



## Erna Aaltonen, Beyond Spheres

"Spheres have always been central to my work, but for this second exhibition at the Galerie de l'Ancienne Poste, I wished to show other quality of my work as well", Erna Aaltonen explains. The harmonious roundness of the coloured globes for which she is renowned is matched here by the rigour, though subdued, of her *Monoliths*. Nothing cold or austere, however, in the Finnish artist's vertical creations; no harsh angle, no sharp edge, but rather a serene elegance. The proportions are perfectly balanced, the forms rise and discretely impose their bodies within the space. Erna Aaltonen likes pure lines and her influences can be found among the fields of modern architecture and minimalist sculpture rather than ancient or contemporary ceramics. "When I was a teenager, I remember leafing through a magazine and coming across photographs of Notre Dame du Haut Chapel built in Ronchamp by Le Corbusier. I think no other monument has ever made such an impression on me, the artist confides. I was also marked by the Egyptian prehistoric pots I saw at the Museum of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Antiquities in Stockholm, as well as by Finnish artist Harry Kivijärvi's smooth, abstract stone sculptures, which were a true revelation to me. All of it somehow pervades and feeds my own research".

At first sight, Erna Aaltonen's *Monoliths* could appear monochrome. Yet, though they are dominated by one main colour (white, black, green...), they gradually reveal the wealth of a palette full of nuances and gradations, devoid of violent contrasts and ruptures. The surface's substance, with its play on smooth and rough textures, creates subtle reliefs that capture or reflect light. "In a way, I consider *Spheres* and *Monoliths* as three-dimensional canvasses on which I can experiment colour", Erna Aaltonen explains.

When it comes to *Spheres* covered with layers of coloured engobes and oxides, the artist engraves, scratches, incises the outside crust in order to create a set of lines that hug the curves of the object while inducing a vertical movement through irregular striations that run across the surface from the base up to the neck. The *Monoliths*'s "skin" is less rugged, less crackled without being uniform. Erna Aaltonen indeed shuns perfection of shape, which is in her view contradictory with the hand's work.

"I always leave quite a few things to chance, she clarifies. The life of a work of art springs from these flaws that enliven it. The same goes for a piece of artwork and a human face whose two profiles appear similar without ever being exactly the same. When I draw up my structure, I give it a direction; then it evolves freely, as if it had grown in the wild. What happens within the kiln remains a mystery and always holds surprises in store". Whether it comes to *Spheres*, *Monoliths* or other sculptures with freer forms made of folds and creases of clay, the technique remains the same (a construction of successive additions of clay strips).

But what happens backstage, in the secret of the studio, is really just the artist's concern. The heart of the matter lies elsewhere, within the magic of the works that we are given to see. In Erna Aaltonen's opinion, they have no other reason for being but to convey beauty. Those who know her work will rediscover it here from a fresh angle. About fifteen *Spheres* interact with a set of *Monoliths*, some of which were created in the early 2010s but seldom seen before, and other smaller-scale ones made especially for the occasion. Confronting these two main "families" allows us to consider Erna Aaltonen's coherent artistic universe of abstract sculptures with very simple volumes and lines, as well as measure the subtlety of her countless variations of form and colour.

**Guillaume Morel**

**Translated by Marina Duval Matthews**

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"La Symphonie des Sphères", June 2015, a full color publication of 48 pages, and a seminal text "Erna Aaltonen, au-delà des Sphères", by Guillaume Morel, accompanying the exhibition.

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