

Susanne Eckert-Trautnitz

Voice in Clay

JULIA SCHIFFER

Clay is silent. It cannot speak. But what if it could? What stories would it tell? What happens when a material becomes a medium? A medium that speaks to us not with words but in forms.

The answers to these questions can be found in the works of Karlsruhe ceramic artist Susanne Eckert-Trautnitz. Her sculptures are never silent. They speak for themselves - and for the artist herself. Her work is her voice. This voice is often direct, sometimes loud and sometimes quiet but never empty. Her sculptures carry messages that not only touch us, but also critically interrogates societal issues.

Play is the Journey.

Susanne Eckert-Trautnitz is self-taught. She studied science, not art, and has no craft-based training in ceramics. What at first glance seems like an obstacle becomes an element of absolute freedom for the artist. Everything she can do today she learns not by talking about it but by doing it. By radically trying things out, playing, turning and twisting, failing, rethinking. That is the magic of "learning by doing": when you think with your hands, your mind remains free.

Eckert-Trautnitz has made this freedom the core of her her approach. Everything she does comes from within herself. Through experimentation, she develops her own techniques and her unmistakable ceramic style. Her works are almost always unglazed, which means that the texture of the clay remains visible - with her very own expression: natural, pure, earthy and honest.

From "I" to "you".

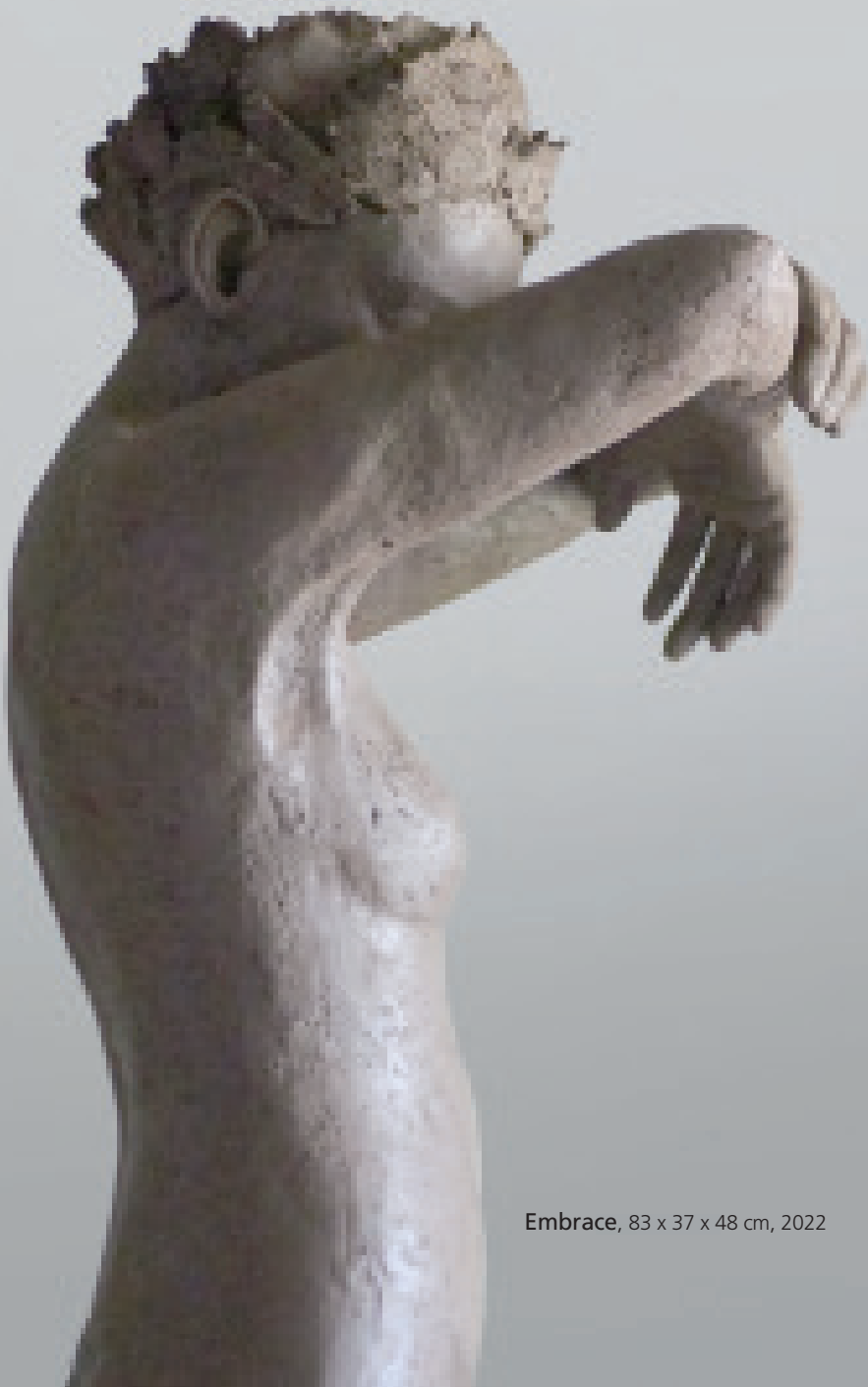
The artist's work centres on people, often in figurative or fragmented form. Her focus has evolved continuously over the years. In the past, Eckert-Trautnitz's work was primarily about women and thus also her own identity. Here, anthropomorphic figures are created that embody different phases of life, moods and attitudes.

