

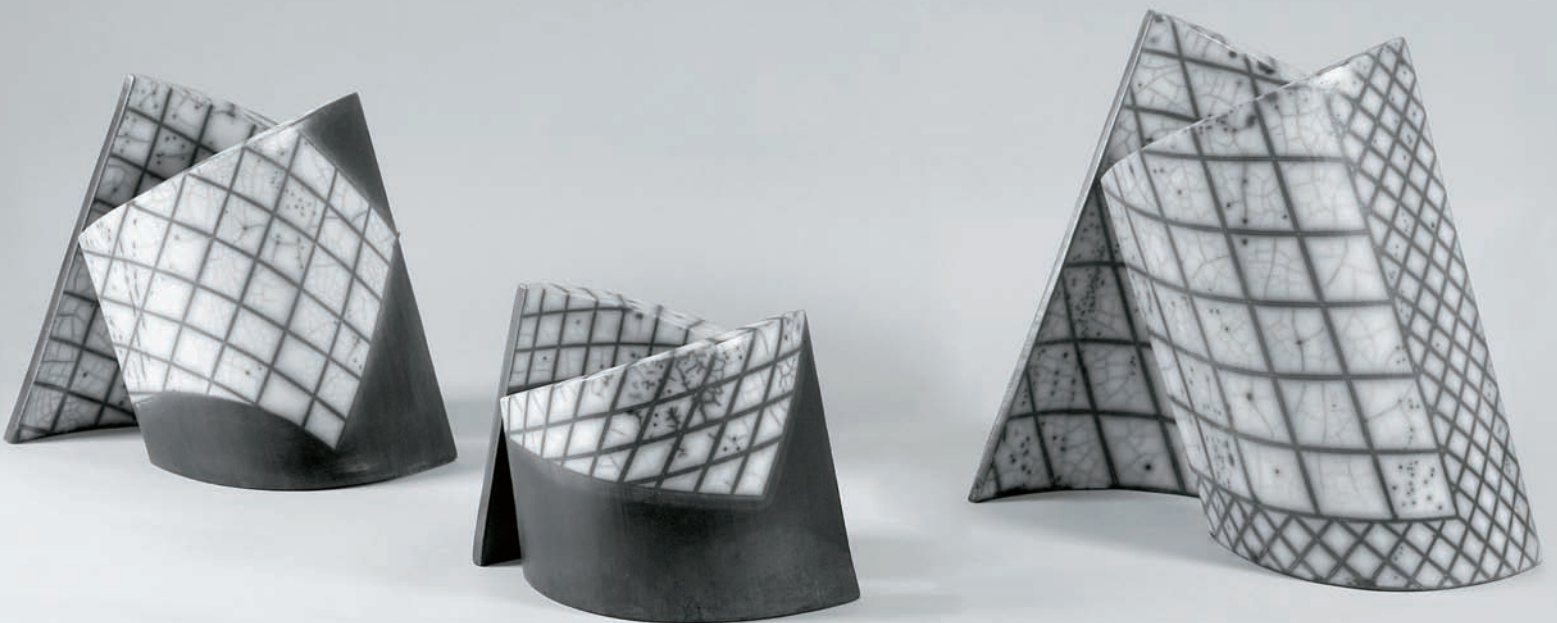
1 *Fragmentation*, stoneware and porcelain, slab-built, burnished, terra sigillata, 2006, H40cm 2 *Dialogs*, stoneware and porcelain, slab-built, burnished, terra sigillata, 2006, H30cm

