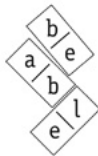


The Pancake Project



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Jan. – March 2016

be able in collaboration with Stephanus-Werkstätten Berlin

led by Weiwei Wang and Sara Ricciardi

sponsored through Aktion KulturAllianzen

www.be-able.info



About be able

Be able e.V. is a nonprofit organization based in Berlin focusing on inclusion and empowerment of marginalized social groups through design.

2010 product designer Isabelle Dechamps developed the education concept *be able* in cooperation with a sheltered workplace for people with disabilities. The participants experienced self-confidence while designing products that were based on their own ideas.

This award-winning concept developed into a catalyst for social design and is currently operating in a network of competent designers, staff developers, social workers ect. throughout Germany.

Our seminars, workshops and projects are designed for socially neglected people and diverse companies. Our creative process contributes to overcome the fear of contact, prejudices and insecurity between different social groups, therefore we raise awareness on integration.

Starting Point



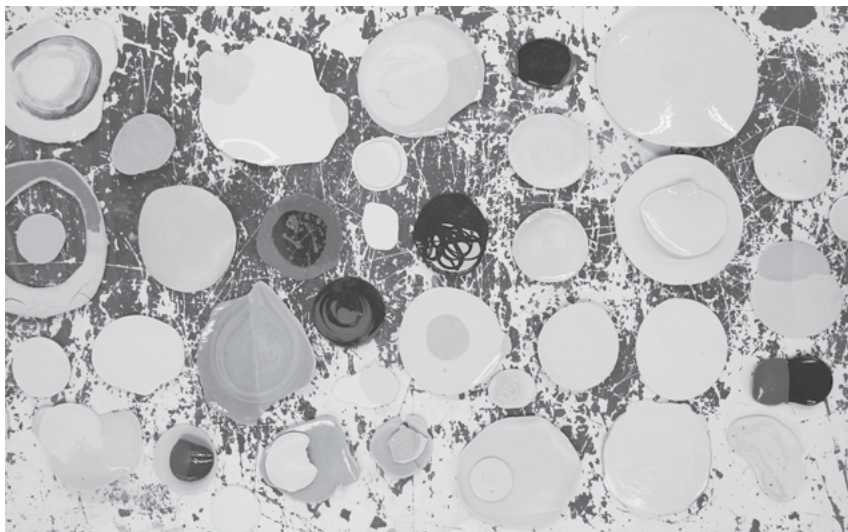
Material experiments

It all started with a series of coincidences. We are two designers, Weiwei Wang based in Berlin, and Sara Ricciardi based in Milan. We met on an exchange programme at Pratt Institute in New York City, where we were introduced to ceramic materials for the first time. Both fascinated by the stunning picture liquid ceramics taking shape on a flat surface, we started working together, exploring the nature and potential of ceramics.

We mixed colours into the slip and let our imagination flow along the chaos. In contrast with the accuracy and perfection of the slip casting process we had learnt from the school, we invented a process that allowed us to work freely and intuitively.

As experience accumulated, flat, white ceramic pieces gradually grew into colourful plates, each with an unique face. To stress its playful and organic process, we named it The Pancake Project.





Workshops



Collaboration with Stephanus-Werkstätten Berlin

Stephanus-Werkstätten is an association of sheltered workshops offering jobs in craft to people with disabilities across Germany. After visiting its ceramic department in Berlin Weißensee, we came up with the idea of breaking up their daily routines with the playful process of making Pancakes.

As they also wished for more openness and dynamics at work, we were able to share a common goal: to develop a new production concept which meets their individual needs, a way of working that enables a stronger self-identification. At the same time, it shall demand as little guidance from the department leaders as possible.

We planned to lead the project in two stages, each consisted of four workshops and participated by 4 – 6 employees of the ceramic department. Stage I is about self-exploration and material experiments, where the participants will be encouraged to work completely freely. Stage II is about production, where the experience from stage I will be adapted to a reasonable long-term production method.



