



HB381

Steen Ipsen
**Organic
Reflection**





Introduction

In the summer of 2018 we traveled to visit Fiskars Village, an artist colony about an hour outside of Helsinki, where a fantastic exhibition was on view - *About Clay - Pearls of European Ceramic Art*. There was one large work there that at the time I had no point of reference for, a floor piece comprised of various sized, gleaming white ceramic orbs, seemingly held together by a complex network of red PVC which criss - crossed back and forth, creating a cat's cradle of interconnectivity.

This was our first taste of Steen Ipsen's work, but it wasn't until a few years later that we met in person. Steen and his fellow members of Copenhagen Ceramics, Martin Bodilsen Kaldahl and Bente Skjøttgaard, visited our gallery in New York, a fortuitous meeting which led to our co-curating the exhibition *Bend, Bubble, and Shine* with these three exceptional artists in 2021. The exhibition represented nine contemporary Danes pushing the ceramic medium forward, and Steen Ipsen is definitely one of the artists who has been leading the charge for years.

We are thrilled to present his first solo exhibition in New York at HB381.

Thank you to photographer Dorte Krogh and designer Victor Levie for a catalogue which illustrates Steen's dynamic process so vibrantly. And thank you to Garth Johnson, a long time advocate of Steen's work, for an erudite text which brims with the energy of the work itself.

Juliet and Kim



Bubbles and Blobjects and Ferrofluids (Oh My!)

by Garth Johnson

Paul Phillips & Sharon Sullivan Curator of Ceramics at the Everson Museum of Art in Syracuse, New York

¹ Patton, Phil. "Blobjects." *Esquire*, Dec. 1993, p. 48.
² Holt, Steven Skov, and Mara Holt Skov. *Blobjects and beyond: The New Fluidity in Design*. Chronicle Books, u.s., 2005.

³ "Blobjects & Beyond: The New Fluidity in Design." *San José Museum of Art*, simusart.org/exhibition/blobjects-beyond-new-fluidity-design.

⁴ Copenhagen Ceramics is an ongoing collective consisting of Ipsen, Skjøttgaard, and Kaldahl that revolved around a physical gallery space in Copenhagen that presented 27 exhibitions between 2012 and 2014. Copenhagen Ceramics continues as a platform for periodic new exhibitions and symposia. For more information, see Bogh, Mikkel, et al. *Copenhagen Ceramics: Exhibitions 2012 - 2013 - 2014*. Copenhagen Ceramics, 2016.

In 1993, design journalist Phil Patton published an article in *Esquire* Magazine entitled *Blobjects*. The one-page article featured an array of consumer objects that prized rounded edges and inflated volumes that welcomed the enveloping embrace of a human hand. Suddenly, a Go-Video remote control became a pebble "worn smooth by the waves" and a Minolta camera puffed out its volume in curious places "as if it had been left too close to the fire." As it turns out, Patton's observations were prescient—they presaged nearly two decades of fun consumer objects that achieved maximum (aerodynamic!) velocity with the near-simultaneous introduction of the iMac and Volkswagen's "New Beetle" in 1998.

The word *Blobject*—a portmanteau of "blob" and "object" has been widely attributed to writer Steven Holt-Skov, who was credited by *Esquire* writer Phil Patton.² Holt-Skov, along with his partner Mara would go on to curate the exhibition *Blobjects & Beyond: The New Fluidity in Design* at the San Jose Museum of Art in Spring 2005. The exhibition, which was sponsored by *Wired* Magazine, was touted as [having] "gathered its energy from the premise that blobjects have become the defining products of the new millennium—the best examples of what is considered cool-looking and compellingly curvaceous."³

Although he would only stray from his path of rigorous geometric work in the early 2000s, this is the landscape that artist Steen Ipsen inhabited after receiving his graduate degree from the late, lamented ceramics department at the Danish School of Design in Kolding in 1990. The relationship between ceramics and design is inextricable in Denmark. Instead of hopping into bed with university art departments like it did in the postwar United States, ceramics in Denmark hewed to design's strengths: form, function, and the in-depth study of materials, which gave the Danes a commanding edge in mid-century design. By the 1980s, when Ipsen and his *Copenhagen Ceramics*⁴ colleagues Martin Bodilsen Kaldahl and Bente Skjøttgaard cut their teeth, rebellion was in the air. Although steeped in design education, Ipsen and his peers set their sights on fine art rather than industry.

