

**Cleo Fariselli** (b. 1982, Cesenatico, Italy; lives and works in Turin, Italy)

Cleo Fariselli creates ceramic sculptures that connect the body to its surrounding environment, allowing it to develop new material affinities. She incorporates her own body into her sculptural pieces, using it as a tool to measure her ever-evolving relationship to the physical world. While she has worked with a myriad of materials throughout her practice, for the past four years, she has experimented with raku ceramic, a medium that allows her to cast selected portions of her body. She encases her hip, ear, or face with clay, and the final result is a negative shell of her body. As the artist states, “The body part will continue to exist as an empty space, an invisible shape, defined by the terracotta skin.” In her works, the physical body is transformed into an absent void; however, Fariselli does not perceive this emptiness as a sign of lack. Rather, she presents it as an alternative space that is full of potential, one that can forge new relational paths and imaginative interpretations of the world.

Through an indexical process, where she imprints the surface of the clay with her body’s form, Fariselli makes the familiar wondrously strange. What was once a hip becomes an abstracted shape that has been manipulated beyond recognition. She intensifies her works’ unrecognizable qualities by covering the sculptures with glaze and firing them in the kiln, an unpredictable process that gives the finished works a pearlescent sheen. Their crinkled folds and luminescent surfaces most resemble mollusk shells, mutating the human body into invertebrate remains. The works resonate with Paul Valéry’s “Man and the Sea Shell,” a piece of poetic prose that describes the author’s happenstance encounter with a seashell during a walk along the waterfront. He becomes enraptured by its beauty, a piece of tidal debris that was spontaneously generated by nature.

Fariselli similarly looks to nature as a source of radical inspiration, and many of her works specifically explore themes related to water, an element that is capable of constant change and powerful healing. In her 2019 photograph *Senza titolo (Hydria)*, long tendrils of hair emerge from the right edge of the frame and swirl across the image, transforming into tentacles or algae that sway along to the ocean’s flow. Also, abstracted paintings like *Paesaggio acquatico con bisce (Aquatic landscape with snakes)* and *Torrente (Torrent)* contain smears of murky paint that reference a range of aquatic sources, from subterranean bedrocks to sea monsters. Through many media and methods, Fariselli reflects on the fluid, ever-evolving nature of water.

“For as long as I can remember, water has been a recurring element in my dream life; a powerful, mysterious, almost oracular presence,” the artist states. “Over the years, I have learned to interpret its changing appearance as a telltale of the deeper movements of my inner world, and it has always been an object of inspiration, reflection, and self-analysis for me – an element of reunion with myself through comfort or discomfort. By simultaneously encouraging contact with the body on the one hand and introspection on the other, water is the perfect bridge between waking presence and the unconscious.” For Fariselli, water represents a liminal space, where the conscious and the unconscious, the solid and the liquid, the terrestrial and the aquatic, brush up against each other and convolute the established order of things, which separates the world into a system of binary forces.

Her sculptural works in *Breaking Water* evoke this sense of liminality. The exterior sides are blackened and rough, like fired, vulcanized concretions, yet the interiors are smooth and

iridescent. By merging these seemingly disparate elements into a single form, Fariselli plays with the boundaries between the internal and the external, allowing them to coterminously exist. Clay is also significant to the artist's interests in bodily liminality. As a malleable material, that is aqueous and ever changing in one state, yet hardened and solidified in another, the artist represents the fluid, flowing nature of our liquid universe. Standing at the borderland of a dream state, Fariselli's work reorients the limited perceptions of reality that live within our physical bodies.