

stir pad

Carmen D'Apollonio crafts anthropomorphic lamps imbued with familiar human postures

Sept 8, 2023

The sculptural clay lamps designed by the self-taught Swiss ceramicist embody the human form through carefree, organic, and fluid lines, as well as rippling textures.



*'Into the wild' (2022) by Carmen D'Apollonio
Image: Marten Elder*

Early this year, a collection of bronze-tinted [ceramic](#) lamps titled *I'm Not a Shrimp* adorned the Los Angeles-based [Friedman Benda Gallery](#) with its intuitive, carefree, tongue-in-cheek sensibility. One can't help but notice the striking resemblance of the droopy and spasmodic [lamp designs](#) with the surrealist painting *The Persistence of Memory* (1931) by [Spanish artist Salvador Dali](#). Created by Carmen D'Appollonio, these anthropomorphic lamps succinctly replicate the figures and gestures of humans, prompting viewers to contemplate whether they hold stories of their own.

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The [Los Angeles](#)-based ceramicist was born in [Zurich, Switzerland](#), in 1973. D'Apollonio initially worked as an art director for short films and commercials in the mid-1990s and began assisting Swiss [contemporary artist](#) Urs Fischer in 1996—a [collaboration](#) that lasted over a decade. In 2006, she founded the fashion brand Ikou Tschuss, which blends modern textiles with traditional artistry and went on to establish her own studio in Los Angeles in 2014.

D'Apollonio is a self-taught [ceramic artist](#) and describes her 'straightforward' works through the medium of clay, often infused with a touch of humour. Specifically, her approach to sculptural lighting emphasises the harmonious blend of artistry and utility within irregular and surprising [ceramic designs](#).



*'No way out' (2022) by Carmen D'Apollonio
Image: Marten Elder*

The dynamic and organic forms—often paired to intensify the intended message or emotion—imbue each [table lamp](#) with a lifelike quality, resembling organisms or small creatures. Each lamp crafted by D'Apollonio captures vivid human gestures and postures like squatting on the floor, teetering on the edge of a wooden ledge, a figure drooping with fatigue or a hulking stance.

Every lamp or sculpture she conceives seems to spring to life for D'Apollonio. "I try to approach ceramics with no boundaries. I push myself to break the rules of how clay regularly behaves. I like to believe that my sculptures portray unspoken poetry," states the [lighting designer](#).



'I wish I was a little bit taller' (2022) by Carmen D'Apollonio
Image: Marten Elder

The lamps are also christened with whimsical names attesting to their forms—take for instance, *I wish I was a little bit taller*, *You left without saying goodbye*, and *I'm Not a Shrimp*. The [product designs](#) also reflect her creative philosophy, which she described as carefree, slightly whimsical and humorous, as well as unapologetic and experimental.

D'Apollonio's process begins with sketching, which she then translates into clay—evolving into three-dimensional forms as she sculpts. While the bases of the [sculptural designs](#) are fashioned from Cone 10 clay procured from [California](#), their lampshades are crafted using materials such as paper, porcelain, custom fabrics such as cotton or linen, and more. Her [lighting designs](#) are usually finished with a simple, coloured lampshade, imbued with hues that are either an offshoot of the clay base or one which stands in contrast against it.



*'It's all over now' (2022) by Carmen D'Apollonio
Image: Stephen Busken*

Some of her lamps draw inspiration from her fascination with Roman statues, while others directly respond to lyrics, poems, texts, or everyday observations. Their monikers, namely, *I can't wait to meet your wife* and *Its all over now*, convey a spectrum of emotions, ranging from humour to contemplation. They provide narrative fragments that perfectly complement their suggestive and open-ended compositions.

Waiting for the Sunset exemplifies the [product designer's](#) creative approach which blurs the lines between [sculptural art](#) and storytelling. The piece features a slouched figure positioned on a subtly curved surface. Even though the character lacks limbs or distinct physical features, it manages to convey a palpable sense of anticipation. The lampshade's light teal colour creates a striking contrast with the dark brown of the figure and the surface it rests upon.

D'Apollonio's lamps are a testament to the harmonious marriage of [craftsmanship](#) and practicality. When these lamps are switched on, they disclose fresh dimensions of texture or colour, furthering their dynamic personalities.



*"I look better than the shade" (2022) by Carmen D'Apollonio*Image: Marten Elder

Initially inspired by the faces of her friends, D'Apollonio's artistic journey has taken a transformative turn. Her creative process has evolved to manifest charmingly surreal luminaries with abstract, loosely figurative shapes, each seemingly melting and self-collapsing as if possessing human-like, unique personas. She firmly believes that the realms of [art and design](#) are boundless, and remains unrestricted in her experimentation, unburdened by consumers' expectations.

Embracing the infinite potential of working with clay, D'Apollonio's one-woman production line shows no signs of deceleration. Her upcoming show called *Ja Natürli* is set to commence on September 14, 2023, at the Tobias Müller Modern Art Gallery in Zurich, Switzerland.

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