# The Poetics of Mathematics

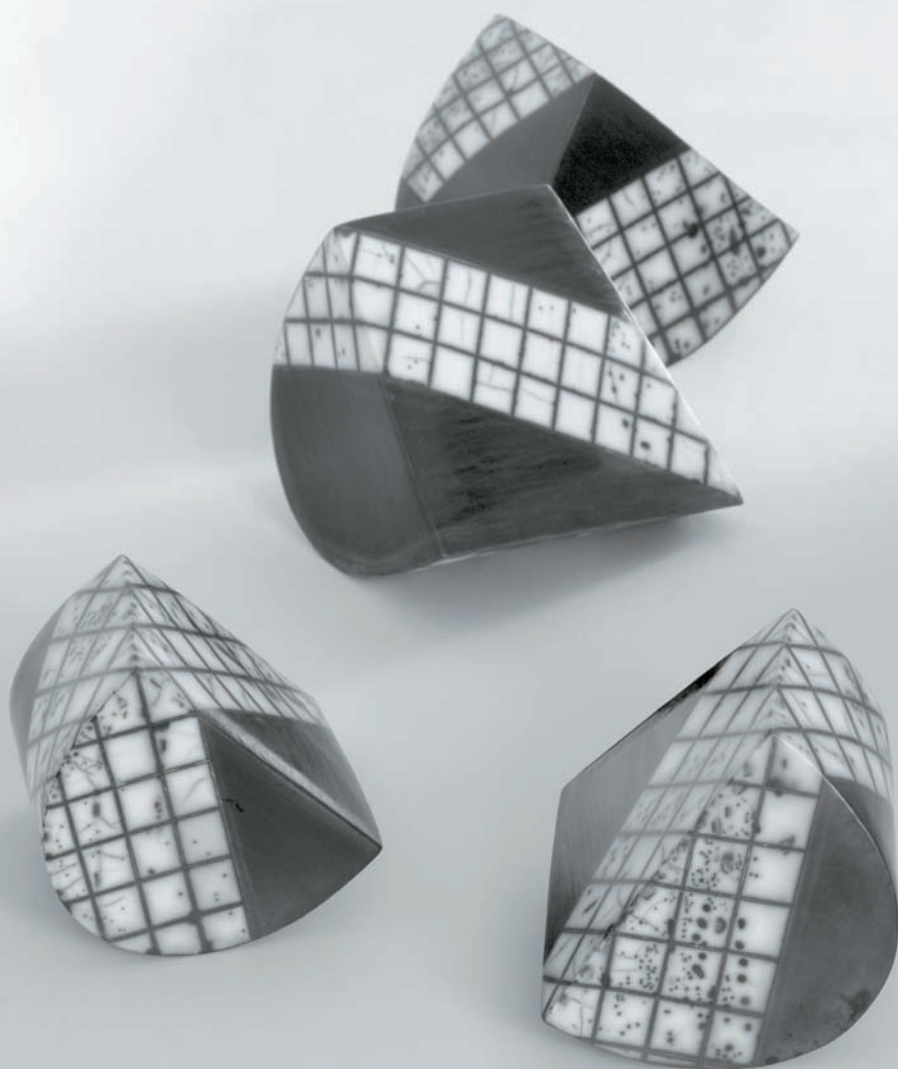
Sara Hakkert enjoys the combination of science and art in Simcha Even-Chen's black and white raku pieces.

Mathematics and art may seem at a fleeting impression completely unrelated, but on deeper reflection may have much in common. Throughout the history of art, more so since the Renaissance, mathematics has been employed as an inspiration or even as the basis for many works of art. In modern times, the existence of 'mathematical art', based on intricate mathematical formulae, has found its own place in the art world.

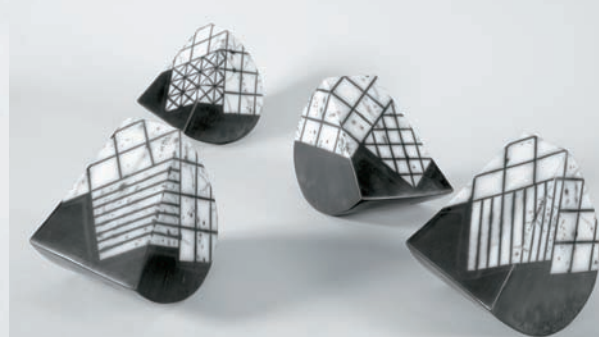
The body of work created by Simcha Even-Chen over the past three years has been inspired by mathematics, which is not surprising once you know that she has a scientific background. Yet, they do not belong to 'mathematical art' in the pure sense, since they are neither based on nor have been initiated by certain theorems. Her links with the disciplines of mathematics and science are of a more intuitive and







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emotional nature. 'Science is a continuous stimulus for me', says Even-Chen, 'it has broadened my creative thinking, it has pushed me to experiment and taught me that patience and perseverance lead to improved results.'

Even Chen's new series of works are quite hard to define formalistically, as each piece is unique, but in general they are sculptures of closed geometrical volumes, most of which are based on diagonally cut cylinders. Within this wide parameter are a wealth of shapes that are presented in pairs, threesomes or multiples. Not only are these amazing shapes intriguing, but each piece draws attention to its surface design, a maze of grids and lines that accompanies and complements the shapes. The dominant colours are black and white obtained by the 'naked raku' technique successfully used by Even-Chen.

**GRAPHIC DESIGN** The starkness of the graphic black and white design is mellowed by the spectrum of in-between shades of grey,

all characteristic of smoke-fired raku. In some of the more simple designs a grid of squares of different sizes covers the entire surface, or part of it; others may be partially covered with lines. The potential play between the various forms in space, between shape and surface and again between grid and line, is endless; it goes as far as the imagination takes the artist, and indeed it is the core of this body of work.

