

Steen Ipsen:
Organic Reflection

October 27 - December 22, 2023

Opening Reception with the artist: October 27, 6 - 8pm

HB381 is pleased to announce *Organic Reflection*, an exhibition of new ceramic sculptures by Copenhagen-based artist Steen Ipsen (Danish, b. 1966). Throughout his career, Ipsen has explored and experimented with myriad themes emphasizing form and composition, as well as spatial context. Primarily employing hand-built circular, elliptical, and biomorphic shapes, his work reveals a methodical approach that is both complex and refined in structure.

His *Ellipse* sculptures are accented with interwoven strands of PVC, resulting in an optical expression of surging movement within the object. The monochromatic *Organic* pieces are created intuitively—a series of idiosyncratic undulating forms.

Garth Johnson, the Paul Phillips & Sharon Sullivan Curator of Ceramics at the Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse, New York, has contributed an essay for the exhibition catalog, excerpted below:

“Ipsen’s path to the *blobject* began in the early 2000s with the exploration of the sphere as a geometric element to accompany the other forms in his vocabulary... As with all his previous bodies of work, Ipsen worked through his ideas methodically. His prolific rate of production allowed him to take stock of the combinations of form and surface that he felt are most effective. Over a period of several years, the polychrome glazing became more subtle, and began to privilege single candy-like colors that provide the frenetic *Bubbles* with a sense of unity that is by turns playful and seductive. The *blobject* revolution in design was undeniably driven by computer-driven 3D modeling, but Ipsen works in a deliberately low-tech way, laboriously hand-modeling and assembling his pieces from the ground up.

Speaking of the ground, Steen Ipsen’s design training is particularly evident in the way his pieces seem to be floating or undulating upward, appearing to defy gravity. Negative space is also paramount—each piece contains volumes within volumes. With every successive exhibition, Ipsen adds to his vocabulary of forms.

Ipsen has explored balls and ellipses for over a decade now. Again, his training as a designer is evident in how his work is resolved. As with the polychrome glazes in his bubble sculptures, his work benefits greatly from a pinch of friction... or more accurately, tension. Beginning in 2012, Ipsen began using PVC or leather cords as ligatures between the individual forms in his sculptures. The cords appear to constrict the bulbous forms—there is often a sense that the balls and ellipses are teeming with movement and energy that strains against the constriction of the cords.

For his exhibition at HB381, Steen Ipsen has amplified the scale, complexity, and ambition of the work. His longstanding forms have all matured without losing their sense of play. Each of the forms—*Balls*, *Ellipses*, and *Organic Movement* have been imbued with countervailing forces that lend their candy-coated qualities an edge that can be sexy, sinister... or both. Over the more than three decades that Ipsen has spent as a professional artist, it is clear he spends more sustained time than most artists methodically working his way through iterations of his ideas, leaving room for growth and surprise without duplicating his efforts. This body of work is extraordinarily resolved... which invariably means that new forms and new experiments are waiting to emerge from his studio.”

Steen Ipsen studied at The Royal Danish Academy, School of Design and Kolding Design School from 1984-1990. He was appointed Head of the Ceramics and Glass Department at The Royal Danish Academy, School of Design in 1996, a position he held through 2004. Ipsen is a co-founder of the artist run exhibition platform, Copenhagen Ceramics (CC), launched in 2012. His work has been exhibited widely, including numerous international solo presentations, and is in the collections of Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, France; Victoria & Albert Museum, London, UK; Design Museum, Copenhagen, Denmark; CLAY Museum, Middelfart, Denmark; Hetjens Museum, Düsseldorf, Germany; Trapholt Art Museum, Kolding, Denmark; Höganäs Museum, Sweden; Musée de Sèvres, Paris, France; Musée Magnelli, Vallauris, France; and Icheon World Ceramic Center, South Korea, among others.