

“Continuity, Persistence, Line”

Thinking Through Clay
- A Selection of Works by Delia Prvački



Prvački's Poem, her
Studio and the
Exhibition, "Continuity,
Persistence, Line"
Thinking Through
Clay - A Selection of Works
by Delia Prvački

Ling Jia Le
Curator

"Continuity, / Persistence, / Line" are the last lines of the poem, *De Rerum Natura (On the Nature of Things)* that Delia Prvački wrote in her 1982 solo exhibition, *delia keramoplastika* at the Meduza Gallery in Koper, Slovenia. The poem reads like a list, containing a mix of organic matter, transformative processes and artistic intentions. A synonymous relationship exists between the groupings: the "fruit" is a conduit for "multiplication" and "continuity," and the "seed" symbolises "beginning" and lineages. Here, the "form" implies a process, a gesture, and a continuous motion. It is in this tacit connection that Prvački finds inspiration from the swirl of the potter's wheel, wielding it into a three-dimensional object.

Withstanding the test of time, the sentiments expressed in the poem remain inextricable from Prvački's practice. Chosen to form the title of this exhibition, "*Continuity, Persistence, Line*" *Thinking through Clay – A Selection of Works by Delia Prvački*, the three words have grown out of their stanza, evolving to outline the key intentions of this show. Featuring works mainly since the 1990s, this exhibition explores the continuity in Prvački's work, how she maintains this continuity, what she persistently pursues and their purpose, and traces

De Rerum Natura (1982) by Delia Prvački¹ in Serbian

*ameba-moguca forma, plod, pocetak, evolucija
uoblicavanje, razvijanje. bezanje od sluca-
jonosti, umnozavanje vrednosti
forma koja tezi cilju
kontinuitet
postojanost
linija*

Delia Prvački's free translation² of *De Rerum Natura*

*Amoeba possible shape, beginning, seed, fruit, evolution
formation, development. avoiding coincidences
multiplication of content
the form that was part of a goal
continuity
persistence
line*

the lineage of ideas, shapes, colours, and textures in her art.

Delia Prvački (b. 1950), a Romanian-born Singaporean ceramicist, creates sculptures and site-specific installations using clay. Before moving to Singapore in 1992 with her husband, she lived in Romania and Serbia (former Yugoslavia). She became a Singaporean in 2002 and has resided here since her arrival.

These inquiries into continuity, persistence, and lineage began with an introductory visit to Prvački's studio, the heart of the artist's practice. With fresh eyes, one perceives no shortage of activities in the spacious studio. Heaps of ceramic pieces - placed indiscriminately on tables, or neatly labelled on shelves - lay dormant and awaiting transformation in the kiln, while previous works serve as bookstands and fruit bowls. There is an air of playfulness, fluidity, and an unabashed sense that life and art have organically coalesced in each other's embrace. The artworks and their work-in-progress, in their natural habitat of the artist's studio, shed their austere roles as exhibition objects of thematic exploration, revealing larger and persisting preoccupations.

¹ delia: keramoplastika (Koper, Slovenia: Meduza Gallery, 1982).

² Transcribed and extracted from interview with Kenneth Tay.

Beyond the immersive experience of being at Prvački's studio, lively conversations with the artist uncover the roots of her practice. Prvački discusses issues on capitalism and the geopolitics shaped by the pursuit of non-renewable resources, the history of migration across the Danube River and the picturesque mining caves of her childhood. Soon enough, every work of hers connects effortlessly to the notion of mining. This provides glimpses into what continuity and persistence entail in Prvački's practice. Prvački describes her practice as "an attempt to describe the unknown," which aptly captures the observations about her studio and practice.

The Museum's exchanges with Prvački give rise to the three exhibition sections: The Search, The Unknown, and The Impulse. These sections define aspects of her practice that developed into deeper exploration.

Instead of drawings and writings, Prvački 'notates' using ceramic test pieces and scale models. The Search takes up the corridor of the NX1 gallery, seeking to encapsulate her artmaking process, displaying a range of Prvački's studies and sketches derived from past projects. This section includes test tiles from her material research with the NUS Institute of Functional Intelligent Materials to incorporate graphene into Kaolin clay. Committed to forging new visual vocabularies with clay, Prvački constantly converses with her materials' history, culture and societal contexts. To exit the gallery, one will pass through The Search a second time. This revisiting of Prvački's test pieces speaks to the cyclical nature of her practice, wherein her experimentation continues after an exhibition project is completed.

The Unknown is a broad section of the exhibition. Prvački's preoccupation with clay, and its connection with the environment and natural resources, serve as a nexus to themes of history, geopolitics, capitalism, colonialism and craftsmanship. Drawing from the materials, equipment, images, and stories related to the

exploration, extraction, and transportation of resources, Prvački weaves complex material realities and predicaments, including her own, into her ceramic sculptures. Concurrently, by placing works from different projects and periods throughout her career, we encourage viewers to make their own conceptual and visual connections between the artworks.

