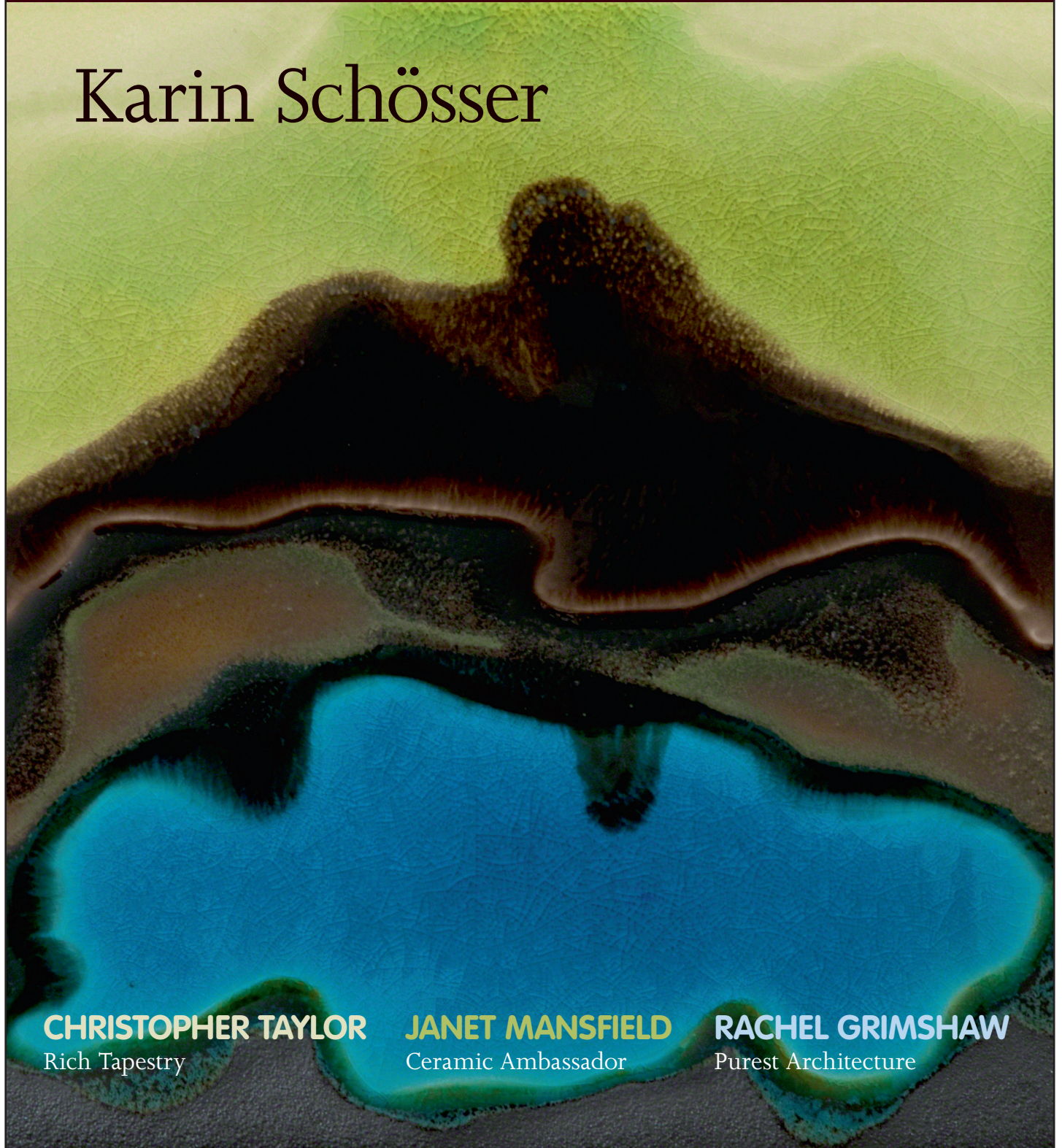


CERAMIC REVIEW

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Karin Schösser



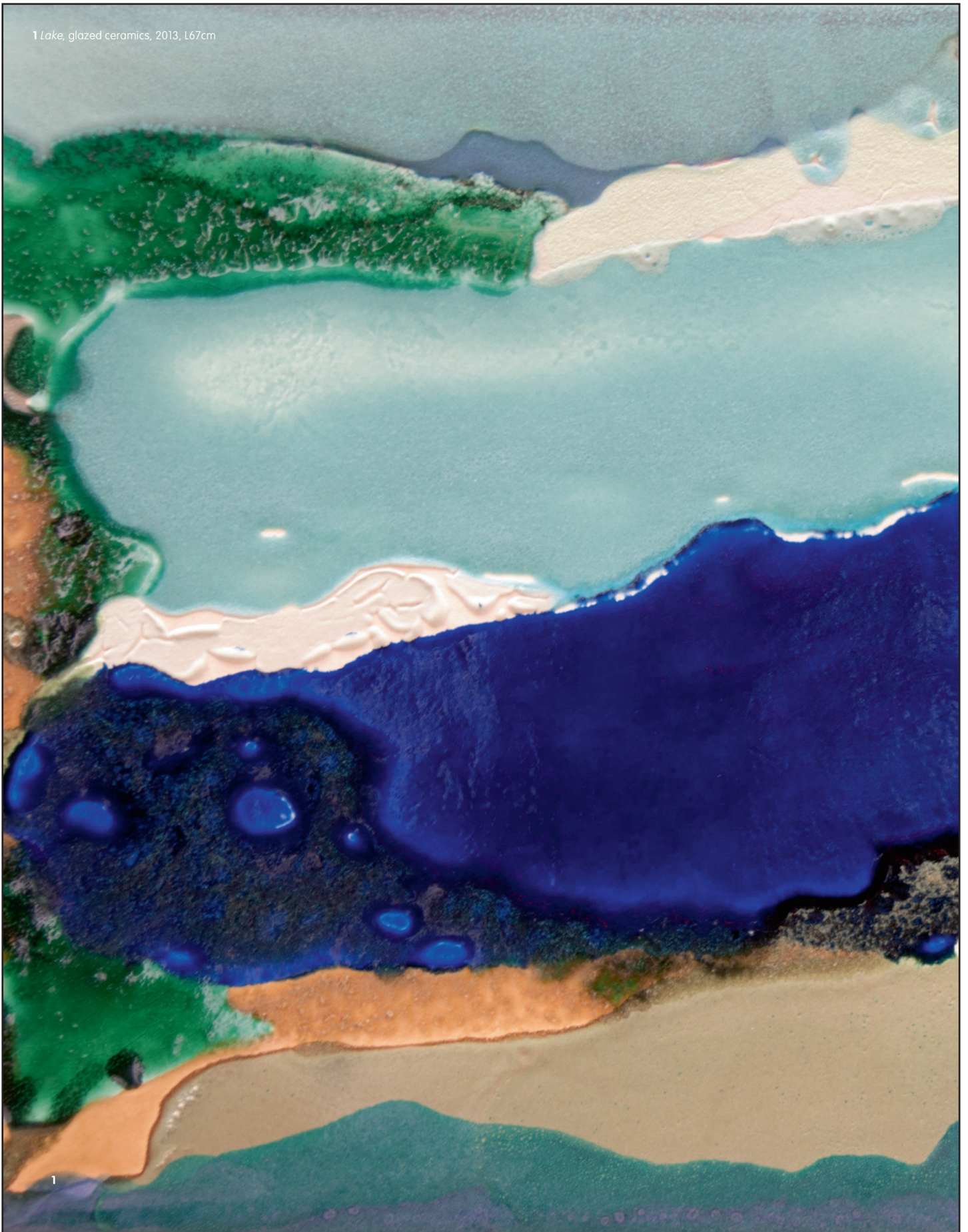
CHRISTOPHER TAYLOR
Rich Tapestry

JANET MANSFIELD
Ceramic Ambassador

RACHEL GRIMSHAW
Purest Architecture

**CERAMIC
REVIEW**

1 *Lake*, glazed ceramics, 2013, 167cm





The Essence of Place

Ian Wilson examines Karin Schösser's wall pieces and discovers her love of landscape and delight in exploring glazes.