Next Generation, 100 x 35 x 30 cm, 2024

Insights is the oldest work from this creative period. The torso is formed by rolling up a single clay slab from both sides so that the inside is turned outwards. A fusion of inside and outside, of vulnerability and strength, which makes the different facets of femininity tangible.

In Embrace from the series Isolation Heroes, Eckert-Trautnitz also shows a woman, a woman who remains in a gesture of embrace. But the embrace is not directed at anyone visible. It is an expression of emptiness, of absence. Created during the Covid lock-downs, this figure embodies the deep longing for human closeness that remains unfulfilled due to forced isolation. The embracing gesture symbolizes the invisible partner, the loss of familiarity and the desire for connection that is suddenly no longer a given. The work tells of the emotional loneliness that many people experienced during the period of isolation.

Today, the artist's focus is directed outwards. It is less about the self, in the sense of one's own identity but more about the "you". With her works, the artist processes what moves her and other people, taking up global themes such as migration, immigration and integration. These find expression in sculptures such as *Remigration* and *Migration Background*. Here, human figures merge with driftwood that the artist



Embrace, 83 x 37 x 48 cm, 2022

collected on Mediterranean beaches - wood that has been on a similar journey to many migrants. The driftwood arms symbolize the loss of home and the painful necessity to put down new roots in a foreign country. Works like these are definitely intended for political discussion and raise the questions: What is it like to lose your roots? And what are we doing to people when we send them back instead of integrating them? If a child is sent back to a country that has become foreign to them, they are essentially blind, disorientated - as if they had been blindfolded.

The Child in Us.

Children and young people in particular shape the artist's work. In the crises of recent years, they are the weakest link in society, and yet they experience the chaos of the world unfiltered. They are the ones who suffer the most and sustain the most damage, even though in their innocence they are the ones who can speak most forcefully. Their voices are powerful, honest and touching - they appeal to our hearts because we ought to protect them and yet often fail to do so.

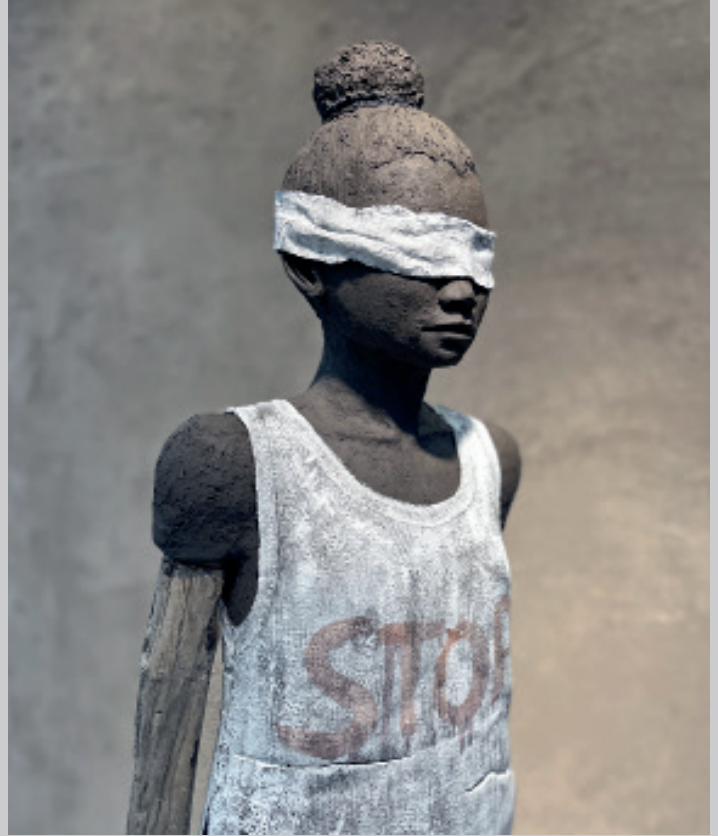
In the works *Alone and Peace*, Eckert-Trautnitz focuses on this childlike fragility. Child figures stand alone on driftwood islands, lost and isolated, longing for peace and rescue. As in the work *Remigration*, the driftwood symbolizes the dangerous and uncertain journey of many refugees, whose path leads them across the sea to an unknown future.