All three artists now make wildly divergent work. Skjøttgaard has embraced the primordial nature of the kiln; her objects ooze, drip, and are pushed to their very limits during their firings. Kahldal makes meandering sculptures out of sections of ceramic tubes that exploit the tension between their odd forms and masterful glazed surfaces. Of the three, Ipsen has always been the hardest to pin down as he continues to reconcile an unmatched taste for rebellion with his penchant for exacting detail and exquisite finish.

Nowhere is this dichotomy more evident than his studio. Rather than producing his work in a shabby loft or former factory, Ipsen is more at home in a gleaming, white-tiled former fishmonger's shop in Nørrebro, once home to thousands of newly arrived factory workers, and now Copenhagen's most diverse (and increasingly trendy) neighborhood. Although he shows at galleries around the world, Studio Steen Ipsen also serves as his showroom, giving passersby a glimpse into his more than three decades of world building.

Although his work is now celebrated for its organic, undulating forms and precise glazes, his initial body of work upon graduating from Kolding was unrelenting in its exploration of geometry. Taking inspiration from such disparate influences as Islamic mosaics and 1960s "Op Art," Ipsen leaned as hard into "hard-edged" as the medium of ceramics would allow. Achieving formal mastery over a notoriously amorphous material like clay was itself a form of rebellion, as was denying the sense of texture and materiality that we often associate with Danish ceramics.

Precocious in their construction and mind-boggling in their formal complexity, these formative works marked Ipsen as a rising star. Just six years after graduating from Kolding, he was appointed as the head of the department of ceramics at the prestigious Royal Danish Academy School of Design in Copenhagen, a position that he would hold for eight years. Ipsen's influence can still be felt at the Royal Academy today. Students at the Academy still receive rigorous formal training, but they are encouraged to spread their wings and create work that is conceptual, performative, multimedia, or even ephemeral.

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. First came a series of accumulated teardrop shapes that were combined into sculptural "plates." Quickly, the teardrops gave way to aggregations of spheres (or in Ipsen's vocabulary, *Bubbles*) that initially held on to vestigial function as bowls and plates, but quickly became autonomous tabletop sculptures. Ipsen also began exploiting his work's new curves by



pairing his forms with dazzling polychrome glazes that run, drip, and stretch over the spherical forms and pooling in their joints.

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 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, 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. He started in the early 1990s with slipcast stoneware *vesse/s*, then added *bubbles* (which sometimes appeared in tandem with lattice-like geometric sculptures), which begat *ball/s*, which morphed into football-shaped *ellipses*. Ipsen's ellipses share DNA with another classic ceramic provocation, Dutch designer Marcel Wanders' *Egg Vase* (1998), which was made by creating a slipcast mold from a condom stuffed with eggs.

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. It is no accident that Ipsen's impeccably shiny surfaces resemble latex fetish gear, an association that is fortified by their PVC and leather bindings. His works draw their power from their knockout formal qualities but stick with the viewer as they process the complex *souçon* of desire, sex, and submission.

With every blocky new iteration of the iPhone, the *blobject* era recedes farther into the past.⁵ Never a slave to fashion, Ipsen continues to find power in his undulating forms, finding ways to push the envelope both formally and conceptually. In 2014, he began his *Organic Movement* series, which untethered his work from the modular *balls* and *ellipses*. Works from *Organic Movement* are stark white amorphous cloudlike forms that are marked by topographic lines that help demarcate the sleek curves of the probing pseudopodia. As always, Ipsen magnified the complexity of his forms with every successive body of work. By 2016, the forms began to cantilever into space like futuristic riffs on Chinese scholar rocks.

In addition to their *blobject* qualities, Ipsen's forms also echo *ferrofluids*, liquids that suspend magnetic nanoparticles that respond strongly to magnetic fields. Ferrofluids were originally invented by NASA scientists in the 1960s to get rocket fuel from the tank to the combustion chamber using magnets in zero gravity. Ultimately, their use in rocket fuel was a failure, but ferrofluids have found their way into everything from audio speakers to silicone computer chips.⁶ Depending on the type of magnetic field they are exposed to, ferrofluids can display tessellated geometric qualities, but they can also be wildly amorphous. Whether intentional or not, Ipsen brought his *Organic Movements* into closer alignment with ferrofluids by applying an inky black glaze to the forms, dubbing them *Organic Reflections*.