Wholly unexpectedly – and rather thrillingly – in a secondary school in the small Austrian town of Mayrhofen in the late 1970s, a girls' handwork class had three weeks of pottery lessons instead of the usual knitting and sewing. This was Karin Schösser's introduction to clay and two memories from that delightful departure from the regular curriculum remain ineradicable: firstly, that the small vase she produced – and still possesses – was not thrown, coiled, or pinched, but built up from tiny 'bricks' that, as instructed, she had to fashion; and secondly, that the firing process, in altering the colour of the glaze, revealed itself as unpredictable, a fact that, for Schösser, still retains a revelatory excitement.



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EARLY MENTORS Working in London as an au pair, Schösser attended classes at the then Ealing College of Higher Education (now the University of West London) where she had an inspiring Iraqi-Armenian teacher, David Kanikianian, who persuaded her to do an art foundation course. Later, at Camberwell School of Art, her personal tutor was Gillian Lowndes (1936-2010) to whom she still remains immensely grateful, not only for being a teacher who took her position seriously, but especially for her stimulating response to, and insightful discussion of, her pupils' work. Other ceramic artists on the staff were Peter Simpson, Colin Pearson (1923-2007), Ewen Henderson (1934-2000), Carol McNicoll, Martin Smith, and Richard Slee, all of whom contributed to making these years a hugely rewarding experience for their students. Standing on the floor of Schösser's dining room are two large ceramic sculptures that she moulded from metal funnels while an undergraduate. Here are surfaces that reveal their maker's involvement with painting, while the forms evidence her fascination with the detritus from industrial processes; these are discards 'to which one does things', thereby rendering them organic. However, Schösser is alert to the irony that the mould-making – so essential to this transformation, to this endowing something that was once a manufactured object with organic properties – is itself an 'industrial' technique.

Her multiple-part wall pieces are able to convey the vastness of skies and mountains

