

## ABSTRACT OF THE ARTICLE "TOWARDS A NEW ERA"

By Louise Mazanti

This approach has been the object of discussion in a wide international network. In Scandinavia, visual art, crafts and design are regarded as being closely connected with one another, with Denmark being the country that most vociferously insists that crafts ought to be regarded as a design-related praxis while Norway – on the contrary – considers visual art to be almost an aesthetic partner to crafts. For this reason, it could be said that while Denmark has followed the consequences of visual art's manner of ostracizing crafts, folks in Norway have made a gallant stand and placed a question mark alongside the visual art conception's dominance. What this entails is that we in Norway have our eyes peeled for certain approaches that might appear rather radical, even within a Scandinavian context. One specific example from the exhibition is Cecilie Haaland who, with her photographic series of ceramic "photerry" objects, *Instantly Beautiful – no regrets*, offers a reflection on the object's role and status with the aid of formal experiments between two- and three-dimensional media. Haaland's work is a clear example of how Western crafts has come to be stamped by what the Norwegian art historian, Knut Astrup Bull, calls 'reflective modernism'.<sup>1</sup> The period of reflective modernism follows in the wake of the 1960s' reckoning with the *l'art pour l'art* notion. Within the framework of reflective modernism, the works place a question mark beside this introverted artistic point of departure by reflecting, for example, on modernism's so-called 'medium specificity':<sup>1</sup> i.e., the condition that ceramics is regarded, by definition, as being a three-dimensional medium while painting is two-dimensional. In reflective modernism, the dogmas that modernism has postulated and installed – which, in reality, are so very restrictive – are unmasked in order to provide room for an examination of the various media's boundaries and overlappings.

What we are witnessing here, then, is an approach to crafts that is engaged in a dialogue with visual art's conception of its own program; this is an especially salient characteristic of Norwegian crafts. In the book, *Brennpunkt Bergen: Keramik 1950-2000*, a number of different writers offer accounts of this

evolution, which has been an essential gathering avenue for the guiding conception of crafts in Norway. The large measure of artistic freedom and experimentation characterising the current situation is borne forth by a progressive process that has its roots in Bergen of the 1970s. Previously, the milieu around ceramics had – like in the rest of Scandinavia – been characterized by a tradition of applied and decorative arts that was closely linked up with industrial production. Along with the politically leftist thinking that was flourishing at the time, fundamental crucial question marks were placed beside this orientation. This gave rise to the remarkable situation that all of the teachers in the ceramics department at the Kunsthøgskolen in Bergen collectively walked off the job and allowed the organization of the educational program to be left up to the will of the students.<sup>1</sup> The action came to stand as paradigmatic for the development that followed later on. With a tight ensemble of foreign artists and guest instructors, entirely new ways of thinking were introduced. As far away from the tradition of applied and decorative arts as it was possible to come, the line of development in Bergen came to be the centre of rotation for an important trend that was headed toward crafts manifesting themselves within a material-based artistic praxis.