For his exhibition at HB381, 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.

⁵ Wittkower, Dylan E., and Frances Raven. "The Moment of the Blobject Has Passed." *iPod and Philosophy: Icon of an Epoch*, Open Court, Chicago, Ill, 2008, pp. 17–28.

⁶ Rohrig, Brian. "The Mesmerizing Pull of Ferrofluids." *American Chemical Society*, Dec. 2021, www.acs.org/education/resources/highschool/chemmatters/past-issues/2021-2022/december-2021/ferrofluids.html.







Ellipse 13, 2023, 29.5"H x 19.75"W x 19.75"D, Glazed earthenware, PVC





Ellipse 16, 2023, 23" H x 15.75" W x 14.5" D, Glazed earthenware



Ellipse 12, 2023, 15.75"H x 17.75"W x 15.5"D, Glazed earthenware, PVC



Ellipse 8, 2023, 28.75"H x 15"W x 15"D, Glazed earthenware, PVC





^ *Black Organic Movement 2*, 2023, 22.5"H x 19.25"W x 16.25"D, Glazed earthenware
TiedUp 3, 2023, 24"H x 17"W x 17"D, Glazed earthenware, leather



Ellipse 17, 2023, 15.75" H x 14.25" W x 10" D, Glazed earthenware



Ellipse 11, 2023, 15"H x 18.25"W x 13.75"D, Glazed earthenware, PVC



Ellipse 10, 2023, 23.75"H x 17.75"W x 15.75"D, Glazed earthenware, PVC



Black Organic Movement 4, 2023, 18.25"H x 19.75"W x 12"D, Glazed earthenware



Ellipse 15, 2023, 20.5"H x 19"W x 17.75"D, Glazed earthenware, PVC



Ellipse 9, 2023, 19.75"H x 23.75"W x 19.75"D, Glazed earthenware, PVC



Black Organic Movement 3, 2023, b23.25"H x 17.75"W x 12"D, Glazed earthenware



Black Organic Movement 2, 2022, 29.5"H x 14.25"W x 12.25"D, Glazed earthenware



STEEN IPSEN

b. 1966, Naestved, Denmark

EDUCATION

1987-1990

Royal Danish Academy, School of Design, Copenhagen, Denmark

1984-1986

Danish School of Design, Kolding, Denmark

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2024

Kant Gallery, Copenhagen, Denmark (Upcoming)

2023

Organic Reflection, HB381, New York, NY, USA

2022

Steen Ipsen, Galerie Provence, Vadum, Denmark

2021

Steen Ipsen, Galerie Provence, Vadum, Denmark

2020

Reflections, Galerie Provence, Vadum, Denmark

2019

Reflections, Galerie NeC, Paris, France

2016

Puls Contemporary Ceramics, Brussels, Belgium
Steen Ipsen, Galerie NeC, Paris, France

2014

Steen Ipsen, Galerie NeC, Paris, France

Steen Ipsen: Organic

Movements, Copenhagen

Ceramics, Denmark

2013

Steen Ipsen, Puls

Contemporary Ceramics,

Brussels, Belgium

Cheongju International Crafts

Biennale, Korea

2012

Ministry of Culture,

Copenhagen, Denmark

Steen Ipsen, Galerie NeC,

Hong Kong

2011

Dock 56 Gallery, Hamburg,

Germany

2010

C ramique, Galerie NeC, Paris,

France

2009

BN24 Gallery, Hamburg,

Germany

2007

TIED-UP, Drud & K ppe

Gallery, Copenhagen, Denmark

2006

Puls Contemporary Ceramics,

Brussels, Belgium

2003

Puls Contemporary Ceramics,

Brussels, Belgium

2002

The Variation of Repetition, Gallery

N rby, Copenhagen Denmark

1966

New Ceramic Works, The

Exhibition Room for New Ceramics,

Copenhagen, Denmark

1994

The Variation of Repetition, Gallery

N rby, Copenhagen, Denmark

1993

Gallery Kobolt, Copenhagen,

Denmark

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2023

Galerie Steen Ipsen & Kurt

Trampedach, Galerie Provence,

Vadum, Denmark (Upcoming)

