

Isabelle Cornaro

Inside the
WHITE CUBE

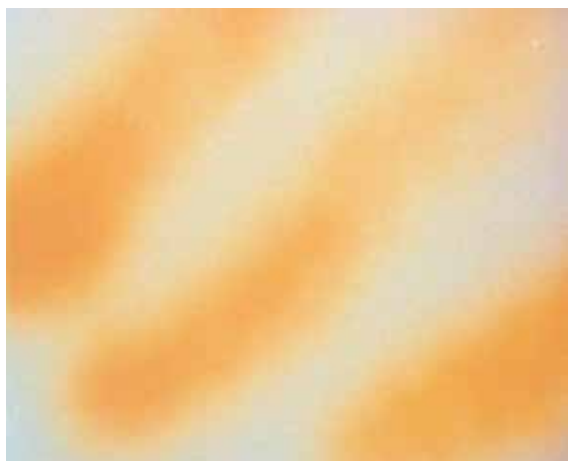












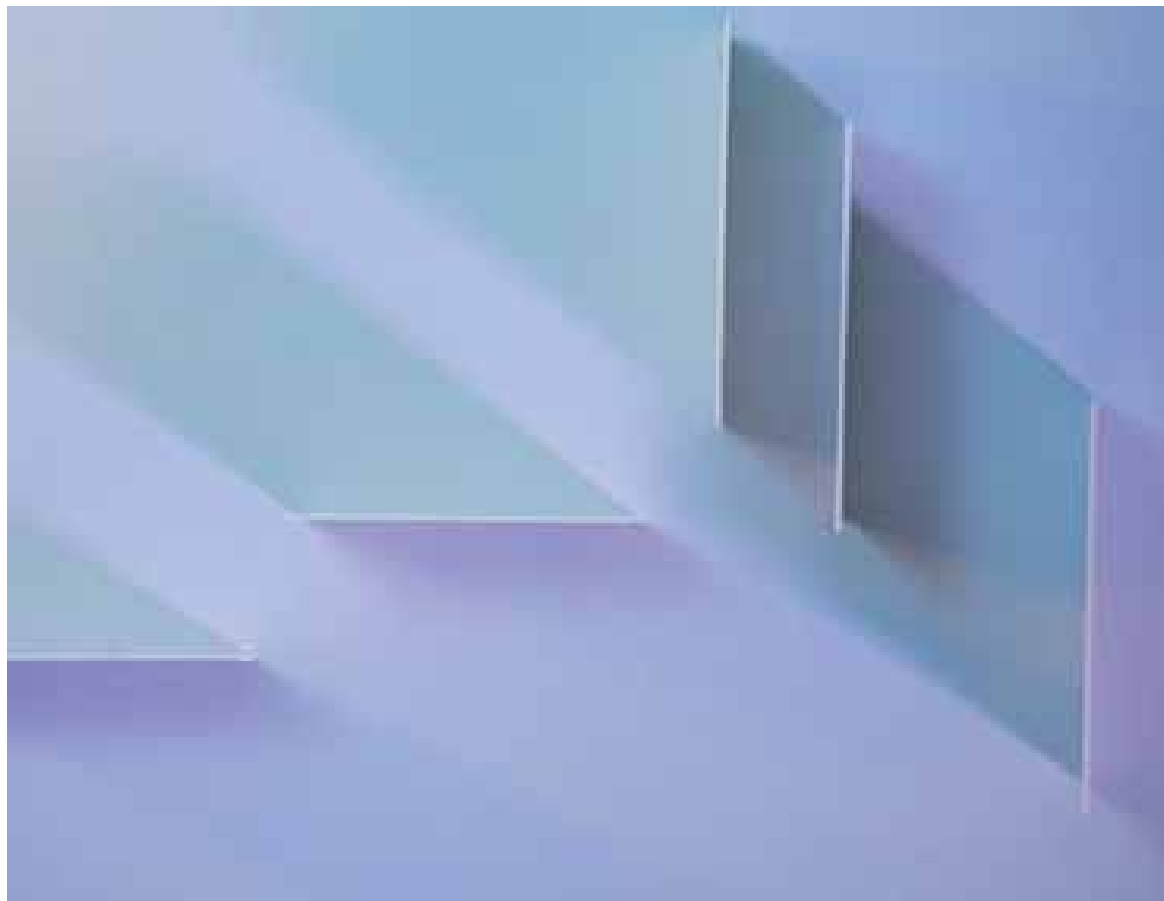


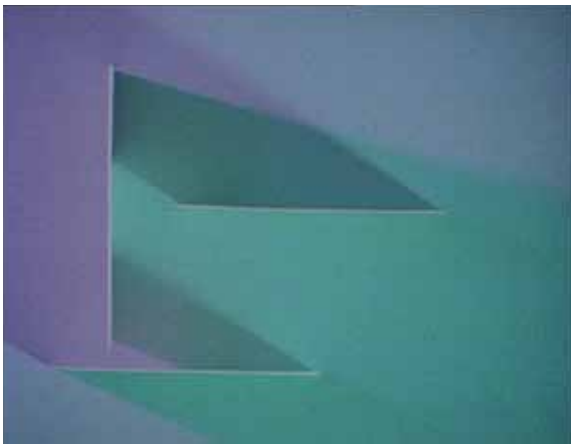
'Monsieur miroir', Fondation d'Entreprise Ricard, Paris, 2010











List of works

pp.3-7

Homonymes (II), 2012

Coloured plaster casts

Four parts, each: 120 × 180 × 20 cm

pp.8-9

Floues et colorées, 2010

16 mm film transferred onto digital, colour, silent

3 min 12 sec

pp.10-13

Homonymes (I), 2010

Coloured plaster casts

Four parts, each: 60 × 120 × 40 cm

pp.14-15

De l'argent filmé de profil et de trois quarts, 2010

16 mm film transferred onto digital, colour, silent

2 min 13 sec

Fabrice Stroun:

The first works of yours that I saw resembled compositions of found objects shown in glass cases (*Le Proche et le lointain*, 2011), or on plinths (*Paysages avec poussin et témoin oculaires*, 2011). More recently, I discovered your casts of similar objects, which you call *Homonymes* (2010 and 2012). How would you describe this passage from one material state to another, from one mode of presentation to another?

Isabelle Cornaro:

The Homonymes are direct imprints of mounds of objects. In contrast to the *Paysages avec poussin*, I do not use objects here as graphic building blocks: this is not about constructing a landscape from an ideal vantage point, but attempting to 'cast from life' categories of representation. The absence of composition allows me to put aside my subjectivity, or at least my 'sensibility', which is clearly at play in the *Poussin* works. This amounts to a shift of emphasis in my artistic gestures, as I try to move from more formal (i.e. aesthetic) to more categorical considerations.

FS:

Can you clarify this last statement? Also, if these heaps are not 'composed', how do you pile up these objects?

IS:

The categories I refer to were empirically defined while observing different objects lying around my studio at the time that I was working on the *Poussin* landscapes. In the first set of *Homonymes* (those with the cast objects), I identified three distinct categories of objects: naturalistic objects (even when streamlined), 'in the shape of' a duck, a flower, etc.; objects carved with decorative motifs, repeated and stylized; and objects sporting geometrical

form – even if impure – that brought to mind an idea of abstraction. In other words, my categories were: Naturalism, Stylization and Abstraction. A fourth cast was then made with what was left over.

Piles were thought of as ‘heaps’, following a functional rather than an aesthetic logic. By that I mean that spacing had to be sufficient for the technician to make the casts, with various heights so as to reveal the maximum detail, etc.

FS:

What drove you to make a cast of these objects – an artificial surrogate, as opposed to presenting them directly as they are?

