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WOMEN WHO MAKE BEAUTIFUL THINGS

Breaking Free

Artist Zemer Peled creates otherworldly sculptures through artful destruction.

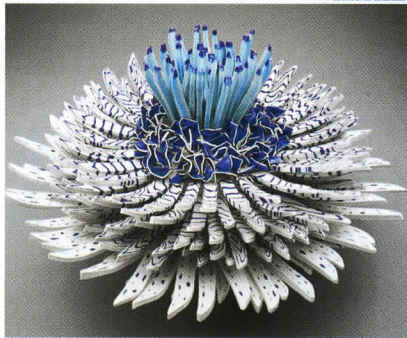


ZEMER PELED CAN still remember the first thing she ever demolished. “I was about 8 years old,” says the artist, now 31, who grew up on a kibbutz in northern Israel, “and my mom wanted to take down a wall in our house—so we grabbed hammers and started smashing.” It’s a memory Peled often reflects on today when creating sculptures, each assembled from thousands of porcelain fragments shaped into blossoming abstracts. “The word *ceramics* usually evokes small items you can hold in your hand,” says Peled. “But I’m most interested in making pieces that are enormous.”

Peled has exhibited her sculptures in galleries from Milwaukee to Milan, but her life as an artist didn’t begin until her early 20s, when a breakup led her to try art therapy. “We painted and worked with different materials,” says Peled, “and I was drawn to clay. It responds to your touch, movement, and emotions.”

In 2010, her passion brought her to London’s Royal College of Art for a master’s degree in ceramics. There, she began experimenting with her now-signature shards, hoping to capture the fluidity and firmness found in nature. “From a distance, the sculptures look soft,” says Peled. “But up close, you realize they’ve got bite.”

Whether she’s working on pillow-size sea anemones or a ten-foot-tall treelike figure, Peled (currently in residence at an arts foundation in Montana) always begins the same way: Using a slab roller, she flattens wet clay into large, thin sheets. Next, each layer (still wet) is either stained and cut into narrow, featherlike shapes or fired, glazed, and shattered into pieces. Then, with a rough sketch in mind, she sticks individual shards into clay forms or clay-and-concrete-covered frameworks. “It can be very chaotic in the studio,” says Peled, whose larger structures typically take four months to complete. “I always have Band-Aids on hand.” Despite her work’s gorgeous complexity, Peled continues to rely on one rudimentary tool: “A hammer is still my secret weapon.” —**Z.D.**



Clockwise from top: Peled’s 2012 graduate-degree installation; smashing shards in her studio; two prickly pieces from her recent collections.

PELED: STEVEN MICHAEL; CERAMIC WORK CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: SYLVAIN DELEU; COURTESY OF ZEMER PELED (2); ERAN TURGEMAN.