

Bringing Ceramic Sculptures to Life by Smashing Them to Pieces

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The disintegrating ceramics in Martin Klimas' series *Porcelain Figurines* burst with more energy than their fragile bodies can handle, shattering into shards and dust with a strange dignity.

The photographer drops the statuettes from a height of 4 meters in his Düsseldorf studio, using the explosive sound of their impact to trigger his camera and make the photo. The technique produces a sense of great energy and emotion, giving otherwise static figurines new life in the moment of their destruction.

"For me an important moment is when the object becomes transparent," Klimas says. "When you see only splatters and parts but the original object is still visible. You get the feeling you can see inside the things. Also in the instant of its destruction, the boring porcelain figurine reaches its absolute peak of vitality."

The resulting images reward close inspection. While the large pieces are interesting on their own, look deeper and you'll see a maelstrom of atomized ceramics that show just how violent these events are.

The concept for this series dates to 2002, when Klimas began experimenting with everyday objects like coffee cans and wine bottles. He later started photographing exploding vases and other fragile objects. Everything he destroys are cheap, mass-produced tchotchkes, which is good because making compelling photos requires a lot of repetition. "The first ones I bought in Asian supermarkets. Later I imported them directly from China, and also ended up getting donations," Klimas says. "Over the years it must've been hundreds of pieces."

Sound is critical not just to this series, but to much of Klimas's work. It adds another layer to the series, as it makes you contemplate the sound created by the impact. Other projects by the photographer seek to visualize sound, whether with paint or sand. His interest in the aural realm stems from his early interest in the saxophone, a career path he eventually left behind.

"After that I turned my focus to painting and drawing," he says. "Finally I found my destiny in photography. My intent was always to continue in the associative depiction of sound. I wanted to transform sound directly into images."

It's hard to lament the figurines destroyed in the series. They've been given a value beyond anything they might have otherwise held, and in the long run they probably would end up in pieces anyway. At least this way, each piece lives on in what is almost certainly the most interesting moment of its existence.

"It seems the figurine comes alive," Klimas says, "and was waiting for this moment all of its life."

All photos by Martin Klimas