



Suboart Magazine

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Featured artists

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Reach, 2024
Stoneware, glaze, 85 x 73 x 12 cm



Roxy Lee YY

On Berlin, Goosebumps and The Stages of Finding

Left page: Self-portrait by Hong Kong born, Berlin based artist Roxy Lee YY

Hello Roxy, it's a pleasure to have you. While preparing for this interview, I read that you studied knitwear design and worked in the fashion industry, before moving towards ceramics. Can you tell us more about your background in fashion and eventually shifting towards art?

I didn't grow up thinking I could be an artist — it somehow wasn't on my mind. Where I come from, being an artist felt like something sacred, not an obvious or realistic path. My mother worked as a manager in a clothing factory before starting a family, and she loved clothes. I grew up surrounded by her wardrobe, constantly searching and playing with fabrics and garments. That is probably how I first found my connection to fashion. As a teenager, I was drawn to fashion not just as clothing but as an art form — its experimental, poetic, and theatrical side. I was obsessed with designers like Martin Margiela, Hussein Chalayan, Yohji Yamamoto, Rei Kawakubo, Viktor & Rolf, and Cosmic Wonder. Later on, as a knitwear designer, I have always been fascinated by how a piece of yarn can turn into a piece of garment or art that carries ideas, stories and personal memories.

Moving to London in 2013 was a turning point. Suddenly I was surrounded by some of the best museums in the world, such as Victoria and Albert Museum, The National Gallery, Barbican Centre, etc, which deepened my connection to art and culture. Working as a fashion designer in London was rewarding. Beyoncé, Adele, and Lady Gaga wore pieces I proudly worked on — but it was not my pure vision, as I worked for someone's brand. Our team did a lot of experimental work and collaborations with artists, which blurred the line between fashion and art. That really inspired me and made me want to create work with my own stories and ideas.

In 2016, I started working with clay as a good friend introduced its beauty to me. Since then, I have fully dedicated my spare time to understanding the materials and mastering the skills. It became my playground and my artistic outlet. At first, it was about making tableware, but over time, it evolved beyond utilitarian work. By 2020, I was creating art objects that reflected my personal story. Moving to Berlin in 2022 marked another shift — I began working on larger ceramic sculptures, experimenting with different media, and pushing my artistic practice further.

Speaking about Berlin, I read that *The Stages of Finding*, the series published in this issue of Suboart Magazine, came as a response to your personal journey relocating to Berlin...

That's right, the idea for this recent series came when I moved to Berlin in 2022. I left London, where I lived for almost 10 years, and when I arrived in Berlin, I constantly asked myself what I wanted to do, what I wanted to make, and how I could push further my art practice. There was lots of time to spend with myself in a new city. There were lots of self-reflections, and somehow I felt a bit lost. One day, I just started drawing in the studio and let my hand represent my thoughts. I tried to channel all the emotions and experiences I had into my drawings.

“The process was like a journey of finding myself by recognising and accepting the emotions I had been dealing with. They became visualised on these papers in front of me.”

After that, I went deeper into the development of shapes and forms, as well as the study of the colours and the meaning they hold. The initial drawings are still hanging in my studio; they are the blueprints of the series "The Stages of Finding" and keep reminding me of how it started, inspiring me to make further works out of them.

At the beginning of our conversation you said that you were introduced to working with clay in 2016, and ceramics is currently the material you mainly work with. What was it that initially drew you to clay?

I was initially drawn to the versatility of this material: You can use it to create all sorts of objects, from a little button to a big piece of furniture or a building! And the tactile sensibility of it – you can see the trace of making through the clay. It is part of the stories of the work you made. After working with it, I realised I like how challenging this material can be if you do not fully understand it. Clay comes from the earth; it is universal. You learn about that as a kid in school, and everyone can work with it easily. However, you need lots of research, work, experience, and failures to get into the profession of working with clay. I have been experimenting with many types of clay, glaze, and firing techniques, but I still feel like I am new to this medium. There are just endless possibilities.

Have you ever considered exploring other materials in your practice?

Yes, although I love ceramics as a medium, in the future, I would like to explore other media in my art practice, like glass, wood, textiles, metal, and oil paint. I don't think we should limit ourselves to any medium when it comes to translating an art concept.

Your pieces have a very peculiar texture and colour palette. How do you achieve this texture and what do you hope is its effect on the viewer? Regarding the colours, can you tell us more about your relationship with them?

I have been experimenting with this particular texture for a few months. I want the surface of my sculptures to look like goosebumps.

"It is a pure body reaction from your body to respond to the changes in the environment & surroundings. And my sculptures also represent emotional responses to my relocation journey."

I did different glaze recipe trials to see what would go with my selected clay body. In the end, I developed my own glaze recipe for this matte and goosebump-like surface with a sugar-coated colour effect. The glazing process was long, as thousands of layers of glaze were applied to the surface through spraying. I always had an embarrassing press mark on my face as I needed to wear a protective mask for the whole day.

Regarding the colours: I love colours. I love studying colours. There is so much to say with colours. I am always interested in the cultural meanings of colours, too. The colours that I use are well thought out, but they are very personal, as we all see colours differently from our own cultural experiences. Sometimes, I would put a colour underneath which the viewer couldn't see, as I fully cover it with another layer of colours just to express an idea. I hope that the texture and colours of my work catch the viewers' attention, that they want to touch it, understand it, and engage with it through their own experiences.