IC:

To wrest these objects from their original function, to transform the way they are perceived, to change their frame of representation. Simply put, to put them at arm’s length.

FS:

How would you define this newly created distance? Do you consider these casts as ‘models’ of something, or some process, or should we regard them more as ‘allegories’? And if so, of what?

IC:

I like the idea of an allegory since it describes an abstract relationship to the world and often calls for the use of figures, of characters, as well as of effects. The cast object relates to two distinct fields of likeness: to the real objects that were used to make the casts, and to the abstract categories they represent.

FS:

Is your choice of making plaster casts linked to the notion of the ‘imprint’, in the sense of a particular category of representation as defined by Rosalind Krauss or Yves-Alain Bois in ‘L’informe’ [Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1996], or is it more of an art-historical issue for you, one that relates to technique?

IC:

One thing that really matters to me is that the cast is moulded in a single take. It is a solidifying, a change of material state – meaning that all the objects used become a single mass; in the same way in which ‘drawn’ shapes emerge from a formless block of matter. An important point of reference are 16th-century Mannerist grottos, where animals and flowers are sculpted in a mass that remains partly formless, or rather, keeps its natural shapes. There are also other grottos where the entire stone is sculpted, including the parts that are supposed to be formless, ‘natural’ matter. The material and the manner in which it is used projects an image of reification, i.e. of death – the passage from an animated body to that of a corpse.

FS:

Is this the reason why most of the objects you are using seem to come from a defunct era? All these old-fashioned tchotchkes seem to come from someone’s attic or the flea market. I hate flea markets.

IC:

They do indeed come from flea markets, which I visit without any pleasure. I too hate this slightly pornographic relationship to objects, half-sentimental, half-concupiscent. They are domestic decorative objects (vases with Chinese-style ‘Oriental’ motifs, trinkets, cheap glassware, Christmas baubles, knife holders, egg cups, etc.), outdated tools (rubber stamps, metronomes, rulers, old camera lenses), as well as my own used working tools (small varnished plinths, bubble wrap, plaster, glass sheets, slides, etc.), or objects linked to money (coins, bills, poker chips, piggy banks), or to pageantry (perfume bottles, jewels, medals, lipsticks, etc.). There are never any direct human representations, only abstract, vegetal, and animal and mineral decorative motifs. In the end all these objects are, in one way or another, related to work (as in the work necessary to produce these decorated objects, or their mechanical reproductions), as well as to the ways they map out a social class, which happens to be, most of the time, my own.

FS:

Is this a way of bringing to the fore an autobiographical dimension in your work?

IC:

No, not in this sense. Just that I have some familiarity with these types of objects having grown up with them. In fact, the very first objects I ever used – and which made me reflect upon the emotional, sentimental, but also historical and social dimensions of objects we encounter daily – are jewels that belonged to my parents. Not only did I have them at my fingertips, but I had also seen them in old photographs. Otherwise all the objects that come from flea markets are devalued: they are copies of copies, surrogates of 'sought-after' pieces, presented as unique objects when they are in fact, most often, industrial reproductions.

FS:

This use of culture is really peculiar to your practice and your story, and does not seem to have the remotest connection with the globalised 'pop' culture that many of your contemporaries draw on.

IC:

I find it difficult to work with pop culture because, in my opinion, it is already overloaded with presence, in every sense of the word. A sense that takes up too much space, both physically and in our mind's eye. Most importantly, pop almost always generates a positive, sentimental relationship to culture that I cannot relate to at all. To work with the objects and places I detest creates a harsh and tense power relationship that I much prefer.

