

Jenna Basso Pietrobon

Break the Mold



May 15th 2024, New York City, - 'Break the Mold' was incorporated in the launch of Christian Siriano's new furniture line

Artist, Jenna Basso Pietrobon, left her beloved city of New York to embark on a journey, moving to her family's hometown an hour outside of Venice, Italy. It is here where she connected to her family heritage in ceramics, producing a wide range of work over a five year period. One project in particular titled 'Break the Mold' pays tribute to her family who has worked in lighting industry for over 80 years. Part of this project is to help revitalize the town of Nove di Bassano, while critiquing mass production and mass consumption that is so prevalent in today's society.

Jenna Basso Pietrobbon

Break the Mold

lights



Cassola+Cassola



Marostica+Cassola



Marostica+Marostica



Brenta+Brenta



Treviso+Asiago



Nove+Crespano



Breganze+Fara



Treviso



Cassola wall



Fara wall



Fara suspension

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lights



Marostica+Marostica+Brenta



Breganze+Crespano+Fara



Treviso+Treviso+Asiago



Cassola+Brenta



Solagna+Crespano



Marostica+Cassola no shade

Jenna Basso Pietrobbon

Break the Mold

vases



Asiago



Bassano



Breganze



Cassola



Cittadella



Crespano



Fara



Marostica



Nove



Pove



Maser



Brenta



Vicenza



Thiene



Treviso



Solagna

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article

In the 1950s, my grandparents left Italy for Canada, where my grandfather used his knowledge of ceramics to make lamps. Following his footsteps back to Nove, Italy almost 70 years later, I have returned to my grandfather's town to likewise produce my own clay forms. In a way, I see this project as my collaboration with the factory and with my cousin, Claudio Lancerini, a very material edit to the knowledge passed down by my forebears.

Within the world of ceramics, plaster molds are used to make duplicative objects; the molds are vessels which facilitate mass-production and mass-consumption. My artistic practice turns a critical eye toward this type of rote production, and asks how we can instead turn the molds normally used to make repetitive identical pieces into vehicles for unique, one-of-a-kind pieces.

Break the Mold is a series of lamps, vases, and photographs which deconstruct and reimagine traditions of craft to produce objects that are novel and beautiful in their imperfection. I hope this work will inspire people to embrace and celebrate their idiosyncrasies, rather than conform their lives to predetermined forms.

Family History

My work in ceramics springs from a deep familial and cultural history. In the 1950s, my grandparents left Italy for Canada, where my grandfather applied his knowledge of ceramics to making lamps. Growing up, I spent weekends in my grandfather's and father's lighting factory, roller-skating down the long hallways lined with fixtures and shades, and playing hide and seek amongst the boxes with my siblings. As a teenager, I spent summers helping out in the factory, and, after college, I moved to New York to work with architects and designers in the lighting industry.

Lights

The clay forms of the lamps are collaged from multiple different plaster molds modified to make each piece distinct; stacked in precarious configurations, they seem almost to buckle under pressure. For the standard editions, the lampshades are created with canvas, the same canvas I use for my paintings.

For the limited edition series, each one of my unique lampshades is crafted from fabrics made in the Veneto region and manufactured between 1950 and 1990, a time span that encapsulates the year of my grandparents' immigration, my parents' birth, and the year that I was born. By adorning the lampshades with fabrics originally used for objects, fashion, and interior design—such as silk, velvet, and wallcoverings—I suggest different relationships between the viewer and the figure of the lamp. This work also takes up the craft of my grandmother Bertilla, who made shades for my grandfather's lamps in Canada.

Photographs

The collection also includes a series of photographs depicting my clay constructions. The photographs are a conceptual work that stand alone but are also inextricably and forever tied to the tangible, material reality of the lamps and vases they document. Printed similar to life-size, it feels as if the objects themselves are stepping out of the images and into your physical reality — a memory brought to life. If not for a pop of color from a flower, many of the images would otherwise appear to be shot in black and white due to the neutral palette of the vases and their environments.

My white ceramic vases are willfully lopsided and asymmetrical, like the clay and glass vessels in a Giorgio Morandi painting—which warp and melt as if from heat. They wobble and wilt like the flowers they hold, seemingly pliant, tractable, and yielding, the ceramics stagger and trip over the even table surface.



Vases

The vases, when empty, recall the factories left vacant and unused in Nove. The vases, like the factories, require active investment to be brought back to life, or “activated.” By placing flowers in the vases we can completely change the energy of the space. This activation represents the artist’s desire and effort to help revitalize the factories in the town of Nove. Ideally the vases are positioned in a room in close proximity to a Break the Mold photograph of the same vases.

Forms

Each form that is created to make the lamps and vases are named after local towns in the vicinity of the ceramic atelier in Nove di Bassano.

Activation

The vases, when empty, recall the factories left vacant and unused in Nove. In my images, empty vases sit in the stark lighting — the sun goes up and down, and it is as if years go by. The vases represent objects abandoned in these factories, bathed in beautiful lighting, but left waiting for the town to wake up and rediscover them. The vases, like the factories, require active investment to be brought back to life, or “activated.” By placing flowers in the vases or turning on the lamps, we can completely change the light and the energy of the space. This activation represents the artist’s desire and effort to help revitalize the factories in the town of Nove.

