

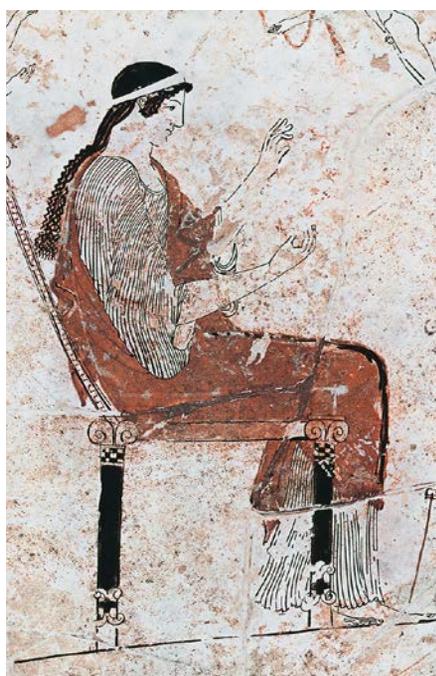
Enlightenment 3.0

The creative optimism that permeated the Enlightenment era shone its light in all areas of thought, research, production technologies and art as well as raising ceramics to new heights. Looking back into the past does not serve pure cognition but presses us towards the future, into the third Enlightenment, which we have already stumbled into.

Gustav Weiß

Gaining enlightenment is a natural human desire. In Classical Greece, Socrates, Plato and Aristotele embodied the first age of enlightenment; the second, which we really mean, lasted in the West from 1680 until 1830, and finally, UNESCO published its world report in 2005, Towards Knowledge Societies. This is the third attempt to make humanity see reason. In this third age of enlightenment, we are experiencing how the world is changing in such a way that no-one had been able to foresee. Let us take a moment to fully realise of how all this came about. The true story sounds like a crime mystery novel with the ups and downs of events. In between: the high points of the mind. These were also the high points for ceramics. And the future stands ready for us with its demands and encouragements. The word “enlightenment” also implies clarity and transparency.

In the life of our society, there is scarcely a demand that is raised more often. It is the demand for truth. In Antiquity, the Presocratics, Socrates and his pupil Plato were a 150-year chain of truth seekers. The Greek mind was targeted to understanding the world, whereas Eastern philosophy examined the development of character. Remarkably, both golden ages occurred at the same time; the 150-year flowering of Chinese philosophy began with Buddha at the time of the Presocratics, followed by Confucius and Laozi, who lived at the time of Socrates and Plato. The Tao Te Ching is from the 4th century BCE and was the oldest piece of philosophical writing, whilst in their discourses the Greeks laid the foundation for the sciences that were to come. Very little has survived in written form. After the astronomy of prehistory and early history, it was especially mathematics that they elevated to a new level, where is be-



White ground vase painting from the time of Socrates. Aphrodite by the painter Lyandros 470/460 B.C.E.

came a concretisation of knowledge. This period also produced vase painting, considered for centuries to be the zenith of ceramic art. In the time of the Presocratics, the archaic style was in vogue with its black-figure painting, which, in Socrates time, turned into the severe style with painting on a white background. The High and Late Classical periods followed and the rich style of Plato's and Aristotle's times. The intellectual highlights also apply to all the other art forms: verse, anthems, theatre, temple construction and free-standing, monumental sculpture, which had begun its development in Presocratic times. The great sculptor. Polykleitos lived in Socrates' times. Every sculpture, whether in stone, wood or

terracotta, was painted. This could be a clue for us. The painting and the partial gilding were not a mere embellishment but a major part of any sculpture. Pliny tells how the sculptor Praxiteles was asked which of his marble figures he thought were best, to which he answered, the ones that painter Nikias had had a hand in. This was how highly he esteemed the painter's work.

This age, filled with intellectual achievement, was later described by European Enlightenment thinkers as the First Enlightenment. It ended in Hellenic times with Alexander's wars. Alexander destroyed Achaemenid culture and overran Asia Minor like one of the horsemen of the Apocalypse; on his whim, he had thousands of his prisoners crucified or rewarded*. Philip II had summoned Aristotle to Macedonia to educate his son. However, the boy was more interested in the heroes of the Trojan war and his mind was set on establishing his claim to the throne of Greece and Macedonia. He had his father murdered by a hired killer and instigated the massacre of six thousand Thebans*. In his campaigns against rivals for the throne, he demonstrated his military skill and became the undisputed leader of the army against the Persians. Alexander's wars lasted ten years. It is said that he consumed fifty crates of wine a month. In the eleventh year he drank himself to death with a huge goblet of wine. After him, nothing was of value any longer. Many towns survived named Alexandria (Plutarch says there were seventy), one was even called Bucephala in honour of his horse. Everything else ended in strife and murder. His entire kin, young and old, men and women, were murdered.

