

VESSEL GALLERY

LONDON



Nicholas Arroyave-Portela (United Kingdom 1972 -)

Consciousness

White St. Thomas clay with stoneware glazes
300 x 320 x 40 cm (118 ¹/₄ x 126 x 15 ³/₄ inches)

'Consciousness' is a unique installation by the British artist, Nicholas Arroyave-Portela.

Please contact the gallery for the price of the full installation. The artist can also work to commission to create smaller compositions, groups and long runs of unique hand thrown forms.

Consciousness | A Personal Interpretation of The Mayan Long Count Calendar | A countdown to December 21st/22nd 2012 | The Journey so far.....

The Mayan Long Count Calendar was how the unfolding of time, over a period of just over 5125 solar years, was marked by the Mayans. It was believed to have ended around December 21st 2012, a date we have now very much passed.

The artist's intention is to recreate their own interpretation of this 'long count calendar' by reproducing an installation of 13 rows of 20 thrown vessels, 260 in total. Made in close and tight proximity to the next and representing roughly 19.7 years each.

Arroyave-Portela has also purposely altered the height and volume of the pieces following the Fibonacci

code for the numbers 13 and 20. An example of this sequence would be: 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34 etc. Essentially, the next number is created by the sum of the two previous. The Fibonacci number sequences can be found everywhere in nature, from the leaf arrangements in plants, to the pattern of the florets of a flower, the bracts of a pinecone or the scales of a pineapple. The numbers are therefore applicable to the growth of every living thing, including a single cell, a grain of wheat, a hive of bees and even all of mankind.

The 13 rows of this piece are therefore made up of 8 rows of vessels of one height and 5 rows of vessels of a different height perhaps suggesting a sense of gravitational weight. Of the 20 vessels in each row, 10 are of a certain volume, 6 of another and 4 of another still, a pattern that is reproduced throughout the whole work in order to represent a sense of rhythm. The aim is to give a visual reference to one of the main themes of the piece, which is a sense of time getting faster and faster as we approach the last day of the calendar.

Many of the apocalyptic interpretations of the Mayan Calendar have gained much infamy. However, for the artist, this is the source of his fascination and intrigue, reimagining the calendar as a vehicle to explore the notion of cycles, their beginnings and their ends.

The full artist's essay can be read [here](#).

Artist description:

Nicholas Arroyave-Portela's professional ceramic practice began in 1994. After 20 years based in London, he moved and set up his studio in Barcelona, Spain.

Arroyave-Portela's creations are all thrown on the wheel using his own unique technique. Pulling up as much clay from the bottom mass as possible, the clay walls of each piece are created thin and even, maximising the artist's ability to manipulate the form while the material is still soft and malleable. Additional porcelain slips are sometimes applied to create further surface textures and layering. After the first initial bisque firing (1080 degrees) glazes are applied by using various methods such as spraying and pouring, a process often repeated several times after each firing of 1260 degrees. The multi-firing process allows for the build-up of the glaze, creating a rich palette of tones and finishes.

Arroyave-Portela's works can be found in various major museums and private collections worldwide including the Ashmolean Museum (Oxford UK), the Fitzwilliam Museum (Cambridge UK), The Philadelphia Museum of Art (USA) to name a few.

In the artist's own words;

"Over two decades ago when I started out as a young artist working with clay, a particular concept haunted me - "It is written the water that flows into the earthenware vessel takes on its form" Lao Tzu, an ancient Chinese philosopher - I wanted to explore how this idea actually translated for me. I started experimenting with polythene, a material easily transformed in shape and form through the insertion of water inside its walls. This analysis led to a fascination with saturation, volume and fullness, also with the opposite qualities, of emptiness, dehydration, cracked and dry.

After a long break of many years, I decided to revisit the vessel as a vehicle for self-expression. It felt like coming home after a long journey. I have become conscious that these qualities have now taken on a symbolic emotional gesture of the human condition.

When working with materials as metaphorically powerful as Earth, Air, Fire and Water, I am also made aware that the ritualistic and performative aspects of throwing have become like a mantra for me, one in which the revolving motion of the wheel head, the clay moving through my hands and the water acting as a lubricant to create form also allows me to connect to a particular state of mind.

The vessels that are created are the manifestation of being in that state of mind where I am free to trust my intuition and creative instincts.

I also take inspiration from the life and work of Dr. Masaru Emoto, the Japanese scientist who studied the scientific evidence of how the molecular structure of water transforms when it is exposed to human words, thoughts, sounds and intentions. Water being one of the constant references in my work, Dr. Masaru Emoto has made me more mindful of what I am putting into each and every work of art that I produce.

Indeed I am also able to use the metaphor of water as a means of representing time, which not only takes an infinite number of shapes but also comes in cycles."