

WORKING POTTER

Corien Ridderikhoff

When I was 18 years old, I had to choose a profession, and I knew it had to be something creative. My parents wanted me to choose a career that could give me a stable income, so I went to the Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, to learn to teach painting, crafts, and art history.

Developing a Passion for Clay

At the Rietveld Academie, the curriculum included working with plaster, metal, wood, and clay, in addition to taking theory-focused lessons. Our ceramics teacher, Adriana Baarspul, was an energetic, inspiring woman who invited us to visit and work in her studio for the first three years. We did some raku firing in her back garden and went with her on a trip to France. She had worked in France as a trainee in a small ceramics factory during her studies and took us there. We also explored the wider region of la Borne, which is home to lots of potters who fire wood and salt kilns. Nearly the whole class got their love for clay from Baarspul.

After my exams, I preferred to develop myself as a potter. I was already addicted to clay and not so interested in teaching. It is a privilege to be my own boss and to be able to decide what I make and create and execute my own designs.

After completing my training at the Rietveld Academy in 1977, I was given the opportunity to work for a year at the Ceramic Work Centre (KWC, now the EKWC), which at that time was located in the fortress town Heusden on the Meuse in the Netherlands. While there, I was able to experiment with stoneware and porcelain, reduction glazes, and gas-kiln firing. Working together with friends and colleagues, we built a salt kiln in the garden behind the studios.

During my last two years at Rietveld Academy, I chose Japan as my focus. I immersed myself in Japanese culture, especially ceramics and glazes. During my first period working at the KWC, I experimented a lot with Asian reduction glazes, such as celadon, oxblood, tenmoku, ash glaze, and chun glaze.





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1 Sake bottles, to 8 in. (20 cm) in height, porcelain, 2004–present. 2 Corien Ridderikhoff in the studio, decorating porcelain with wax resist. 3 Rainbow tableware, various dimensions, porcelain, 1990–present. 4 8-angled plates, 7 in. (18cm) in diameter, porcelain with wax-resist decoration, 2004–present.

At the end of that period, as one of six selected ceramic artists, I contributed to the first exhibition that took place at the KWC in 1979. A number of gallery owners visited the exhibition. My work was noticed, and that exposure led to exhibiting in galleries and well-known museums. I also began to sell my work.

Creating a Business

In 1979, two former classmates and I started a ceramics studio in a shop located in downtown Amsterdam. At first, we only used the shop as a studio, but after a while, we started to sell our work there too. The building was situated in an up-and-coming neighborhood

in the old city center that is now called The Nine Streets. Today the area is home to many nice small stores, cozy cafés, and restaurants.

I started making tableware with colored slip decoration, cast in molds to keep up with the orders of whole sets of cups and saucers, teapots, bowls, and plates. A good friend, Gerda van Kersbergen, joined in decorating my ceramics, so a new line was born. This line is in production to this day. We make cups and beakers with birds for some hotels and a shop in a restaurant.

I invested in a big kiln with clay fiber insulation that fired on Dutch natural gas, which was cheaper than electricity back then.

In our new studio, I was making boxes, plates, and pagodas from slabs of French stoneware, and porcelain cups and bowls turned on the wheel. In addition to these, I also made abstract sculptural objects using porcelain.

I developed a wax-resist decoration technique for my porcelain work that is similar to Indonesian batik. First, I make a geometric pattern with pencil on the bisque ware and then fill in the parts that must remain white with wax resist. Then, I dip the work in a dark-blue glaze. The wax burns away in the kiln. After firing to 2255°F (1235°C), the result shows a contrast of high-gloss blue and matte white. And because of the thick glaze, a relief texture

is also formed. I apply this technique to slab-built and slip-cast porcelain. The shapes and decorations are both geometrical and inspired by Japanese indigo-blue ikat textiles, quilt patterns, and Islamic tiles, Chinese porcelain, and 17th-century Delftware. Another part of my work consists of porcelain jewelry and miniature vases made in plaster molds created from discarded plastics, toys, light bulbs, and Christmas decorations.

