



Nathalie Khayat

## Porcelain with a design edge

The door to Nathalie Khayat's Beirut workshop leads into a haven of peace and breezy quiet, a space that exudes the same restful vibe as its owner.

"What I love about pottery is that I'm constantly learning," she says, as she deftly moves between large wooden tables covered with her students' works in progress and the wheels spread out on the floor.

Trained at Montréal's Centre de Céramique Bonsecours, Khayat found herself involved in this line of work "a bit by accident," she says. "It was in 1993. I took a ceramics class because I wanted to work with the material. Then I took another, then I realized that two, three times a week didn't do for me anymore. I became addicted," she says. "Since then, I never let it go."

When she first returned to Lebanon in 2000, she was working mainly with clay, stoneware and earthenware. "Everything was conceived, planned and designed beforehand. I was creating objects that lay between the sculptural and the functional. I did stools, trays and vases, and I knew exactly what I wanted in advance."

During that time, Khayat's line of clay-made flower and candle holders became best-sellers at ArtiShow, the avant-garde design store that was the first to showcase up-and-coming Lebanese designers.



**NATHALIE KHAYAT'S CREATIONS INCLUDE LARGE BOWLS DESIGNED TO HOLD FLOWERS OR FRUITS AS WELL AS WATER PITCHERS INSPIRED BY THE TRADITIONAL LEBANESE EARTHENWARE PITCHER**

Khayat is now exploring an entirely different new matter – porcelain – which she says, has encouraged her to adopt a new approach. For the past two years, she has shifted to working on the wheel. “I wanted to improve my technique, my form, by creating very simple and functional objects.”

Porcelain is generally associated with a hard, white, cold matter. However, Khayat’s porcelain objects are anything but that.

Porcelain’s beauty, she believes, lies in its thinness, in its fragility. And it is indeed a very delicate balance, trying to make the porcelain thin while maintaining its functional nature – in other words, creating porcelain objects that are thin and delicate but not so thin that they can’t be put to everyday use.

“I’ve learned to work within the limits, to accept accidents and integrate them into the object. Whenever I have an accident or a hitch, I stop and put it in the oven instead of trying to correct it. Thus, the accident becomes part of the history of the object, in turn highlighting its fragility,” she says.

Khayat’s most recent creations include large bowls designed to hold flowers or fruits as well as water pitchers inspired by the traditional Lebanese earthenware pitcher. All of these new objects come in various shades of white, challenging the notion that the color white comes only in one hue.

To achieve these myriad whites, Khayat experimented with the porcelain by seeing how much she could stretch the material and by playing with its translucence. With her bowls for instance, some parts are noticeably thinner, thus allowing light to filter through to the objects, almost as if candles were floating inside.

“I am engaged in a dialogue with the earth,” Khayat says.

“I am learning to expand my expectations, let go of some of them and manage the limits imposed on me.”

**Lynn Maalouf**