2010 – 2012

Works and installation views





Le Magasin, Grenoble, France, 2012



Paysage avec poussin et témoins oculaires (version V), 2012

Wooden pedestals and walls covered with concrete and various industrial objects
800 × 1400 cm (variable)







Le Magasin, Grenoble, France, 2012





Reproductions, 2010
Acrylic spray painting on wall
Dimensions variable



Le Magasin, Grenoble, France, 2012







Reproductions, 2010
Acrylic spray painting on wall
Dimensions variable





Le Magasin, Grenoble, France, 2012





Le proche et le lointain, 2011 (details)
Six vitrines of different heights with coloured papers
and various studio and domestic objects
700 × 700 cm (variable)



Of Cinematic, 2011
Installation
Dimensions variable







'Livingroom Exotica', Kunsthhaus Glarus, Switzerland, 2011



Paysage avec poussin et témoins oculaires (version III), 2011 (details)
Plywood panels and pedestals, carpets and various domestic objects
400 × 450 cm (variable)











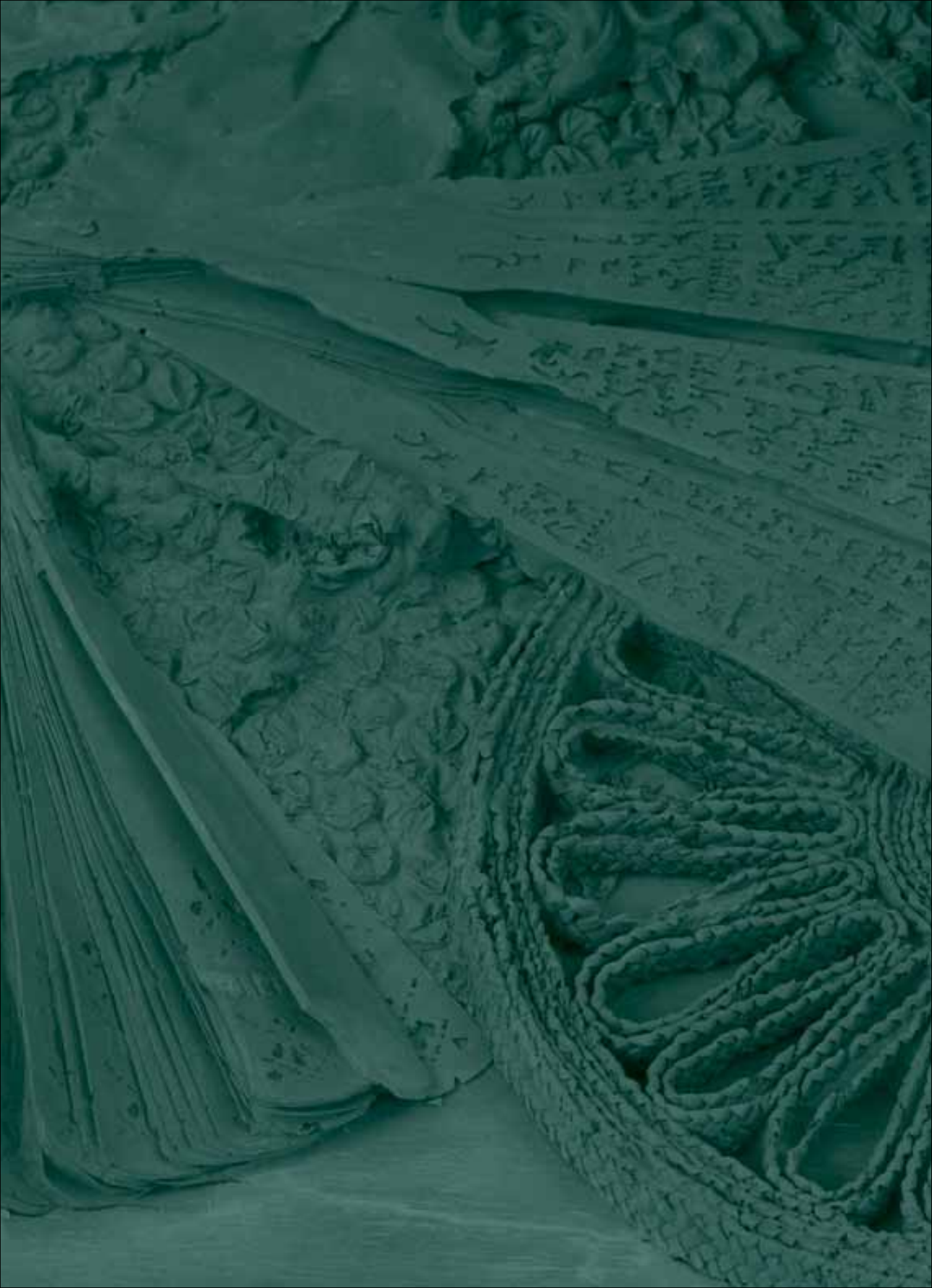
Paysage avec poussin et témoins oculaires (version IV), 2011 (detail)
Plywood panels and pedestals covered with concrete and wooden
and aluminium industrial objects
400 × 600 cm (variable)