In more recent works, the figures stand on islands made of asphalt, created at the beginning of the Ukraine war. These people carry the rubble of their destroyed homeland within them. The asphalt islands embody the lost ground they had to leave behind and the burdensome memories that accompany them in their new lives.

The work *Stop War* also shows a child wandering blindly through the chaos of war. The words Stop are emblazoned on the front of his singlet and War on the back - a clear, inescapable message. In this work we not only encounter a complex topic, but also the connection between different materials and structures. Body fragments made of driftwood meet rough black clay surfaces and textile textures made of clay that gently wrap around the head and body. The child in us - its fragility and strength, its emotions and experiences, all of this is reflected in these works. Eckert-Trautnitz's sculptures are rough, vulnerable and yet lovable. It is this immediacy that makes her works so intense and expressive.



Migration Background, 58 x 31 x 37 cm, 2023



Stop War, 85 x 39 x 31 cm, 2024

Clay can speak - if we let it.

Susanne Eckert-Trautnitz is an artist whose skills and work have emerged entirely from within herself. But she is not an artist who only focuses on herself. When you meet her you meet a person with a sense of the special, the unseen and the unheard, an artist who is courageous because her work builds such important bridges between material and humanity.

Her interest in the environment, which led her to study geoecology before her time as a ceramic artist, has always been more than just a fascination with what surrounds us. Above all, it was a fascination with those who surround us: people like you and me who want to be heard and seen. People with fears, longings and beating hearts.

For the artist, clay is not just a material but a medium through which she expresses herself. She consciously leaves room for interpretation, in contrast to the limited possibilities of spoken language. It is a unique, malleable and visual language that makes the unsaid the subject. Her works touch us, make us think and ask us questions instead of giving unequivocal answers. At once soft and rough, they challenge us to deal with things on an emotional level.

Susanne Eckert-Trautnitz does not just create sculptures, she writes stories. Not with pen and paper, but with hands and clay. Her stories are not recorded in words but released in forms. Every sculpture that emerges from her hands carries a message, an emotion that cannot be read but can be felt. In this way, the artist gives a voice above all to those who often go unheard.

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Susanne Eckert-Trautnitz (*1966 in Freiburg) lives and works as a freelance artist in Karlsruhe. She began her university education with a teaching degree in art, followed by a degree in geoecology at the University of Karlsruhe. Being self-taught, she forged her own path into the world of ceramics. In addition, she completed further training in art therapy, ceramic techniques and sculpture. In addition to her artistic work, Susanne Eckert-Trautnitz is involved in teaching. Until the Majolika Manufaktur in Karlsruhe closed in May of this year, she was head of the educational programme and a freelance employee. Since 2022, she has been a lecturer at the State Academy of Fine Arts Karlsruhe and the Karlsruhe University of Education, as well as a lecturer for teacher training at the Karlsruhe Regional Council. Since 2024, Susanne Eckert-Trautnitz has been assisting children in working clay at a support centre for children with visual impairments in Karlsruhe. Previous teaching activities include the Karlsruhe University of Art and Design, where she worked between 2014 and 2020. Since 1998, the artist has headed the ceramics workshop at the Karlsruhe adult education centre and gives courses there. She received a scholarship from the Ministry of Science, Research and Art of Baden-Württemberg in 2020. Her works have been shown at major exhibitions, including Art Karlsruhe, Majolika Karlsruhe and the Badisches Landesmuseum.



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