*Silvana Annicchiarico*

**Tactile surfaces**

It all starts with drawing. A *passion* for drawing. An *obsession* with drawing. Drawings like spider-webs, obsessively filling spaces, in a kind of manual choreography or gymnastics, a continuous flow. Elena Salmistraro draws all the time. She draws everywhere. Mostly on loose sheets or random surfaces. First and foremost with pen and pencil. Her drawings only acquire colour at a later stage. Often - just like Alessandro Mendini used to do - she draws "monsters": fascinating yet disturbing, subversive forms. The denser, more contorted the shape, the more obvious its underlying truth. For Elena, drawing is an intimate act. It is relaxing. And therapeutic. With an unrivalled communicative strength. Because drawing gives shape to ideas: you both give form to the world and reveal yourself. This passion, combined with natural graphic talent, has guided Elena Salmistraro in her project for Cedit: an experimental series of ceramic slabs produced using a high-definition 3D decorative technique. The explicit aim is to transform surfaces beyond their original flatness so that a new, visual and tactile, three-dimensional personality emerges, sweeping aside the coldness and uniformity that ceramic objects often inevitably convey.

Elena Salmistraro has always viewed ceramics as a democratic material, in view of their accessibility, and the infinite potentials for shaping matter that they provide. She began working and experimenting with ceramics very early in her career, just after she graduated from the Milan Politecnico in 2008. She came into contact with small artistic craft firms specialising in small production lots, and cut her teeth on projects that demanded the hand-processing of every detail, and finishes of high artistic value, for the high end of the market. The large corporations and galleries came later, but here again Elena kept faith with her desire to make mass-produced pieces unique, and to combine artistic value with specifically industrial characteristics. The monkey-shaped *Primates* vases reflect this method and intention, aiming to excite, surprise and charm. Antiminimalist and hyper-figurative, playful, ironic and a rich image-maker, often drawing on anthropology and magic, over the years Salmistraro has built up her own fantastic universe, inhabited by ceramic bestiaries, painted jungles and a cabinet like a one-eyed cyclops , always finding inspiration and inputs in nature and always aiming to reveal the extraordinary in the everyday. Given this background, it was almost inevitable she would work with Cedit: constantly seeking new talents and new approaches, as well as designs that break down the boundaries of ceramics and release them into the realm of art and innovation, the Modena company has recognised Elena Salmistraro as a leading contemporary creative spirit and involved her in a project intended to experiment with fresh ideas in materials and synaesthetics.

Salmistraro's collection for Cedit is entitled *Chimera* and consists of large ceramic slabs, which can be enjoyed not only visually, through their patterns and colours, but also on a tactile level. Like the chimera in the "grotesque" tradition, monstrous in the etymological sense of the word with its merging of hybrid animal and vegetable shapes, the Cedit project attempts to originate a synaesthetic form of ceramics, through a three-dimensional development that exactly reproduces the texture of leathers and fabrics, creating an absolutely new kind of layered effect, with a tactile awareness that recalls the passion of grand master Ettore Sottsass for “surfaces that talk". And the surfaces of the slabs Salmistraro has created really seem to talk: in *Empatia*clown faces add theatricality to the cold gleam of marbles, interspersed with references to Art Déco graphics; *Radici* uses the textures of leathers and hide as if to re-establish a link between ceramics and other materials at the origins of human activity and creativity; in *Ritmo* the texture of cloth dialogues with pottery, almost in homage to the tactile rationalism of warp and weft, of which Bauhaus pioneer Anni Albers was one of the most expressive past interpreters ; finally, *Colore* has a spotted base generated by computer to underline the contrast between analogue and digital, the graphic sign and the matter into which it is impressed. It is an aesthetic of superimposition and mixing, and especially of synaesthesia: as in her drawings, in the *Chimera*slabs Elena Salmistraro's art is one of movement and acceleration. A process not of representation but of exploration. Of the world and of oneself. Almost a kind of Zen, for distancing oneself from the world to understand it more fully. In every sense.