Ideas and lived experiences may not always manifest directly in Prvački's works. Instead, they provide philosophical sustenance, spiritual gumption, and impulse to create. The Impulse showcases artworks deeply connected to the core experiences and ideas that significantly influence her life and have driven her creations. These include reflections on her formative years in Baia Mare, Romania, the literature and philosophical ideologies she consumed, and the experiences of womanhood. This accumulation of past, present, and future events and ideas culminates in a compelling, definite staging where the impulse of recurring ideas behind her artworks unfolds in space.

With this tripartite classification, this exhibition aims to lay the foundation for understanding her practice in hopes of providing fertile ground for further inquiries into her body of works.

The title of Prvački's poem shares that of Lucretius' poem, *De Rerum Natura* (c.99 BC – c.55 BC),³ which identifies the intrinsic and common traits of all things. Inspired by this, Prvački looks beyond the surface to capture and investigate the relationship between all things in the world. As she traverses between the two-dimensional and three-dimensional, clay and fibre, eastern and western cultures, she maintains a vigour and spirit of curiosity. Through a medium that possesses deep history, technicality and at times spirituality, Prvački conjures an expansive and riveting body of works that embodies this enduring outlook on the world.

³Lucretius Carus, Titus. *On the Nature of Things*. United Kingdom: G. Bell, 1898.

The Unknown



3.



1.



4.



2.

The Search



6.



5.



7.



8.



9.



10.

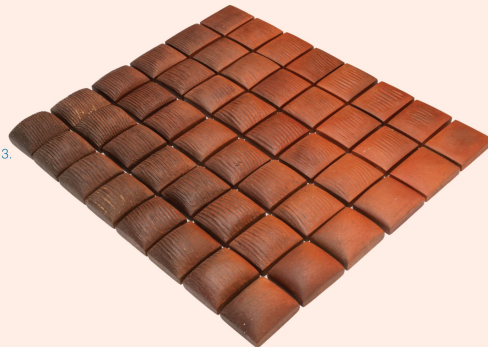


12.

The Impulse



11.



13.

“Continuity, Persistence, Line”

Thinking Through Clay - A Selection of Works by Delia Prvački

NX1 Gallery, NUS Museum
23 August 2024 - 30 August 2025

1. *Amulet*, 1999, Stoneware, terracotta slip, oxides, 95cm x 115cm x 22cm.
2. *Columns from Topography of Hybrid Imagery*, 2020, Stoneware, glaze, terracotta, oxides, Variable dimensions.
3. *Sketch for Grass in the Wind*, 1997, Stoneware, glaze, 25cm x 14cm x 19cm.
4. *Patina*, 2014, Bricks from National Library, glaze, 21cm x 7cm x 10cm.
5. *Masks Series*, 2016, Stoneware, glaze, 21cm x 21cm.
6. *Sketch for the first Piece of Sky*, 1992 - 2016, Stoneware, glaze, 18cm x 21.5cm x 4cm.
7. *Folded Strip*, 2003, Porcelain, glaze, 24.5cm x 8cm x 3.5cm.
8. *Sketch for Raffles The Plaza Hotel Commission*, 1993, Porcelain, glaze, gold lustre, 31cm x 11cm x 15cm.
9. *Sketch for public mural*, 2004, Porcelain, glaze, 26cm x 8cm x 3cm.
10. *First Windows*, 1995, Stoneware, oxides, 23cm x 21cm x 32cm.
11. *Furniture Inspiration*, 1998, Stoneware, glaze, 58cm x 14cm x 11.5cm.
12. *Window 1*, 1994, Stoneware, white clay, oxides, 60.5cm x 53cm x 17cm.
13. *Ageing*, 1998, Terracotta, oxides, 120cm x 136cm x 10cm.

Artworks above: Collection of Delia Prvački.

About the exhibition

“Continuity, Persistence, Line” Thinking Through Clay - A Selection of Works by Delia Prvački is an exhibition that aims to lay the foundation for understanding Delia Prvački’s practice through a selection of her works since the 1990s. Segmented into three sections - The Search, The Unknown and The Impulse - aspects of artmaking, thematic interests and ideologies are explored. Featuring never-before-seen ceramic scale models and test tiles by Prvački, The Search showcases her iterative and cyclical approach to inventing new visual vocabularies. With this newfound language, The Unknown section shows how Prvački utilises it to convey complex and layered ideas in her ceramic sculptures and installations. At The Impulse, personal and geographical histories and ideologies that propel her to create unfold in the intimate room. Collectively, the three sections chart simultaneous explorations while identifying a continuity in methods, ideas and visuals.

About the artist

A Romanian-born Singaporean artist, Delia Prvački works primarily with clay to produce sculptures and site-specific installations. Grounded in the awareness of the historical and theoretical discourse of ceramics as a craft and art form, Prvački’s practice delves into themes of non-renewable resources, including their access, circulation, extraction, histories, mythologies, and mining communities.

Prvački graduated from the Bucharest Institute of Fine Arts in 1975 and moved to Singapore in 1992. Since her relocation to Singapore together with fellow artist and partner, Milenko Prvački, her ceramics have evolved in their conceptual and formal interests as she responds to newer stimuli of culture, economics and politics. She has also developed a strong practice in public art. Her collaborations with the NUS (National University of Singapore) community have been significant, including projects with the Institute for Functional Intelligent Materials (I-FIM) and the Centre for Advanced 2D Materials (CA2DM).



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