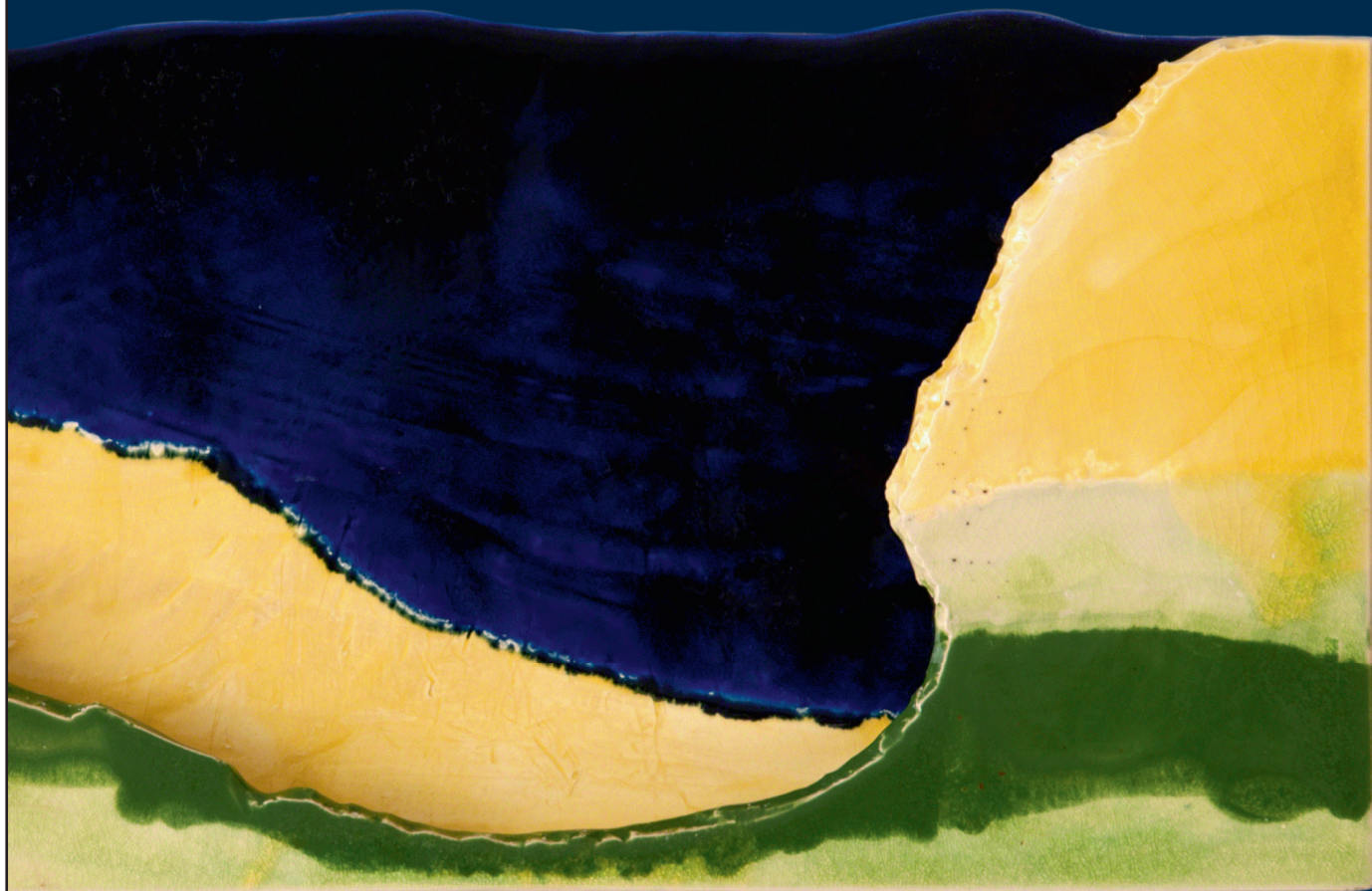


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SURFACE & SHAPE Having Alison Britton as one of her tutors at the Royal College of Art, London, meant the continuation of Schösser's lucky run *vis-à-vis* teachers. It was at this time that she started making the wall pieces for which she is now best known and which, like the earlier decorated 'funnels', clearly relate to her love of painting. Over the years she has also created three-dimensional wall pieces; two of the most memorable of these are *A Palm Tree in the Alps (Misfit)* and *Island Transfixed*. In the former, Schösser's great love of landscape does not exclude a humorous, almost Dadaist interpretation of the mountains that dominated the scenery of her childhood; in the latter the central 'island' component sticks out beyond the straight edge of the 'tile' and impinges upon the surrounding space. But the majority of the wall pieces have a simplified, regular shape – usually square or rectangular – resulting from Schösser's preoccupation with the relationship of surface and shape. This is exemplified in a series of plain white ceramic blocks that celebrate the dynamic of the line, for they are inscribed with nothing other than the dark blue outline of an ellipse or a circle that, on occasion, trails down over the edge. Looking at the minimal, unmeddled-with purity of these shapes brings to mind a handwritten jotting that I found recently when working with the archives of the artist

Michael Kenny (1941-1999) who often included geometrical symbols in both his drawings and sculptures: 'There is a spirituality about the geometrical; a calmness, a tranquillity'. But this serenity is not the only trait to be experienced in Schösser's exploration of the elliptical and circular forms. They also feature in her interpretations of the *Enclosure* theme, which has its provenance in a dream she had of being enclosed within a vast space: 'I tried to recreate its essence by stripping detail, distilling the experience and imagery, until only the most crucial elements remain.'

