with the clay, working in patterns characterised by a considerable degree of repetition, the artist creates a kind of trance-like state where the internal and the external, form and content come together in a perfect synthesis. In her vast, indoor installations and outdoor performances Engelfriet shapes the material – and is herself shaped by it in turn.

Alexandra Engelfriet has a special ability to relate the monumental – nature, eternity – to a human scale, to the ephemeral, the vulnerable. One example would be her vast landscape projects, documented on film, such as *Tracks in the Flats* (2003), where Alexandra Engelfriet creates a series of giant sculptures in the tidal flats by the Dutch Dollard, the estuary of the river Eems. Each sculpture is created over the course of a day and takes six hours to make: that is the timespan available to the artist from the time where the water withdraws until it comes back, flooding the work. *Tracks in Flats* combines the realms of sculpture with that of documented performance. With their temporary nature, and with the insistent soundtrack of the film, Engelfriet's sculpture reminds us of the seductive aspects of the first creative gesture made when sculpting clay, an eminently malleable material.

In the project *Tranchée* (2013) in the sculpture part of *Le Vent des Forêts*, France, Alexandra Engelfriet used her body to shape and form 20 tonnes of clay. This took place in the middle part of a 50 m long and 2 m deep dugout reminiscent of the World War I trenches formerly found in this area. The physical aspects of the process were documented on film, creating images that speak of creation and destruction, of lonely struggles and meditative presence. A kiln was subsequently constructed, covering the work, which was then fired for a full week. Now, the work constitutes a permanent part of the sculpture park.

In September of 2014 Alexandra Engelfriet held a master class in Denmark entitled *Materiality – Body as a Tool – Ceramic Heritage as Matter*. The master class, which was part of the European Ceramic Context 2014 event, was held at the closed-down tile factory Hasle Klinker on the Danish island of Bornholm. An important cultural site – it boasted the only naturally occurring stoneware clay in Denmark – the factory is now a post-industrial relic in a forest setting. Here, Alexandra Engelfriet engaged the participants in a process that was based on her own practice, one which employed a keen sense of immediacy and direct physical interaction with vast quantities of clay to successfully move the participants away from an object-oriented approach, opening them up to a purely sensuous experience of the material. Afterwards, one participant said: "The week was full of very special, deep experiences that I cannot properly express in words." Another said: "I am familiar with meditation, but I have never before reached such a state of mind."

There is every reason to look forward to encountering Alexandra Engelfriet's art, and to thank *Keramiske Veje* for having invited her as a guest contributor.

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