

Art dresses spaces. With the Design Your Slabs technology, ceramic surfaces become blank canvases ready to be customised

Francesco Simeti's art meets the Iris Ceramica Group Design Your Slabs technology, to create "Questa stanza non ha più pareti", the bespoke, site-specific work for the new Milan headquarters of Fondazione Officine Saffi.

A perfect, crystalised natural landscape, suspended in time, crosses human history going beyond geographical and cultural boundaries. "**Questa stanza non ha più pareti**" ("This room no longer has walls"), the site-specific art work designed by Francesco Simeti for the bar area of the new headquarters of Fondazione Officine Saffi (in via Niccolini 35A, Milan) borrows a famous line from a classic Italian song to express a double metaphor. The large ceramic slabs adorned with the work of Francesco Simeti using the "Design Your Slabs" printing technology customise the space, laid continuously with millimetric precision. A true transposition of historical ceramic elements from different eras and places around the world.

"The ceramic process is really interesting, as it brings variables that often cannot be controlled, yet always create magical results. Ceramics have a practically infinite variety of finishes....and many souls," Francesco Simeti explains.

Animals and plants, set in their habitats on land and at sea, create a world that is both poetic and concrete at the same time. The elements were taken from the iconographic history of ceramic decorations from the Etruscan age to modern times, found on vases, plates, terracotta and ancient ceramic surfaces from Turkey, Greece and Italy. The project took over 6 months of historical and geographical research, and was a real challenge for the Sicilian artist, who lives in New York, who was able to produce a collage **with a perfect balance of solids and voids, harmonising the blank spaces with the decorations.**

Nature has always been an inspiration for Francesco Simeti, who in many of his works sets off the natural environment against the artificial human world. Here it is represented by land, sea and sky as in a perfect world in total harmony, while humans are not portrayed even though their presence can be felt. Human presence is real, as people inhabit the space in the room, this time taking part as a subject in the natural environment drawn around them.

"This space is a kind of history of ceramics. All the decorations come from historical vases, plates and objects from different eras, cultures and places. The ceramic material and the technology even allowed me to maintain the defects in the original images," Simeti continues.

The ceramic slabs printed by Iris Ceramica Group using its "Design Your Slabs" technology faithfully reproduced all the subjects in the collage, including their "defects" – which are not really defects at all – such as the cracked glazes, tiny missing details (in archaeology, some findings are damaged by the passing of time), the signs of the joints in the original laid surfaces, the rounded shapes of decorated plates. The colours are both shaded and solid, while the more graceful subjects, birds and butterflies – chosen involuntarily or perhaps unconsciously - are even reproduced in shiny gold.

And the project doesn't end here, but will evolve in the third dimension. Included in the events planned at Fondazione Officine Saffi, Simeti will curate a series of workshops open to different groups and communities, getting back to what he likes doing best with ceramics - "getting his hands dirty": new solid and fluid elements inspired by nature will thus become architectural elements that will complete the site-specific work over time.

Note for the editor

Iris Ceramica Group – Company Profile

Sustainability, innovation and excellent quality for pioneering ceramic surfaces: Iris Ceramica Group is a world benchmark in the design and development of high-end natural ceramic materials for innovative solutions and architecture projects. With over 60 years of business experience, the Group is present in over one hundred countries, with a very clear vocation: to re-engineer ceramics to improve interaction between humans and the environment.

DYS – Design your Slabs

The innovative Iris Ceramica Group technology used to customise the ceramic surfaces of the Group's Brands with any image or design. Using advanced, ultra-high-definition digital printing, this technology creates unique ceramic surfaces.

Francesco Simeti – bio

Francesco Simeti (1968, Palermo) is an artist known for his site-specific installations, which aesthetically present enchanting scenes that reveal a more complex subtext upon closer inspection. Simeti's work appropriates photographs from newspapers and magazines to raise questions about the role of images in contemporary discourse.

Public Art is a fundamental aspect of his practice. In the USA, he has worked with Percent for Art and Public Art for Public Schools in New York, the Multnomah County in Oregon and has created permanent installations for subway stations in Brooklyn and Chicago. In Italy he worked with atitolo for the Nuovi Committenti programme and in 2021 he produced an installation at Casa Giglio in Turin for this project. He is currently working on a public art project for Los Angeles Metro. His personal exhibitions include: XNL, Piacenza (2022), Francesca Minini, Milan (2021), Assembly Room, New York, (2019), Open Source Gallery, New York (2017), Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Palermo (2012), Artists Space, New York (2009). His works have also been presented in collective exhibitions, including: The Whitworth, Manchester (2023-2024), Pera Museum, Istanbul (2023 - 2024), MAO, Turin (2023), PAC, Milan (2022), MACTE, Termoli (2022), Magazzino Italian Art, Cold Spring, NY, (2020), Museo Civico di Castelbuono, Palermo (2019), ICA Singapore (2017), Palazzo Reale, Milan (2016) and Castello di Rivoli Museum of Contemporary Art, Turin (2014). He has exhibited at the Milan Triennale (2014 and 2013). Some of his works are included in the contemporary art collections of Fondazione Luigi Rovati in Milan; Museo del Novecento, Milan; Victoria & Albert Museum, London; Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia. He lives and works in New York. He is represented by the Francesca Minini gallery in Milan.

Fondazione Officine Saffi

Founded in 2011 based on an idea of Laura Borghi, this no-profit foundation works in the international contemporary ceramics field. With an all-round approach, the Foundation promotes new research and experimentation in the sector, considering history and the past and fostering dialogue among art, crafts and design. With a dynamic and inter-disciplinary calendar of exhibitions, educational activities and publications, it participates actively in the ceramic discourse addressing a diverse audience. All the Foundation's activities are driven by the belief that ceramics can bring about artistic, social and cultural change. With an open attitude supporting a participatory environment, Fondazione Officine Saffi encourages artists and the general public to question what it means to live in today's world, relating with others and with material life. The Foundation supports artists, designers and craftspersons throughout all the phases of production, promoting and recognising their work and offering a platform for emerging artists, projects and narrations coming to the fore beyond the consolidated market systems. The Foundation's commitment to exploring Italian culture accompanies an intercultural identity and the desire to build broader global dialogue and a hybrid network of talents, institutions and international organisations.

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