**SPACE AND VOLUME** Although at first glance the shapes may seem fanciful, with the grid lines on the surface incidentally placed, Even-Chen has conducted intensive research in their positioning on the surface as well as in their configuration in space, always with a goal in mind. 'I use ceramic sculptures to investigate the elements of ambiguity and dynamic opposites', states the artist, 'these are achieved by exploring the ratio between mass, volume and space'. Even-Chen deals with issues such as tensions between polarities, with fragmentation and construction, with creating illusions or

**3** *Continuum*, stoneware and porcelain, slab-built, burnished, terra sigillata, 2007, H22cm **4** *Square Variation*, stoneware and porcelain, slab-built, burnished, terra sigillata, 2007, H17cm **5** *Square Enigma*, stoneware and porcelain, slab-built, burnished, terra sigillata, 2007, H24cm

**6** *Dispersion*, stoneware and porcelain, slab-built, burnished, terra sigillata, 2008, H10cm **7** *Illusive Objects*, stoneware and porcelain, slab-built, burnished, terra sigillata, 2007, H17cm **8** *Vacancy*, stoneware and porcelain, slab-built, burnished, terra sigillata, 2008, H14cm

**Making Sequence** See page 70

**Photography** Ilan Amihai

**Simcha Even-Chen** is a leading ceramic artist in Israel. She has received prestigious prizes such as the 2008 Gold Coast International Ceramic Art Award, Australia, the 2009 Design and New Forms in Ceramic Award, Spain and an Honourable Mention at the *V Biennale de Ceramic*, Spain

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trompe l'œil as in painting. These concepts are guidelines to her treatment of space in the context of the surface-volume relationship.

The division of the body surface between white and black, as well as the use of lines, softens the shape, simultaneously placing the grid or lines on the edge of the form, so that they follow the shape, completely dissolving the hard lines; viewing from different angles, surface and volume are blurred, giving an illusion of flatness.

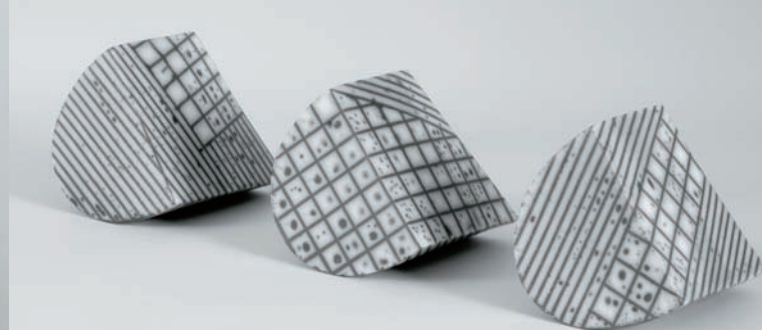
This idea is strengthened and extended by working with pairs or creating a composition of different units, where new volumes and planes are achieved by the way the lines or grid are virtually joined; the ratio between parts to the whole is changing and two and three dimensions are played against each other with great sophistication.

While the black sculptures may seem massive and heavy, their mass is actually light when lifted. Their stance appears fragile because of the tilted shapes of some works, or placed on their convex side in other works, each is full of energy and movement. Once again, the duality of heavy-light, stability versus instability, negative and positive shapes,

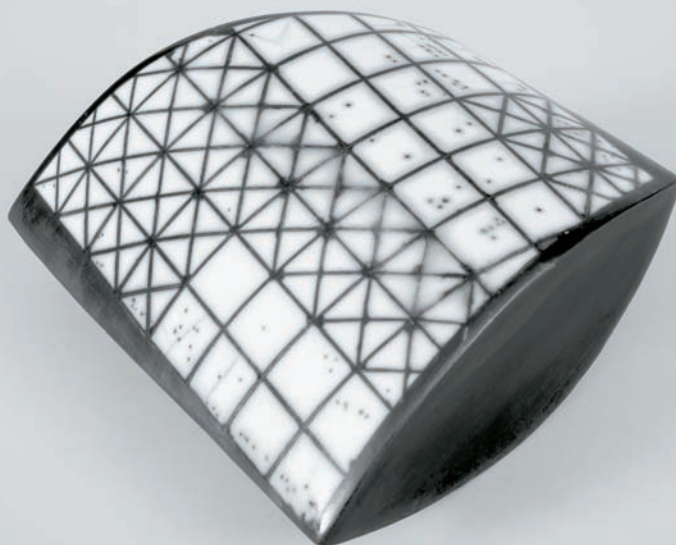
and the contrast between appearance and reality, come to the fore.

Art and science are an integral part of Simcha Even-Chen's life. She is a senior microbiologist employed full-time at the medical school of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem; at the same time she has worked for over ten years with ceramics in a methodical and dedicated way. Although following both careers involves hard work (nights and weekends are dedicated to ceramics) she is not prepared to give up one or the other. Her analytical mind is well attuned to the intuitive and creative possibilities; they successfully combine and complement each other.

Each piece (or multiple) is carefully planned and its execution meticulously carried out, the location of the grid and lines is calculated with a purpose in mind, yet the aesthetic approach to both shape and surface is undeniably there. The choice of smoke-fired raku shows once again that spontaneity and the element of chance are of value to the artist. The associative mathematical names point to their source, adding a certain complexity to the works. □



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