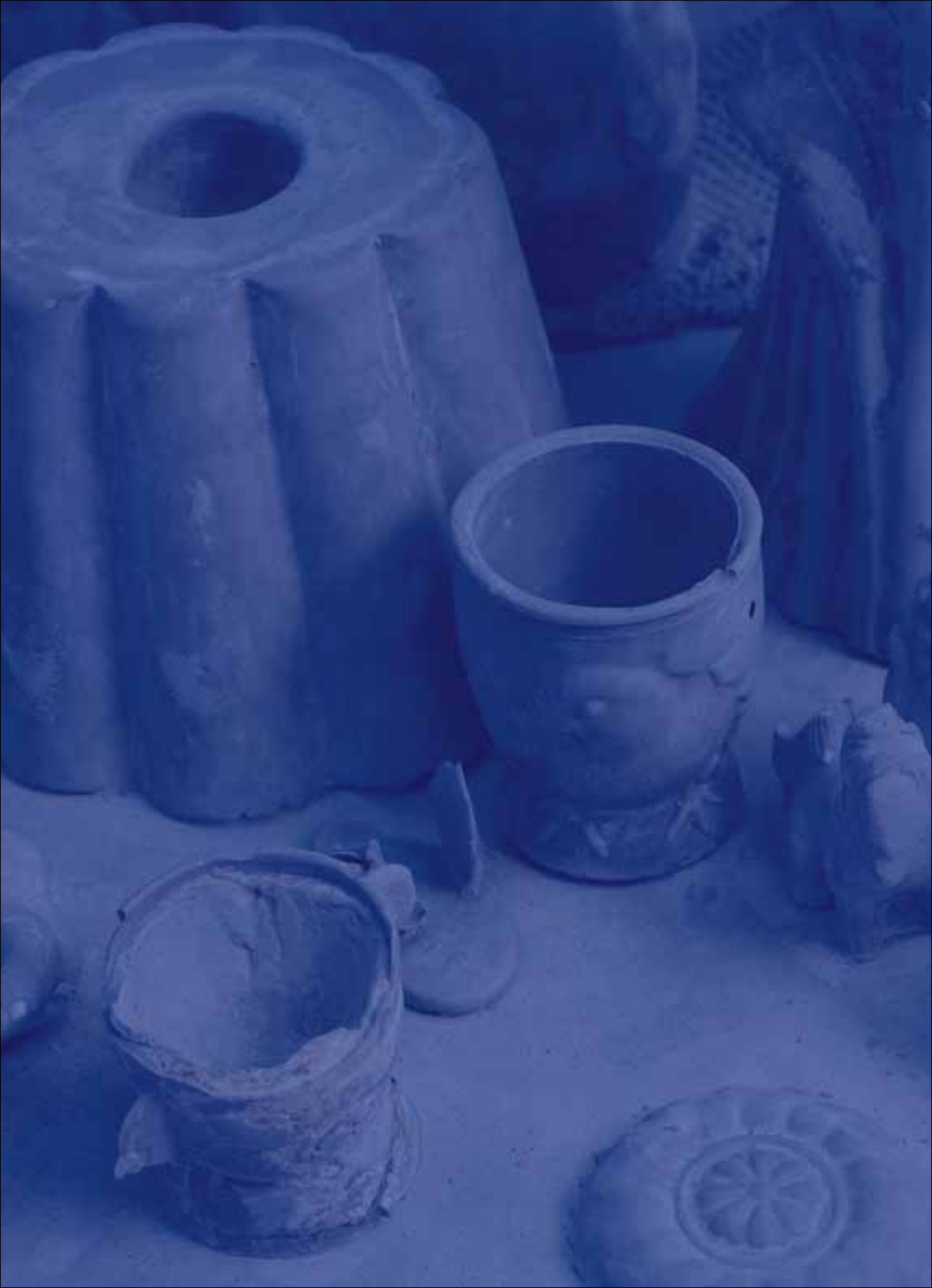


Moulage sur le vif (vide-poches), 2009 (detail)
Pigment print on rag paper
70 × 70 cm

Notebook

Prismatic













Biography

Isabelle Cornaro was born in 1974 in France and lives and works in Paris. She completed a degree in art history at the École du Louvre, Paris (1996) and a degree in visual arts from the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris (2002). Solo exhibitions include Parc Culturel de Rentilly, Bussy Saint Martin, France (2007–08); La Ferme du Buisson, Noisiel, France (2008); Kunstverein Düsseldorf (2009); Centre d'Art Contemporain de Troyes, France (2010); Le Collège des Bernardins, Paris (2010); 1m³, Lausanne, Switzerland (2011); Frac Aquitaine, Bordeaux and Le Magasin, Grenoble (both in France, 2012). She has participated in numerous group exhibitions, including most recently 'The Square, the Line and the Light', Tate Modern, London (2010); 'Un'espressione geografica', Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin, Italy; 'Vide-Poche', SculptureCenter, New York; 'Livingroom Exotica', Kunsthaus Glarus, Switzerland (all 2011); Palais de Tokyo's third triennial, 'Intense Proximity', Paris (2012) and, this summer, Time-Based Art Festival at Portland Institute for Contemporary Art (2012). She has had residencies at Le Pavillon, Palais de Tokyo (2006), Parc Culturel de Rentilly, Marne et Gondoire, France (2007) and the