Preparation for stage I

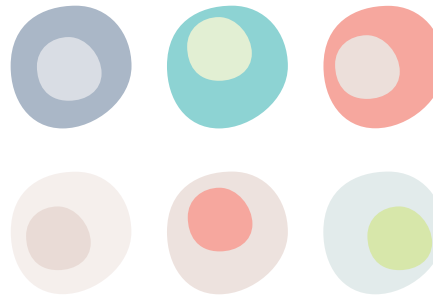
How can we encourage creativity? How can we build up trust? What do we need to pay special attention to while working with people with disabilities? With these questions in mind, we visited the music therapy sections at Stephanus-Werkstätten Berlin led by Mr. Lüdersdorf. Under a comfortable private environment, we were singing, dancing and playing drums in a small group of 8-10 people. We learned that physical interaction and exchange on a personal level are effective means for trust building. We also learned that in order to provoke creativity, we need to ensure the participants that their behaviors will not be evaluated and judged.

Inspired by this experience, we asked the employees of the ceramic department to each bring one object that is important to him / her. Out of our expectations, most people brought way more than one object and they proudly shared the stories behind these objects in the group. It proved to be an effective way to acquire the first insight into their interests and personalities, which also serves as the first step of trust building.



Together with the leader of ceramic department Mrs. Christine Lübge, we prepared the material for the workshops. We designed the color palette in a fresh and vivid tone to stimulate positive energy. We collected unconventional tools including kitchen utensils, spices, and textiles to provoke experiments.

By reading Goodley's Disability Studies with introductions to thought provoking concepts and debates in this field, we started to understand disability in its social, political and cultural context instead of merely physical, cognitive or psychological impairments of the people. With this switch in perspective, disability becomes rather a kind of diversity we live in and we need to embrace. Instead of marginalizing those, who cannot fit into the highly functioning working environment we are used to, we wish to create them an opportunity for self-realization in the context of our current economic system.



Stage I: experimental workshops

Ceramics has its own time measuring system. We designed the workshops according to the physical properties of ceramics in different states. On day 1, we worked with wet slip and focused on colours and patterns; on day 2, when the slip dried and became leather hard, we worked with textures and shapes; after one week, the ceramics is biscuit fired and we were drawing on it and glazing it; the day after, it's high fired and we shared our thoughts about the process and results.

We always started the workshops with warming-up exercises, a briefing and a technique demonstration. The approach proved to be effective. The warming-up section helped to build up bonding within the group, and the exaggerated body movements were a good preparation for their expression with ceramics later on. In the briefing we emphasized to the participants that it's all about trying out new things and enjoying it, not about behaving well and doing a good job, and this did help them to be comfortable at working freely. Except for the techniques and tools we demonstrated, the participants invented their own techniques as well.



Once we started working, the excitement at the beginning of the workshop turned into a relaxing atmosphere with high level of concentration. Each participant created his / her own version of Pancakes. We were absolutely surprised by the strong connection between the participants and their own work. Throughout the process, they showed us over and over again how much they care about what they made and how they're proud of their creation.

Working with textures turned out to be less stimulative than working with wet coloured slip. Only a few participants felt inspired by the subtle changes they could achieve by working on the surface of the ceramics pieces.





Our favorite moment arrived when we opened the kiln. We put all the plates onto one large table and asked the participants to pick out their own Pancakes. Most of them were identified immediately. Sometimes they were able to tell who the authors are, even when it's not their own work. We talked about how they made the Pancakes, what they like about their work, what they would do differently in the future.

Some plates broke in the kiln due to the tension between basic slip and coloured slip. In spite of the strong disappointment about the broken Pancakes, most participants expressed their expectation for more workshops.

At the beginning of the project, we chose 6 participants to work with. It was not long before we started working with all 11 employees from ceramic department due to the high demand. We were extremely happy to motivate them to create and work.



Techniques working with wet slip

- * Use a soup ladle to get continual lines.
- * Use a slip trailer to get dots.
- * Splash a brush soaked in slip to get fine and irregular dots.
- * Drag wet slip with a stick to manipulate the patterns, eventually to get marbling effect.
- * Spread organic materials onto the wet slip to capture their textures. The materials themselves will be burnt away in the kiln.



Techniques working with leather-hard clay

- * Press objects onto the surface to capture their textures.
- * Sculpture the flat Pancakes into plates with the help of half-spherical-forms.

Techniques working with bisque-fired ceramics

- * Use brushes, thread or sponge to draw or stamp onto the surface.
- * Glaze the Pancakes in different colours.



Warming up exercises

* Deep breathing. Move, stretch and shake your body.

* (Imagine) Taking a warm bath and floating. Taking a cold shower and shaking off cold water. Swim in honey. Swim to catch the ball in the middle of the swimming pool.