Diptych and Triptych

When the lamps, vases, and photographs come together in a room, they juxtapose in various combinations, creating unique installation effects. Much like in a painted diptych or triptych, the formal qualities of the pieces amplify and interact with one another to create a conceptual experience that is greater than the sum of its parts. The images mirror the vases, while the vases create physical depth and a sense of tangible possibility. A dialogue is created between the embodied 3D object and the represented 2D one.

Documentary Film

The story and mission of Break the Mold and The Fondamenta is explained through this short

documentary. Filmed by Italian photographer and videographer Giulio Favotto, this documentary explains the concepts, behind the scenes, and the mission of the project.

Performance (The Lamp Lady)

A performance will accompany the series. The performance is often over a few days. Each day I am dressed as a different deconstructed lamp: donning a unitard of different colors with various lampshades, and holding an illuminated light bulb in my hand. I envision each of my lamps as their own unique characters, and by embodying them, I bring them to life and enter into a new kind of dialogue with my work. As I make my way to different areas of the city, I will invite onlookers to join me in traversing the city, integrating the performance into the public sphere amongst the people who live there.

Proceeds

Part of the proceeds will be going to local artisans and the building of The Fondamenta.

For centuries, Nove has been a thriving center for clay harvesting and ceramics production. With globalized outsourcing of production today, Nove di Bassano has deteriorated and begun to lose the material knowledge that made it a ceramics hub for generations. My work aims to keep this history alive, while helping usher in a new renaissance for the town of Nove. Part of the proceeds from each piece sold in the Break the Mold collection will be given to The Fondamenta, which proposes to reinvest in Nove’s legacy, stimulating job opportunities, constructing systems of support for local potters, preserving knowledge of ceramic production, and creating opportunities for the international artist community to engage with and learn from Italian artisans.

I have a great love for the town of Nove, and I hope that my work can, in a small way, help bring attention, and work, and energy to its craftspeople and industries. By working at a local scale, I believe it is possible to have an immense global impact.



Single or double lampshades - Marostica+Marostica



Single or double lampshades - Brenta+Brenta



Limited edition options by upcycling materials from local upholstery company



Adjustable lampshade



Diptych installation - photograph and vase



Diptych installation - photograph and lamp



Triptych installation - Cassola+Cassola



Triptych installation - Nove+Crespano



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Break the Mold

Performance

If you found yourself in Milan on April 18th or Venice on April 19th or 20th, you just might have been lucky enough to stumble across a woman dressed as a lamp, lightbulb in hand, the physical embodiment of a flash of inspiration, making her way through the city — riding the train, eating dumplings, and sheltering from the rain — with strange and whimsical movements and an impressively deadpan expression, as if dancing to a song that exists only in her head. And had you been in the crowds that followed the living lamp's progress, you might have noticed people smiling or taking pictures with a mix of bemusement and curiosity as they witnessed the absurd meld with the everyday: a lamp escaped from its showroom bravely wandering the streets, shining light into the night, illuminating all it passes.

The artist Jenna Basso Pietrobon presented this performance for Milan Design Week as part of her Break the Mold project, which also consists of lamps, vases, and photographs. It would have been enough for her to make these objects, but Basso Pietrobon wanted to really embody the project wholeheartedly, and to present it to the public in an open and freeform forum. Diverging from the standard presentation of work at Milan Design Week or the Venice Biennale, she decided to take her art out of a building and into the city, transforming physical objects into quirky, living characters. Basso Pietrobon, a relative newcomer to the scene, seemed to appear out of nowhere, bringing new luminance to the staid event.

In addition to the hand-crafted lampshade hats and different color unitards, the artist wore Bottega Veneta sunglasses each night — an homage to the fashion house based in Vicenza, close to her atelier — and Giuseppe Zanotti shoes. The performance was designed to garner attention for Break the Mold, a project which embraces and gives back her grandparents hometown of Nove di Bassano in Italy. For centuries, Nove has been a thriving center for clay harvesting and ceramics production. With globalized outsourcing of production today, it has begun



Venice, Italy / Architecture Biennale performance, 2023

to lose the material knowledge that made it a ceramics hub for generations. The artist aims to keep this history alive, while helping usher in a new renaissance for the town of Nove. Her long term goal is to create a sustainable creative hub called The Fondamenta, which will support and hopefully revive the long craft tradition of ceramics there, and create new economic opportunities for the community. A portion of the funds from Break the Mold will go toward The Fondamenta.



Venice, Italy / Architecture Biennale performance, 2023





Milan, Italy / Salone de Mobile performance, 2023



Jenna Basso Pietrobon

Biography

Born in 1986, Jenna Basso Pietrobon is an artist who fearlessly explores society through her personal experiences. She offers a raw critique of political, economic, and social systems, using a blend of painting, sculpture, photography, architecture, design, psychology, performance, and activism. When attending her Masters in Fine Arts at Columbia University in New York two of her professors, Sarah Sze and Rirkrit Tiravanija had a large impact on the trajectory of her practice. After graduating this program in 2017, Basso Pietrobon moved to her family's small hometown in Veneto Italy to explore the culture and histories which impacted her life. Here she further explored producing art using high-quality discarded materials from factories across the country. After dissecting the histories in Italy and transferring them through art, Basso Pietrobon's practice has grown and expanded to global issues and missions. Her practice is categorized using different points that she refers to as the Agenda.

