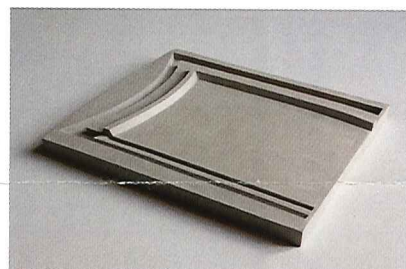
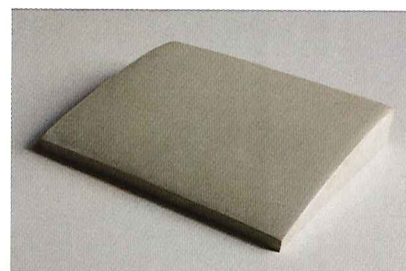
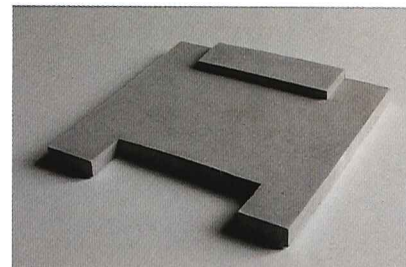
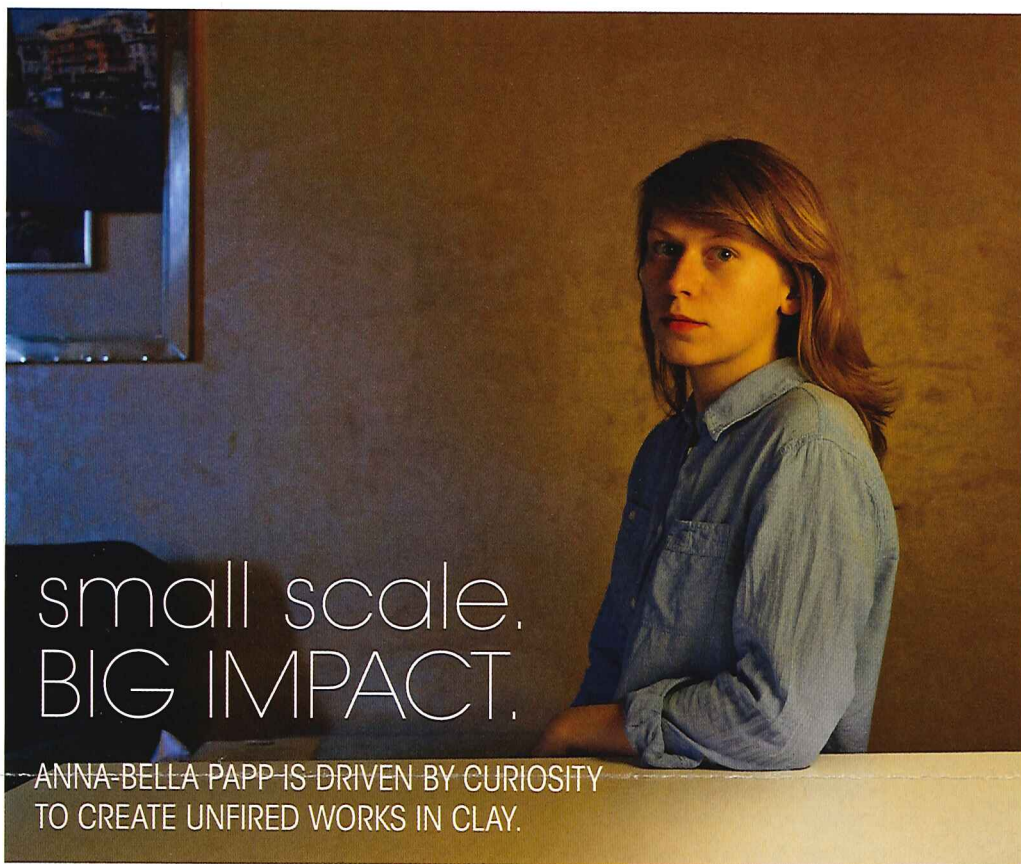


BY SARAH VULKALOVIC



Anna-Bella Papp’s small-scale works in unfired clay clear a space for themselves. From the twenty-six year old artist’s chosen medium, to her remarkably restrained design, her pieces are nothing if not understated. Displayed as they were created, on tabletops, the viewer experiences an intimacy with each piece that feels inhibited in a venue as highly regulated as a museum. And that, it seems, is precisely what Papp seeks to do. “Preciousness doesn’t come from the material,” Papp muses. “It comes from a relationship that you have with the piece.”

The artist’s preference for tabletop displays protects the pieces from a reduction to mere images of themselves mounted upon a wall. For all of the interpretation that her minimalistic pieces inspire, however, Papp resists the speculative artistic discourse on the intentionality of her work. “I don’t hope for anything, and I don’t have a story to tell,” she remarks. Pausing, the Romanian-born, Italy-based artist explains, “I mean, there are stories, but they are so personal...I’m happy if someone can have an experience with my work, but it’s not the same experience I have.”

A typical artwork, for Papp, is roughly 12 x 12 inches. Designs range from a single geometrical cut-out, replaced and reworked to achieve a particular aesthetic, to a subtle, mosaic-like pattern achieved through a manual extraction of clay sediment that is subsequently re-introduced according to the artist’s design.

“I like to be intrigued and surprised with what I get,” she explains. “Curiosity drives me; I like to make experiments.” Papp’s medium of unfired clay certainly lends itself to such experiments and surprises.

“I’m finishing the piece, but the piece is not finished yet,” Papp elucidates. “It takes a week, sometimes more, to be completed by itself. And it’s something I’m not in control of anymore. Things change, move, and change color.”

Papp notes the host of ways that the medium can vary, some of which aren’t visible to the naked eye. While colors range from warmer hues, with a certain ruddiness, to purer greys and whites, the mineral composition differs according to places of origin. The range of colors and combinations of clay allow for a pictorial effect that adds visual intrigue.

The pieces create a palpable physicality, yet, once dry, each remains exceptionally fragile. This fragility plays an active role in the artworks, evocative of the materialization of the ephemeral. Anna-Bella Papp’s markedly minimalistic pieces offer a welcome visual respite to viewers in their simplicity, intriguing the minds of onlookers through the calculated subtlety of the works that are at once foreign and familiar.

Much like her artwork that is so stunning in its simplicity, Papp’s attitudes are equally as refreshing. “It’s interesting that sometimes people see things that aren’t there at all. Our eyes correct images, and with my work, they associate everything. Even dusty computer screens,” she laughs.

The intrigue of Anna-Bella Papp’s pieces is profound, while the presence of the works alters the atmosphere in an almost architectural way that is surprising, given their subtlety and scale. Visitors experience the works rather than observe them. “They should watch the piece, and not the artist,” Papp explains. We agree, Anna-Bella. **P**

Clockwise from left: Portrait of Anna-Bella Papp. Anna-Bella Papp, *Untitled*, 2014, clay, 11 x 10 ¼ x 1 in., courtesy of the artist and Stuart Shave/Modern Art, London, © Anna-Bella Papp. Anna-Bella Papp, *Untitled*, 2013, clay, 11 x 9 ¼ x 1 ½ in., courtesy of the artist and Stuart Shave/Modern Art, London, © Anna-Bella Papp. Anna-Bella Papp, *Untitled*, 2013, clay, 12 ½ x 10 7/8 x 5/8 in., courtesy of the artist.