* Showing gestures related to cooking and ceramics and exaggerating the movement in a circle.

* Throwing sound balls to one another.

* Drumming and clapping, rythm in chaos.

Preparation for stage II

Even among a pile of Pancakes full of mistakes, we could clearly see their potential to become marketable products. At that point, the challenge was to define the product and the working procedure, and to generate a structure out of chaos.

First we set out to optimize the materials. We solved the technical problem of objects breaking in the kiln. We also altered the colors into softer and more elegant tones, since the visual expressions of the participants were extremely strong and direct.

We prepared a “toolbox” for each participant according to his/her very unique working method. We also created mood-boards corresponding to their individual visual identity as a tool for inspiration and guidance in future work.

We talked with Mr. Schaaf, a social worker at Stephanus-Werkstätten, about the participants' conditions and special needs, so that more targeted and customized support could be provided.

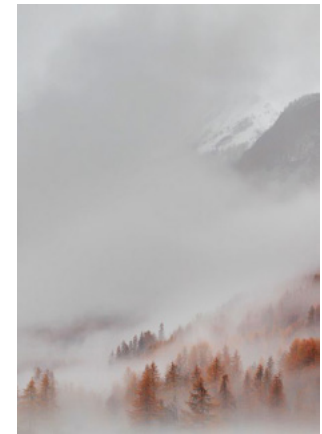
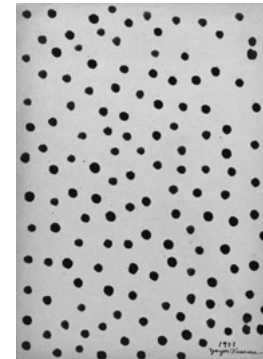


Stage II: transition to production

This time, we started the workshops by showing the mood-boards to the participants. However, the abstract meaning of the message was not understood as we intended. Some participants couldn't grasp the connection between 2D images and their ceramic work, whereas some others were able to understand our expectations, but put themselves under tremendous pressure and they could not even start working.

Since we reduced the colors in the slip, at the beginning many participants were confused. Even though colors were going to be much brighter after high firing, as the after firing samples we showed, still it was not easy for them to imagine the grey patterns in front of their eyes turning into pink flowers one week later.

