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Lecture: Fairy Tales and Decadence – Recent Developments in Figurative Ceramic Sculpture in the Nordic Region

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ABSTRACT

Ceramics from the Nordic countries are often routinely associated with a modernist design aesthetics focusing on form and function, or its direct opposite – a fervent sculptural expressionism played out on a monumental scale. Other facets of Nordic ceramics, such as small-scale figuration, fairy tale-tinted narration and the application of styles such as naïvism and surrealism, tend to be overlooked. This presentation highlights the works of group of younger and mid-career ceramic artists who in various ways explore motifs and moods that go beyond the well-known image of Nordic ceramic sculpture as mainly expressionist and nature-inspired.

Common for many Nordic ceramic artists working in the figurative domain today is an interest into the whimsical and the mundane. Rather than alluding on classical myths or legends, the artists find their motifs in the realm of the everyday, or in popular culture imagery. There is a marked difference here to the artists who established ceramic sculpture as an artistic discipline in the Nordic region in the earlier post-war period, who were often drawn towards abstraction, expressionism or classicism. Today, many younger artists tend to give preference to a looser and more playful artistic attitude and an interest in the fleeting moments of contemporary life. Using historical comparisons, the paper presents an overview of how artistic preferences and styles in ceramic sculpture in the Nordic region have changed over the last decades.