

Tactile Temporalities

- and in the beginning, there was fire... -

Man's first contacts with pottery were, as in many other domains, uncertain and erratic. Heated only by the sun, clay broke easily with use and handling, and amphorae, dwellings, and the most diverse instruments needed to be constantly renewed and dried again in the sun. It was so in Egypt, and so it was in the civilizations between rivers. An urban or pre-urban agglomeration in the ancient eastern world was, above all, a superimposed set of *tells*, and dwellings succeeded each other even as they collapsed and were replaced. Clay work was, then, distinguished by its provisional nature and its brevity.

But man was not content with his fate - nor with the fate of his work and his art - and thought, at one point, that the sun alone was not enough for him. And it was a first demiurge who had the idea of casting the clay into the fire, multiplying in this way the intensity of the sun. Ceramic pottery was, then, created: plastic, elastic and flexible, certainly, but the fire conferred upon it a new direction, giving it what, until then, it had not possessed: the endurance of time. And in this process the caprices, chance and accidents of nature were replaced by the precision and certainty of a controlled action. It is in this sense that one can say that pottery is an invention of fire, but principally the invention of the control over fire.

But the accident and chance that marked the beginning of the process are present, albeit in a residual manner and as vestiges, in the work of the demiurge ceramic artist. In the work developed by Ilca Barcellos, the scratches on the surface of ceramic plates are the memory of a time that no longer exists. Flattened fossils immobilized at the instant of their figurative death - and of their effective creation - indicating that the same gesture which represents the end is a gesture of new beginning and transformation: from adobe clay to petrous clay. These ceramic plates are, simultaneously, the chance of art and the precision of fire.