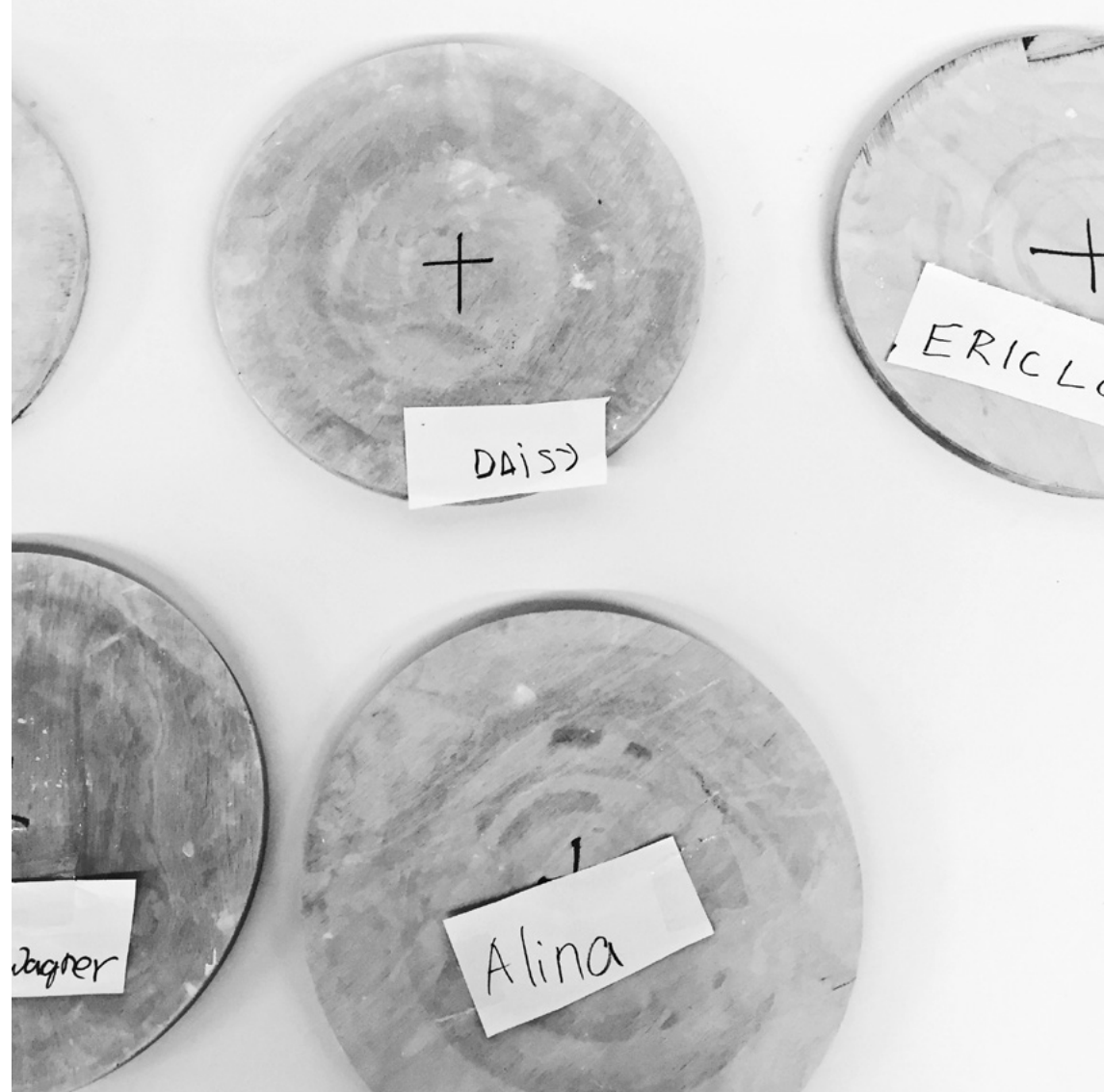
We came across another bump on the road when we tried to have the participants keep their visual identity from stage I. Despite the fact that we reminded them of what they had already made and how they had worked, almost everyone tried new tools and techniques. They kept exploring and developing with the materials by themselves. Workshops were more like a journey without a particular destination for them and they enjoyed it this way.



Confronted with their differences and vulnerability, we quickly decided to reduce our inputs and interference. The moment we gave up controlling the situation and the results, creativity started to flow out smoothly again. Although their Pancakes did not always meet the current aesthetic demand on the market, we believe that the authenticity which can be found in their work is far more valuable. We are confident that this unique quality can be recognized and appreciated by many other people, who will end up supporting this project.

We have worked with all the 11 participants, providing them with the space and freedom they needed to develop their skills and enjoy the process. We also encouraged the Department leaders to gradually take over our roles and turn the project into future working routines.

The Pancake Makers



Eric Last

When was the first time you worked with ceramics?

I was a trainee at the beginning. I tried other workshops, but I liked it here the most.

Why did you choose it to work with?

Because it's fun to work with.

What do you enjoy the most, what you don't enjoy so much?

I enjoy molding clay by hand. I enjoy everything.

What about making Pancakes?

I also enjoyed it a lot.

Why?

Because you always had nice ideas. You always thought of something new. You always prepared everything before, it made me feel that something special was happening.



Can you tell me what you were thinking when you made the Pancakes? How did you come up with new ideas?

I was thinking of my mom.

Do you want to give it to her as a present? She would be very glad about it.

Yes. She will hug me.

Can also other people receive your Pancakes, other than your mom?

My grandma, my father and my brother.

Apart from family?

No.



Moritz Ameln

When was the first time you worked with ceramics?

I started as teenager at home. Later on I did an apprenticeship for pottery. You had a lump of clay, you had to center it, so that it could be turned into objects. Everything started from the lump, you can make everything possible out of it. When I started to work with hands, I discovered clay. When I work with clay, I am at peace. For me it's like balm for the soul.

Do you still work on the turning wheel?

Not anymore. I don't have time for that. Or I have the time, but not the space. Here in the production I work mostly with slip-casting process.

What do you enjoy the most at work? What you don't enjoy so much?

I don't like it when people talk too much, I like to focus on the work. I need peace and privacy to be able to concentrate.



What helps you to concentrate?

**Listening to some music or going for a walk.
But also working with you was so much fun. It really
made me happy.**

I am glad to hear that. Sometimes I wondered if you were really motivated.