2023

Galerie Provence, Vadum, Denmark

(Forthcoming)

B&W, Duran Mashaal Gallery,

Montreal, Canada

Wunderkammer, Peach Corner,

Frederiskberg, Denmark

2022

Challenging Encounter, Galerie

Provence, Vadum, Denmark

The Magic of Form - Design and Art, Design Museum, Copenhagen, Denmark

Homo Faber, Fondazione Giorgio

Cini, San Giorgio Maggiore Island,

Venice, Italy

2021

Bend, Bubble and Shine, Hostler

Burrows, New York, NY, USA

Formens Magi, Museum of Modern

Art, Aalborg, Denmark

2020

Homo Faber, Fondazione Giorgio

Cini, San Giorgio Maggiore Island,

Venice, Italy

ESCAPING, Simard Bilodeau, Los

Angeles, CA, USA

Summertime 20 - The Annual

Group Show, Galleri Christoffer

Egelund, Copenhagen, Denmark

A Space Between, Duran Mashaal

Gallery, Montreal, Canada

Spring Exhibition, Galerie

Provence, Vadum, Denmark

Formes Vivantes, Mus e National

Adrien Dubouch , Limoges,

France

2019

Ceramic Momentum, CLAY

Museum of Ceramic Art,

Middelfart, Denmark

100 Years of Danish Ceramics,

Sophienholm, Denmark

XMAS'19-The Annual Winter Group

Show, Galleri Christoffer Egelund,

Copenhagen, Denmark

2018

Mus e des Arts D coratifs, Paris,

France

Maison du Danemark, Paris,

France

Pik'd Gallery, Beirut, Lebanon

About Clay, Fiskars Village,

Finland

Galerie NeC, Paris, France

2017

Filosoffen, Odense, Denmark

2016

Crafting a Continuum: Rethinking

Contemporary Craft, Houston

Center of Contemporary Craft,

TX; Nora Eccles Museum of Art,

Logan, UT; Boise Art Museum, ID;

Bellevue Art Museum, WA; ASU

Art Museum, Tempe, AZ

2014

10,000 Hours, Trapholt

Kunstmuseum, Kolding, Denmark

2013

40 Year Anniversary Exhibition,

Sydney Opera House, Australia

H gan s Museum and Konsthall,

Sweden

Spring Exhibition, Charlottenborg

Foundation, Copenhagen,

Denmark

NeC Gallery, Paris, France

NeC Gallery, Hong Kong

2012

Lys over Lolland, Saksk bing,

Denmark

Parliament Building, Brussels,

Belgium

NeC Gallery, Paris, France

Karen Bennicke and Steen Ipsen,

Copenhagen Ceramics, Denmark

2011

Living with Ceramics, Puls at

Ampersand House and Gallery,

Brussels, Belgium

Galerie NeC, Paris, France

Extrudox A/S, Ann Linnemann

Studio Gallery, Copenhagen,

Denmark

2010

It's a Small World, Santiago, Chile

International Salon, Lucy Lacoste

Gallery, Concord, MA, USA

NeC Gallery, Paris, France

2009

It's a Small World, Danish Design

Center, Copenhagen, Denmark

Danish Ceramics, Hobro, Denmark

2008

The View from Denmark, Lucy

Lacoste Gallery, Concord, MA, USA

NDC Statistics><Ceramics,

R shsska Museet, Gothenburg,

Sweden

Love Your Figure, Puls Contemporary Ceramics, Bruxelles, Belgium

NDC Statistics><*Ceramics*, Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg, Germany

Sculptural Ceramics, St. Joseph Gallery, Leeuwarden, Netherlands

Spring Exhibition, Charlottenburg Foundation, Copenhagen, Denmark

2007

Biennale for Craft and Design, Trapholt Kunstmuseum, Kolding, Denmark

2005

Conversation Pieces, Gallery Nørby, Copenhagen

Dutch Ceramic Museum, De Tiendschuur, Holland

The International Festival of Postmodern Ceramics, Varazdin, Croatia

2004

From the Kilns of Denmark: Contemporary Danish Ceramics, Maison du Danemark, Paris, France

The Nordic Embassies, Berlin, Germany

Biennale for Craft and Design: Trapholt Kunstmuseum, Kolding, Denmark

2002

From the Kilns of Denmark: Contemporary Danish Ceramics, Museum of Art and Design, New York, NY; Mingei international Museum, Sacramento, CA; Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, CA; Racine Art Museum, WI; Fitchburg Art Museum, MA

