

Conceptual Design

Ceramics designer Maxim Velčovský focuses on fragile permanency

Maxim Velčovský is a member of the last generation who will remember life in the Cold War Czechoslovakia. During his 31 years, he's seen what everyone assumed was the permanent legacy of the Soviet Empire shatter and be replaced by a consumer-oriented, disposable society.

It's obvious the past has had a heavy influence on Velčovský, who is regarded as an avant-garde on the local design scene.

"I try to create objects with some kind of history, so people can realize some things," he explains as he walks around his Old Town store, Qubus Design, on Rámbouk street.

One work that encapsulates this idea is a porcelain cup made to look like the bottom of a soda bottle. To magnify the effect, Velčovský added the blue-onion pattern that is seen on traditional Czech tableware. Some of his most iconic pieces are glass cups designed like glass bottles, juice and water-cooler cups.

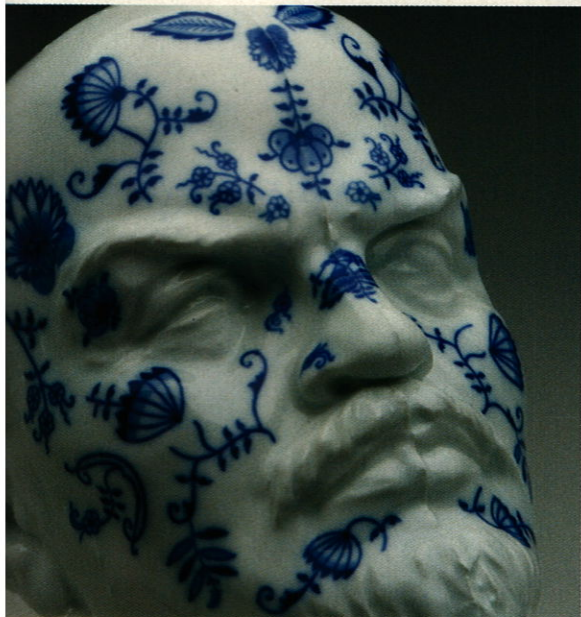
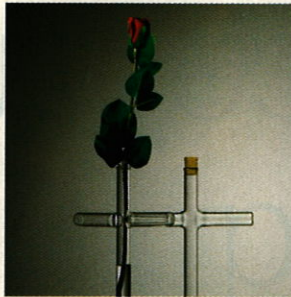
"You can feel a special fragility in plastic," Velčovský says. Turning to the throw-away nature of these items, he says, "Kind of like a fossil," he says, "these are just the shapes you throw out every day in the desktop."

Velčovský also contrasts the traditional with the modern in other ways. In one of his most well-known pieces, a light blue clock, he contrasted the traditional with the new by sticking a digital clock face on a porcelain reproduction of an antique clock. This design was named one of the top 100 Czech designs of all time.

Tomáš Týrka, who helped create a 2007 exhibit called 100 Czech Design Icons, says, "I sometimes use porcelain in my designs."

JAN PIŘEROVSKÝ/The Prague Post

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"I try to create objects with some kind of history, so people can realize some things," he explains as he walks around his Old Town store, Qubus Designs, on Rámová street.

One work that encapsulates this idea is a porcelain cup made to look like the bottom of a soda bottle. To magnify the effect, Velčovský added the blue-onion pattern that is seen on traditional Czech tableware. Some of his most iconic pieces are glass cups designed like plastic beer, juice and water-cooler cups.

"You can feel a special fragility in plastic," Velčovský says. Turning the throw-away nature of these items into permanent objects is what interests him. "Kind of like a fossil," he says. "These are just the shapes you throw out every day in the dustbin."

Velčovský also contrasts the traditional with the modern in other ways. In one of his most well-known pieces, Digi Clock, he contrasted the traditional with the new by sticking a digital clock face on a porcelain reproduction of an antique clock. This design was named one of the top 100 Czech designs of all time by Tomáš Zykan, who helped create a 2005 exhibit called 100 Czech Design Icons.

"I sometimes use sarcasm in my design," he says.



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In *Waterproof*, his famous vases shaped like rubber boots, Velčovský turned the function of the boots inside out: Instead of keeping water out, they hold it in. This idea was a hard sell for the porcelain factory, he says. They didn't think the boots were vases and Velčovský had to convince them to produce them.

Although he's been dubbed "the savior of Czech porcelain industry" by UK design magazine *Icon*, Velčovský says it's been a struggle to work with Czech factories, as much as he would like to support them. His studio is considering moving their production to a cheaper

place like China. Velčovský says it's getting expensive to use local porcelain factories, which he says are closing down because they lack vision and are afraid of innovation. He says they do the same things that can be done more cheaply elsewhere. "Czechs think design is industrial and art is unique," he says. This is a line he'd like to smudge.

Velčovský and his business partner, Jakub Berdych, started Qubus in 2002 in part to be able to create their own art in designs, without being totally dependent on factories.

"We just decided to start this crazy adventure," he says of the studio. But



he was well-trained to do so. The son of a painter, Velčovský has been surrounded by art his whole life. He studied ceramics at the Academy of Applied Arts, was trained in Moravia and spent some time as a student in Glasgow, Scotland.

The studio is finally seeing success, he says, and is no longer seen as experimental. Today his designs can be bought in the United Kingdom, the United States, France, Japan and elsewhere. In fact, 80 percent of his functional art is sold abroad.

But how long his small studio off Dlouhá street will last is uncertain. Velčovský wants to move to New York City, which he considers “the coolest city in the world.” And with him could go the future of Czech porcelain design.
| Kimberly Ashton

QUEUE UP
Qubus design studio
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Tel.: 222 313 151
Web: www.qubus.cz
Prices range from 345 Kč (\$17.50) for a coffee cup to 1,100 Kč for candle holders



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