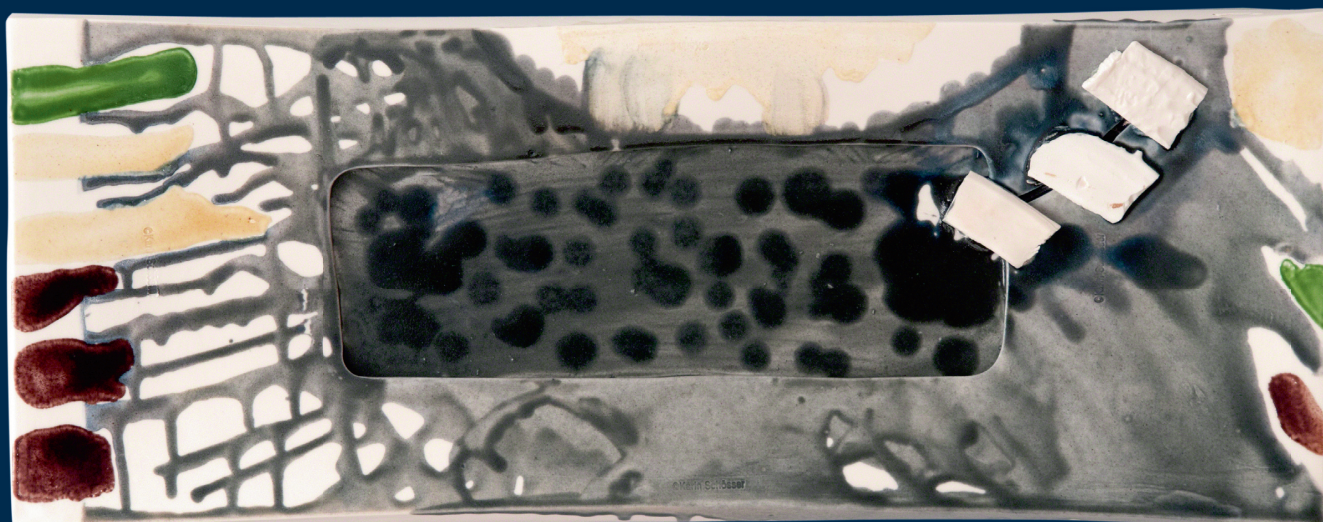
PASSION FOR GLAZES Many of Schösser's works are hung in groups of three and five and the reasons for this are her interests in series and multiples, in gaining scale 'without making something big', and especially in using repetition to create rhythms; in this respect she draws an analogy with music. These qualities are felt particularly in a ceramic quintet such as *Dark Horizon*, where a real sense of immensity is conveyed via the silhouette of a mountain in matte black that contrasts with the dark but gleaming skies. This contrastive dull-glossy co-presence is an informative introduction to a discussion of this potter's passion for developing her own glazes, the primary



4 *Mountain*, glazed ceramics, 2004, L160cm 5 *Indigo Pool*, glazed porcelain, 2011, L63 cm 6 *Riverbank*, glazed ceramics, 2012, L68cm 7 *Merge*, glazed porcelain, 2012, L15cm