I have been a bit moody lately. I couldn't sleep well at night. It's not been easy.

So you would like to continue working on Pancakes?

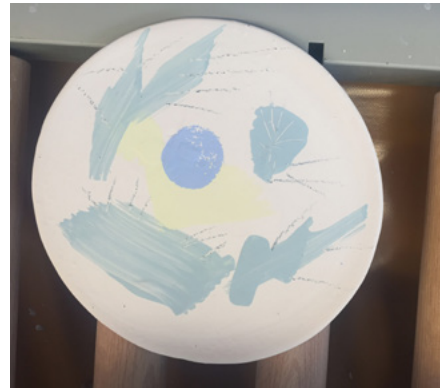
Yes. I wish it would not stop soon.

Let's take a look at your plates. How did you make this? It seems very fine.

I don't know. Was rather a coincidence.

You didn't plan this.

No. I was there and meditating.



Lovely! This is mine! It was a coincidence as well.

What would you eat out of this plate?

Nothing at all.

Great idea.

**I will just display it as it is and it's unsaleable as well.
I like elephants. They make me feel calm.**

**Look at this! What can we see here? I see a little bird. If
we turn it upside-down, we can see a forest. Or a lake.**



Claudia Wagner

When was the first time you worked with ceramics?

2006. I was 18.

Where was it?

It was somewhere else. Was an internship. Lasted two weeks.

What did you do there?

Cleaning.

Why did you want to work with ceramics?

It's fun.

What work you don't enjoy so much?

Packing cards into envelopes.

Did you enjoy what we did together?

Yes.

What did you enjoy about it?

Many things. Colours.

Here are the new plates you made.

I am surprised. I like the colours.

What was in your mind when you made them?

Colourful look.



Would you use them as plates?

Yes.

What would you eat in it?

Sushi. We always eat sushi on my birthday.

What can we see here? A Japanese house.

I saw in the news that there was flood in Japan, in Tokyo.

A tower broke down.

Do you often get new ideas from the news?

Depends.

Would you like to continue making Pancakes?

Yes.

Is there anything we should change?

It's good like this. It shall stay like this.



Detlef Hanke

When was the first time you worked with ceramics?

I came to the workshop in 1984. Although I already worked with ceramics at that time, it was a different kind of working. It was a sort of therapy, it was more diverse. We were assembling radios and working outside as well as working with ceramics. We didn't really earn money out of the work. But we need to enjoy the work as well, not only earning money.

How did you like the project?

It was something new and beautiful. It's more like art. Like to paint pictures.

How do you get new ideas?

I try out new things and see how they turn out to be.

Can you recognize this?

Oh yes. This is how it turned out to be. The structure is really beautiful.



Yes, we can feel interesting things when touching it. Which glaze do you prefer? Matt or glossy?

Actually both. They remind me of the photos in GDR. They were also in matt or glossy.

What was in your mind when you were making it?

I was thinking about the nature. About the sky and the trees, they all reflect in the cearmics. For instance a stone from The Baltic Sea is beautiful as it is. It's fascinating to see what nature creates on its own.

Which ones are your favorite here?

The matt one is closer to the nature.

How do you feel about people buying your work?

It will be sold out at once.

Would you like to keep working in this way?

Yes, if the project would continue.



Alina Eberhardt

When was the first time you worked with ceramics?

I started on march 16th 2015. I always memorize special dates. Birthdays as well.

I started as a trainee. I molded bowls by hand. I enjoyed working with ceramics from the very beginning.

Do you enjoy other crafting activities?

I draw and paint mandalas.

What did you enjoy the most in our project?

That I could use a lot of colours.

What you didn't like so much?

That most of my plates were broken in the kiln.

We're sorry about it. We're optimizing the materials as well.

Yes, you always need to get warm about something, and then it will become better.



Which kind of work do you enjoy the most, and which you enjoy less?

**I don't enjoy industrial work so much as ceramic works.
It's always the same there.**

I see you prefer creative work. How do you get new ideas?

I started to create stories in primary school. I wrote them down, or when I played with the Barbie, I always made up theater pieces. I've always enjoyed working creatively.

What was in your mind when you were working?

I was dreaming and I was away in my own little world. Sometimes I looked out from the window and let myself inspired by the nature.

Did you like how we worked together in a group?

Yes, I think it was fun.