Changes Over Time

The shared studio where I started out in Amsterdam's The Nine Streets was rented from the father of one of the other two artists. The rent was low back then, but everything changed over the last 10 years. The Nine Streets became a highly desirable location with high rent. In 2015, I had to leave that studio and ended up moving into another friend's studio on the canal Kloveniersburgwal, which is also a beautiful location in the oldest part of Amsterdam. It was still affordable for me, but since the studio is situated at the back of a canal house, clients have to find me through my website and social media and can only visit by appointment.

In 1979, I started out feeling relaxed—I was making my ceramic work and teaching small groups. Later, more stress was involved when I started selling more and exhibiting a lot. The store was running well, and tourists from all over the world visited The Nine Streets and were glad to buy my work. I stopped teaching and made sure my shelves were always full. Nowadays, I also get commissions from people who find me on Facebook and Instagram. By now, fortunately, I have made more of a name for myself and get orders from all over Europe and the US. Usually, I work on several series at the same time, but if I have a big order, I concentrate on that.



A DAY IN THE LIFE

MORNING

- Begin the day with coffee
- Cycle to the studio
- Empty the molds cast the day before
- Cast a new round of molds
- Set the timer and finish the cast work from the previous day
- Take a moment for a coffee break
- Timer rings, then pour out the molds

AFTERNOON

- Lunch break with a bowl of soft cheese (kwark), fruit, and coffee
- On the way to the supermarket, look at the flea market nearby (Waterlooplein) for things I can use
- Decorate raw earthenware with engobe or decorate bisque-fired porcelain with wax resist
- If ready, glaze the decorated pieces
- Take photos for Facebook and Instagram
- Cycle home
- Post photos and text on Instagram and Facebook

EVENING

- Dinner
- Connect with friends, colleagues, and customers through email, apps, Facebook, and Instagram
- Write down ideas for work, etc.
- Watch television
- Go to bed



5 Kloveniersburgwal, the studio at the back of the canal house, shown on the right. 6 *Tuliptower*, 14 in. (36 cm) in height, porcelain with wax-resist decoration, 2020.



7 Teapot and cups, to 8¼ in. (21 cm) in height, porcelain with wax-resist decoration, 2016. 8 Little vases and rings (detail), to 3 in. (8 cm) in height each, porcelain, 2010–present. 9 *Labyrinth*, 5 ft. 3 in. (1.6 m) in diameter, stoneware, 2004.

My pursuit of the pottery profession, now for 45 years, has made me addicted to looking at ceramics made by colleagues. I also enjoy wandering around in museums and art galleries, as well as at flea markets, where I look for secondhand ceramics. The endless possibilities that clay has to offer continue to fuel my curiosity. I am always open to new experiments; even failures can yield new ideas.

Opportunities

In 2004, I was invited to work at the EKWC in Den Bosch and made two big labyrinths and a lot of smaller ceramics. In 2019, I received an invitation again to be an artist in residence at the EKWC, now located in Oisterwijk. This time, I worked on new methods of making my already successful *Tuliptower* (my modern version of the Delftware tulipiere/tulip-tower vase of the 17th century).

Originally, I handbuilt my tulip towers from slabs, which can be a very time-consuming way to produce. At the EKWC, I made 3D-printed forms of the five sections of the tower, then cast plaster molds of the forms. And with the forms completed, I did a lot of test firings with different glazes and at various temperatures, all with the help of the excellent EKWC staff.

Through the EKWC, I was able to exhibit a *Tuliptower* in the 2021 Korean International Ceramic Biennale at the Gyeonggi Museum of Contemporary Ceramic Art (Icheon City), in the Dutch section of the exhibition, “The Story Beyond The Sea, Dutch Ceramics Now.” The participating artists were selected by Ranti Tjan, the director of the EKWC at that time.