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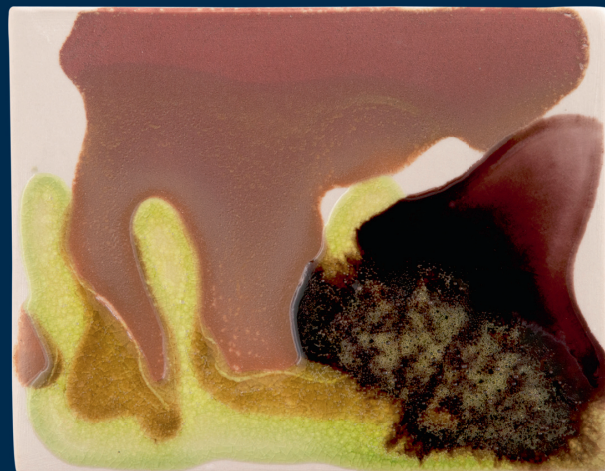
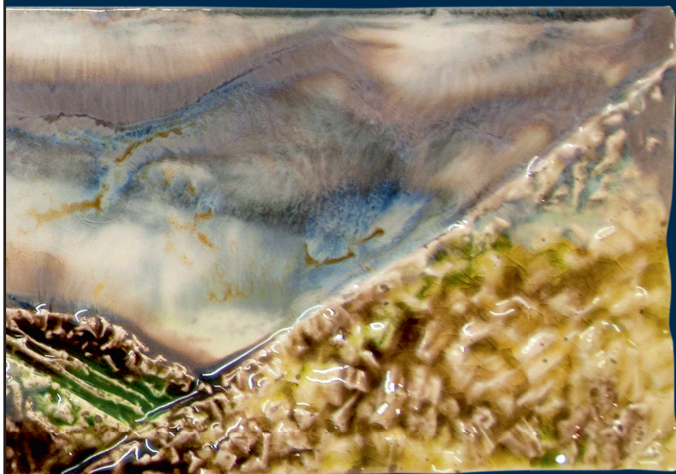
She started making the wall pieces... which clearly relate to her love of painting

aim of this activity is to secure 'an authorship which is emotionally connected to oneself'. She applies her glazes by spraying and brushing on, but also by pouring – as in *Desert Flower* and *Autumn*. The latter method is one of which Schösser is particularly fond as she feels it is best suited to 'allowing the imaginative process to express itself'. Glazes that have hardened supply Schösser with little 'rocks' of colour that – when applied to matte surfaces – emerge from the kiln as shiny blobs.

Schösser's *modus operandi* with respect to glazing is one of embracing the randomness – that is, the often indeterminable

workings of the firing process – within a physically determined order, represented by the thorough testing of her colours and the scrupulous weighing of ingredients. This carefulness in no way diminishes her relish of the elements of chance and surprise, of not fully knowing, for example, exactly what to expect when layering glazes. There is a sense of energising anticipation in working with such an awareness and in awaiting the results of this often precarious interplay of the systematic and the unpredictable.

COMBINE, UNITE, BLUR The mountains and Alpine valleys where Schösser grew up are often the source from which her landscapes are derived, but her interpretation of the natural world varies tremendously, and includes being inspired by the terrain and expressing this non-figuratively. In her own words: 'The abstraction in my work is derived from the landscape of my youth, it defines



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me. Being in London one can see things more clearly away from it.' *Mountain Snow* and *Mountain with Cloud* have a direct realism in their depictive approach, while *Indigo Pool* has moved towards the non-representational; pieces such as *Mountain Lake* and *Riverbank* seem to hover between abstract forms and figurative representation, which the final image integrates without granting dominance to either. This abstract-figurative blend is related to the theme of merging, which constitutes another strand within her oeuvre and is concerned with ideas of combining and uniting gradually so as to blur the individuality. The eponymous *Merge*, in glazed porcelain, embodies this interest and demonstrates how the mingling of glazes usually causes another colour to emerge.

Karin Schösser's ceramics encourage the viewer to study them with unhurried contemplation, which is sometimes realised by her use of geometric symbols, but equally by the colours she achieves in

her glazes. Her multiple-part wall pieces are able to convey – with an impact many times greater than their physical size might suggest – the vastness of skies and mountains, while other landscapes – often poised between a depictive realism and a non-pictorial abstraction – convey a profound response, a subtle receptivity to the essence of place be it riverbank, lake, or mountain. ☞

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