A question we always ask is about the creative process – what does yours look like?

My creative process is like everyday exercise. I observe. I think. I draw. I research. I digest. I analyse. I sometimes over-analyse. I look around. I reflect. I develop the ideas. I make mock-ups. I ask questions. I answer questions. I take photos. I write. I talk to myself. I chat with people. I respond. I keep repeating these processes every day. It can take me a long time to finish a project.

Speaking about working on a project, is there anything currently in the making that you'd like to share with us?

I am currently working on my first solo exhibition in Berlin in June. I am developing some new works that are bridging my older architectural objects with my newer abstract organic forms, which are inspired by the city landscapes I have been living in. It is a study of the interaction between architecture and urban nature and how they are integrated into our daily lives. I specifically look into the casting of shadows and light reflections. At the same time, I keep adding more work to my analogue photography series "City Record", which I started in early 2024.

Congratulations on your first solo exhibition! And I'm curious to learn more about your photography practice...

Thank you! As for my photography practice, I have always been interested in photography. I started a personal project called "City Record" in early 2024 when I was given a



Under construction, 2024
Analogue photography

refurbished second-hand analogue camera — a Rollei 35SE from the late 70s. It is a perfect pocket-size 35mm camera for me to carry around, capturing the moments that speak to me personally in different cities. This project is so important to me, as I realised how much the city's landscape influences my aesthetic views, how the people, the conversations, and every encounter shape my point of view.

"I use photography as a medium to complete my stories from a more direct lens than my abstract sculptures."

It is about the sentimental moments, exploring the connection between people, objects and cities. I will show some of the work from the "City Record" series alongside my sculptures in the coming show in June.

You just mentioned that the city's landscape shapes your point of view – could you please expand on that and tell us more about Berlin's influence on your practice? And, more generally speaking, what else have you been interested in or inspired by lately?

As for Berlin, that's right, I always draw inspiration from the city I live in. I have been preparing my show recently, so I spend lots of time in Berlin and walking around my studio at Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz.

I find Volksbühne, an iconic theatre designed by Oskar Kaufmann and built from 1913 to 1914, fascinating. From 1950 to 1954, it was rebuilt according to the designs of architect Hans Richter after the severe damage of World War 2. The original slogan inscribed on the arch was "Die Kunst dem Volke" ("The art to the people"). I found it very liberating and powerful to read about the history of the building. And how a building in the area can still reflect the energy to the people after 100 years. In early March, I drew a few pages in front of the building to kickstart new sculptural work.

Regarding the second part of your question, one of my key influences is the book *Zerro* by Matuda Yukimasa, which explores the characters and symbols of human civilisation from different times and cultures. The author highlights their similarities and connections, which inspires me to think about the universality of symbols in visual communication. This has motivated me to create my own visual language—symbols and forms that express abstract concepts while having some nuance elements to connect with viewers.

And as we're approaching the end of our conversation, I have five last questions for you. First, let's switch sides for a moment – when you are its viewer and not its author, what is it that draws you towards a piece of art?

At first, it would be the visual; it needs to be visually intriguing, and then it is always the meaning and stories behind an artwork that go deeper into me. The tactility and textures always draw me closer to the artwork. And I am a person who looks for extra information about the work and does additional research on the artwork that I find interesting.



Pulse, 2023
Stoneware, glaze, 89 x 61 x 10 cm (close up)

Any advice you've been given that you'd like to pass on to fellow artists, especially to those just starting out?

I guess it is what I hear the most: keep going, keep creating. There are opportunities out there; you just need to keep looking and believing in yourself. Try to find your own voice; it is within you. Be honest with yourself.

Any fellow emerging artists you'd like to recommend?

Yes, Kin Ting Li, Cho Juheon, and Viktor Voi.

Next one, what are your plans and hopes for the future?

I am preparing my first solo show, which will start on the 12th June in Berlin. The exhibition is titled "The Stages of Finding". There will be a selection of work from the last 2.5 years. I am also creating new work to put into the show. There will be lots of work that I will display for the first time. I am very excited to present all these works to the public finally.

My hope for the future is simply to keep challenging myself and trying out some new materials. I hope there will be chances to collaborate with different artists and interesting parties to explore subjects related to cities, identity, personal movement, and belonging.

And finally, you wrote in your statement, "Ceramics became my language when words failed me." My follow-up question to that: what does art mean to you?

As simple as it is, art is like a universal language — a way for me to communicate with people and surroundings.

*Get in touch with Roxy: roxyleeey.com
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*Page 12: **Pulse**, 2023, Stoneware, glaze, 89 x 61 x 10 cm
Page 13: **Drift**, 2024, Stoneware, glaze, 80 x 63 x 13 cm*



Up: *Seed*, 2023, Porcelain, glaze, 67 x 59 x 10 cm (left) / *Man sitting on stairs*, 2024, Analogue photography (right)
Down: *Back garden*, 2024, Analogue photography (left) / *Seed*, 2023, Porcelain, glaze, 67 x 59 x 10 cm (close up) (right)