To reach as many people as possible, I am very active on social media. There are two places (besides the studio) where I display my



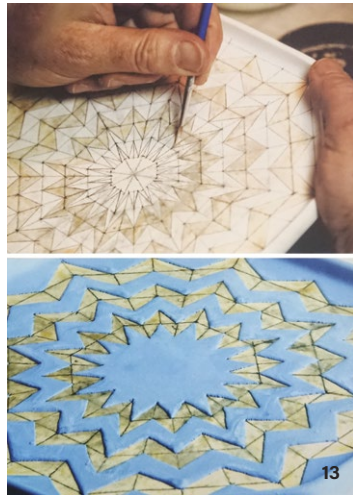
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10 A 3D printer at EKWC, printing a form in plastic, which will later be used to cast a plaster mold. **11** Plaster molds of parts of the Ridderikhoff's tulip tower. **12** Casting porcelain in the tulip tower molds. **13** Application of wax resist onto a porcelain plate. **14** Detail of finished wax-resist decoration. **15** Ridderikhoff in the studio, decorating a vase with wax resist. **16** Ridderikhoff's fired ceramics, unloaded from one of the big EKWC kilns, 2019.



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17 *Tuliptower*, 14 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (36 cm) in height, porcelain with wax decoration, 2019.

18 Big cups, 4 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (11 cm) in height, porcelain with wax decoration, 2023.

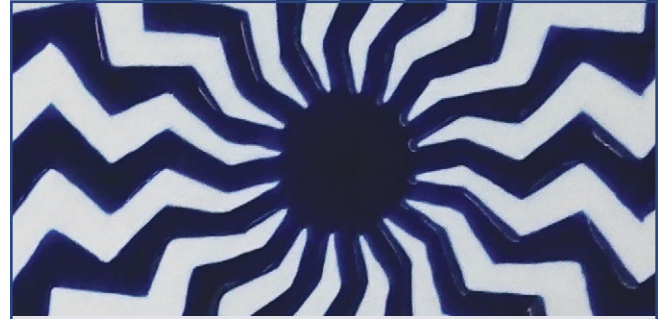
work for sale, the EKWC store and a friend's secondhand bookstore in Amsterdam that also sells prints, art pieces, and ceramics. In this bookstore, I have my own window display.

I find it difficult to price my products. My work was sold at the best ceramics gallery in Holland, TERRA in Delft, but some years ago I made the difficult decision to stop selling there. With galleries as intermediaries, when including the commission, the prices had to be too high for my liking. I value keeping the prices at a reasonable level so my work can be affordable to the public.

What really makes me happy is when I hear that people get very attached to a cup I made after drinking from it every day. I often get requests from customers to make exactly the same cup after someone has broken the original. I always try to do that.

Advice to New Artists

My advice to beginning ceramics professionals is to get a good education, take courses, and keep an open mind as broadly as possible. Participate in internships or apprenticeships with potters or ceramics factories. Visit exhibitions and seek out potters to



CAREER SNAPSHOT

YEARS AS A PROFESSIONAL POTTER

45 years

NUMBER OF POTS MADE IN A YEAR

300–500

EDUCATION

Gerrit Rietveld Academie (Amsterdam)
Teaching Arts and Crafts degree

THE TIME IT TAKES (PERCENTAGES)

Making work (including firing): 80%

Promotions/selling: 20%

Office/bookkeeping: 10%

FAVORITE TOOL

Potato peeler and a spade with a knife edge

PROCESS

Batik or wax-resist decorating

WHERE IT GOES

Retail stores: 5%

Galleries: 5%

Studio sales: 90%

LEARN MORE

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Instagram: [@corienridderikhoff](https://www.instagram.com/corienridderikhoff)

Website: www.corienridderikhoff.nl

EKWC: ekwc.nl

talk to. Share a studio. Collaborating with other artists to set up that first studio helped me. Together, studiomates are more resilient to the overhead of rent and additional issues like purchases and investments. In a group studio, artists can also share tools and kilns. And, it is important to always have people around to talk to about techniques, new ideas, and approaches to the material.

What do you need to be a successful ceramic artist? It takes creativity, a strong work ethic, self reliance, patience, persistence, resilience, flexibility, stress resistance, and a sense of business acumen. So, you have to be a little crazy! The life of a potter is tough, and you have to live a simple lifestyle.