International Studio & Curatorial Program, New York (2010). In 2010 Cornaro received the Prix de la Fondation d'Entreprise Ricard, Paris. She has solo shows opening at Kunsthalle Bern, Switzerland and Laxart, Los Angeles in 2013.

Isabelle Cornaro
7 September – 11 November 2012
Inside the White Cube

Designed by Jonathan Hares
Co-edited by Honey Luard and Dorothy Feaver
Photography by Blaise Adilon, David Aebi,
Florian Kleinefenn, Adrien Missika, Olivier Pasqual,
Guillaume Ziccarelli
Printed by MM Artbook Printing & Repro

Artworks © Isabelle Cornaro
Text © Fabrice Stroun and Isabelle Cornaro
Catalogue © White Cube

Images courtesy the artist and Fondation
d'Entreprise Ricard pp.10–11; the artist and
Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin
pp.38–39; the artist and Kunsthhaus Glarus,
Switzerland pp.40–43; the artist and 1m³,
Lausanne, Switzerland pp.44–47.

Fabrice Stroun is the director of Kunsthalle Bern.
In 2013 he will present a comprehensive survey
exhibition of the work of Isabelle Cornaro.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may
be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or
transmitted in any form or by any means, electrical,
mechanical or otherwise, without first seeking the
written permission of the copyright holders and
of the publishers.

White Cube
144–152 Bermondsey Street
London SE1 3TQ

+44 (0)20 7930 5373
whitecube.com

Cover:

Prismatic, 2012