

Open Fires

A project by Liliana Ovalle
in collaboration with Colectivo 1050°

September 21-27, 2015
Brompton Design District

Open Fires features the latest explorations by Liliana Ovalle and Colectivo 1050° around the firing process used in vernacular ceramics in Oaxaca. The project comprises a variety of exercises where clay pieces are fired in particular geometric setups created with sand, dung and agave leaves. Each composition acquires black traces of smoke and coal, a permanent imprint of the fire they were exposed to.

The clay pieces were formed by the artisans *Mujeres del Barro Rojo*, a family of female ceramist in Tlapazola who inherited ancestral local techniques for utilitarian red clay pottery, a craft that is nowadays struggling to endure. All the ceramics are shaped by hand using a combined technique of coils that are stretched into shape with a corncob. The pieces subsequently go through two different firing processes. An initial open fire, traditionally used in the region, hardens the pieces and makes them stable. In the second stage Ovalle worked closely with the artisans creating different setups for individual contained fires to imprint a black smoked finishing. All the materials used in the clay and the firing process are sourced locally by the artisans.

Exercise No. 1 - Vases

The vases are designed with flat extensions that are used to place dung and other combustible materials to create a small contained fire. The imprinted black traces remain as an indication of the intensity and direction of the flames.

Exercise No. 2 - Plates (*Comales*)

The plates, based on the traditional cooking plate *comal*, are partially masked with sand. The remaining area is covered with dung and agave leaves that combust into an open fire. The resulting pieces display a contrast between intense black smoked tones and bare red clay.

Exercise No. 3 - Cylinders

In a similar process to the plates, the cylinders are partially dug into a pile of sand in vertical and horizontal position. The final pieces are marked with a defined line along the interior and exterior of the shapes, depending on the position they where set up for the fire.

Liliana Ovalle

Liliana Ovalle is a London-based designer from Mexico who graduated from the Royal College of Art in 2006. Her work includes commissions and production pieces for Plusdesign Gallery, Nodus, and Anfora amongst others. Liliana designs objects where the functional and the aesthetic components are accompanied by a reflection on some contemporary life aspects. She pays special attention to inquiring themes such as the "incomplete" and the "unrehearsed" observed in the urban context.

In 2006 she received the Talent Award by the British Council and in 2008 the Mexican Clara Porset Special Award. Her designs have been selected for multiple exhibitions including Design Miami, Gallery Libby, Sellers and Museo Poldi Pezzoli.

Since 2011 Liliana is researcher at the Interaction Research Studio, Goldsmiths University of London. In April 2011 she joined the collective Okay Studio based in North London.

Her project Sinkhole Vessels, the first collaboration with Colectivo 1050°, is part of the permanent collection at Museum of Arts and Design in New York.

Colectivo 1050°

Colectivo 1050° is a platform where designers and artisans work together to make high-quality functional ceramics in Oaxaca, Mexico. In their projects, they challenge old conventions and set up new paradigms about new possibilities for traditional processes. Colectivo 1050 ° is the commercial branch of Innovando la Tradición AC, a multidisciplinary non-profit and a sustainable-design project that offers services to potters to support their activity, to preserve the local vernacular techniques and upgrade their cultural value. Their work has been recognized in Mexico, United States, Japan as one of the most outstanding examples in the field of Crafts and Design. Their latest exhibition, Clay and Fire: The Art of Traditional Pottery in Oaxaca, Mexico, is now in Europe, at The MuZee in Belgium as part of Beaufort Triennial of Contemporary Art, and will be next exhibited at The Arabia Design Museum Gallery in Helsinki, Finland.

Mujeres del Barro Rojo, is part of Colectivo 1050°. The group of ceramists is formed by Angelina Mateo, Amalia Cruz, Alberta Mateo, Dorotea Mateo, Elia Mateo, Macrina Mateo and María Gutiérrez.

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