Daisy Golisch

When was the first time you worked with ceramics?

I cannot remember.

Do you enjoy working with ceramics?

It's a mixed feeling. I don't enjoy it when my wrist is over-worked. It's a problem since some years. But ceramics itself is fun to work with.

Maybe you shouldn't work with it everyday.

No, it doesn't work.

Which kind of work you enjoy less?

The repetitive kind of work like industrial work.

What about the way we worked here?

It was pretty interesting.

What was interesting about it?



Most of all the method of making a plate out of liquid ceramics

How do you get new ideas while creating?

It just happens.

Do you prefer matt or glossy glaze?

The glossy one.

Would you eat out of the plates.

Yes.

How do you feel about people buying your work?

It's very suitable as plates. It's something special, different than the stuff you can get somewhere else in a store.

Each piece is different.

Of course it is.



Carolyn Raabe

When did you start working with ceramics?

It was one year ago. I first started working with wood. In ceramic department I molded a bowl by hand. It was something new for me, but after a while I learned how to do it. I made muesli bowls or tea bowls and I became better and better. At some point I started to slip cast, when Moritz was sick or on a vacation. I was not so bad at it either.

Do you enjoy slip-casting?

It's fine. The slip is heavy and I cannot carry much.

What about making Pancakes?

At the beginning I didn't like it at all. I found it a bit boring. I was also annoyed and stressed by the other participants.



Do you prefer working alone like in the second workshop?

Yes, I had my privacy and I could concentrate much better. Then I started enjoying it as well. When we were working in the group, I couldn't help looking at the work of the others and thought „I can't do it as well as them.“

It's hard to let yourself go this way.

Yes, it's very hard. But I will receive a therapy soon and hopefully able to free myself. I will also move out soon and learn to live more independantly.

Would you like to continue making Pancakes?

For sure. It's a fun thing to do. It's just a pity that my heart plate is broken.

I am so sorry about it. We are trying our best to optimize the materials.

I know. Can I glue the broken plate maybe? I fell in love with it the moment I made it, and now I really would like to give it to my dad as a gift for easter.



Daniella Howaldt

Have you been working with ceramics for a long time?

No. I can't. I am injured in the skin.

Let's look at your work.

It looks fancy.

What was in your mind, when you made it?

The rain outside. This will be a soup plate.

What you don't enjoy doing?

I don't enjoy working with ceramics.

But Pancake is out of ceramics as well.

Pancakes is fun.

Why you don't enjoy working with ceramics?

I don't want to do it.

And this (Pancakes)?

This is much better.

Would you like to continue doing it?

Yes.

We will keep doing it.

When?



Laura Praschek

When was the first time you worked with ceramics?

It was three years ago. I first learned to hand-mold a bowl. I coiled the clay and piled it inside a form.

Did you like it?

At the beginning I found it a bit disgusting to work with clay. It's slippery, cold, wet.... a bit dirty. Then I learned the people here, and I wanted to stay. Sometimes it's really nice, sometimes it's too loud and too much screaming. During the three years, I could notice the changes here. There used to be many trainees whom I liked a lot. But then they were all gone, it made me very sad.

What kind of work do you enjoy less?

For example to count pearls from 1 to 10 or other kinds of industrial work.

Would you prefer to stay at home and not work at all?

It happens a lot unfortunately. Very often I don't want to come to work at all.



Why do you still come?

Because I like some people here a lot and I simply want to see them again.

What about the Pancake Project? Did you enjoy it?

Yes, a lot. Because I learned about colours, I developed feeling for colours, I learned what I can do for the people here.

What did you like the most, and what you didn't like so much?

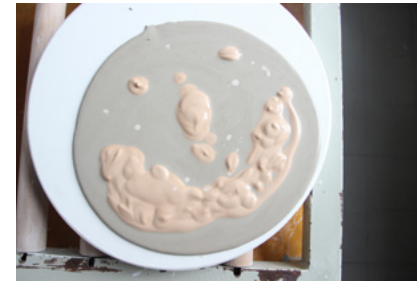
What I liked the most are the colours, and the plates that we could spill and splash.

The freedom.

Yes. What I didn't like so much was fighting with some colleagues here.

Which is your favorite piece?

This is a dragon here. It's my one and all. I'd like to give this smiley plate to someone who is sad.



Charlotte Baade



Ann-Marie Stappenbeck







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