2001

New Danish Ceramics, The Danish Museum of Art & Design, Copenhagen, Denmark

1997

Table Top, The Exhibition Room for New Ceramics, Copenhagen, Denmark

Danish Ceramic Triennale, Trapholt Kunstmuseum, Kolding, Denmark

Danish Ceramics: 1850 to 1997, Sophienholm, Copenhagen, Denmark

1996

Duplika, Danish Architectural Center, Copenhagen, Denmark

1995

Talent Börse Handwerk, Munich, Germany

Contemporary Danish Design, Sophienholm, Copenhagen, Denmark

New Danish Ceramics, Ribe Museum of Art, Denmark

International Contemporary Artists in Clay, Amsterdam, Denmark

1994

Room and Rituals of Everyday Life, Den Frie Udstilling, Copenhagen, Denmark

Danske Dage, Ljubljana, Slovenia

1993

Keramikkens Underskov, The Round Tower, Copenhagen

Spring Exhibition, Charlottenborg Foundation, Copenhagen, Denmark

1992

XIII Biennale Internationale de Ceramique d'art, Vallauris, France

Artist's Autumn Exhibition, Den

Frie Udstilling, Copenhagen, Denmark

1991

The Danish Museum of Arts & Design, Copenhagen, Denmark

1990

Graduate Exhibition, Kolding Design School, Denmark

AWARDS AND GRANTS

The Danish Arts Foundation

L. F. Foghts Foundation

The Danish National Bank Jubilee Fund

Annie and Otto Johs. Detlefs Foundation, Ceramic Prize

Ellen and Knud Dahlhoff Larsens Foundation

Ole Haslund Artist Foundation

Honorable Mention, 4th World Ceramic Biennale, Korea

BG Foundation

Applied Art Prize of 1879, Bronze Medal

SELECTED COLLECTIONS

CLAY Museum, Middelfart, Denmark

Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, France

Hetjens Museum, Düsseldorf, Germany

The Danish Embassy, Tokyo, Japan and Washington DC, USA

Trapholt Art Museum, Kolding, Denmark

Houston Art Collection, TX, USA

The Danish Arts Foundation, Copenhagen, Denmark

Höganäs Museum, Sweden

Musée de Sèvres, Paris, France

ASU Art Museum, Tempe, AZ, USA

Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg, Germany

Annie and Otto Johs. Detlefs Collection, Denmark

Musée Magnelli, Vallauris, France

New Carlsberg Foundation, Copenhagen, Denmark

Victoria & Albert Museum, London, United Kingdom

Icheon World Ceramic Center, South Korea

Danish Museum of Art & Design, Copenhagen, Denmark

Danish Ceramic Museum, Middelfart, Denmark

The Danish National Police, Copenhagen, Denmark

Trapholt Kunstmuseum, Kolding, Denmark

Ribe District Council, Denmark

Copenhagen Culture Foundation, Copenhagen, Denmark

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

2005-2007

Lecturer at Kolding School of Design, Denmark

1996-2004

Head of the Ceramics and Glass Department, The Royal Danish Academy, School of Design, Copenhagen, Denmark

1993-1996

Lecturer at Copenhagen School of Design, Denmark

1994-1995

Lecturer at Kolding School of Design, Denmark

MEMBERSHIPS

2017

Prize Committee, The Biennale for Crafts and Design, Denmark

2013-2016

Board Member, The Danish Arts Foundation

2014

National Commissioner, Bornholm Biennial for Contemporary European Glass and Ceramics, Denmark

2013

Jury Member, The Biennale for Crafts and Design, Denmark

2010

Co-founder, Copenhagen Ceramics, Denmark

2007-2013

Board Member, Danish Crafts, Denmark

2005-2008

Board Member, International Ceramic Center, Guldagergaard, Denmark

2001

Member of New Danish Ceramics, Denmark

1998

Jury Member, The Danish Ceramics Triennial, Trapholt Art Museum, Denmark

Judge, Competition: “The Future Playground”. The Danish Arts Foundation, Copenhagen, Denmark

1997-2003

Committee Member, The National Workshops for Arts and Crafts, Copenhagen, Denmark



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