The 150 years from the 6th to the 4th century were an intellectual event, but religion was untouched by it. There was

actually no persecution of intellectual convictions. Nevertheless, Socrates was condemned to death for the “introduction of new divine beings”. The elders were suspicious of the new ideas that the young followed. And although the Delphic Oracle said that Socrates was the wisest of all men, he had to die for leading young people astray. His young admirers initiated fierce discussions after his death that ultimately led to his accusers being executed too.

Socrates did not flee into exile, although that would easily have been possible. He became a martyr of the spirit. The knowledge that the Greeks had been first to stimulate in the world continued to develop to a higher level. Homer had laid the foundations for Humanism with the myth of humanised gods so that humanity could in its innermost soul feel related to the gods. Then came Jesus as the second martyr of the spirit. However, he did not preach reason but its opposite, intellectual poverty, for his kingdom was not of this world. The love that he meant was altruism, not empathy. This was educational and gave human existence a meaning to those who accepted this teaching. But it led to the darkest Middle Ages, which the Enlightenment wanted to counter by shedding light upon it. That was the problem.

What preceded this “Enlightenment” was the final straw: the Thirty Years’ War followed the Reformation. Charles I of England was beheaded in London in 1649. There was a mass exodus of Huguenots from Catholic France, and they were pelted with stones on their way. In Prussia, they were allowed to practice their beliefs. The Hutterite Habans fled from Germany and Switzerland to eastern Europe, where they became famous with their faience, and under Turkish rule, they enjoyed certain privileges. Under stifling monarchical arrogance, things were seething everywhere. The age of the Enlightenment and revolutions had to come.

By the middle of the 17th century, ideas and art were at an advanced stage. The enlightenment, on which the West proudly looks back, emerged as a force that wanted to understand and control the world. It reached its zenith in philosophy, art and science in the 18th century. In all areas, scientific questions were broadened and placed on an authorial level like nowhere else in the world. The princes kept alchemists at their courts who were supposed to make gold and discover the perpetuum mobile but who actually expanded the world of knowl-



Alexander dropped in. Like an apocalyptic rider, in 330-326 Alexander the Great subjugated the east of Persia in bloody wars.

Gustav Weiß 2012, 25 x 27 x 9 cm.

edge with their experiments. In Florence, the Accademia del Cimento (the academy of experiment) was founded in 1675. In the field of the production of things, the alchemist Böttger succeeded for the first time with his invention of porcelain in replacing experience with experimental research. This technological masterpiece was followed by highlights in the art of porcelain which to-



Haban faience from Hungary from the time of the Turkish occupation. Michel Habel 1680.

day, three hundred years later, are among the pieces most coveted by art collectors.

We normally understand the term “Enlightenment” to refer to the intellectual movement that emerged in the eighteenth century and also lasted 150 years. It wanted to improve the world by rational thought and bring light into social conditions. It was only when it was beginning to wane in 1784 that Immanuel Kant published an essay in a periodical, the *Berliner Monatsschrift*, to answer the question of what the Enlightenment was. In it, he declared the Latin proverb, *sapere aude* the motto of the Enlightenment, by which he charges the reader to follow a programme of intellectual self-liberation, by means of reason. Daring to know in this way brought forth values that are still characteristic of Western civilisation: freedom of expression, the freedom to criticise, the priority of reason, equality, individualism, tolerance, democracy. The priority of reason found confirmation in the expansion of the sciences and is reflected in the constitution of the United States. But knowledge and reason – that cannot be all. In 1781, Immanuel Kant published his *Critique of Pure Reason*, where he contrasts reason with the fact that the senses are also a source of knowledge. This second enlightenment ended in the same way as the first, which seems to justify the claim that history repeats itself. The French Revolution, which was initially greeted as the first free and democratic rebellion of so many major intellectuals (Friedrich Schiller was even awarded an honorary citizenship by the French National Assembly in 1792), ended with executions, the Jacobite Terror, and finally with the Napoleonic Wars.

What has happened in the two hundred years that have since passed for the historical necessity of a new enlightenment to become apparent? The oscillation between reason and soul has been interrupted by two World Wars, after which the desire for humanity and democracy came to the fore. The 21st century will not be able to be a century of philosophers any more, like the eighteenth was, but needs to be broader in outlook. This means that the desire to know must promise benefits to many. Knowledge has now taken over a role in society. It is subject to conditions that had never existed before:

1. The binary system developed by Wilhelm Leibniz and others led to the invention of the computer and was the origin of the electronic age.
2. Evolution superseded the Bible as

a history book.

3. Globality has superseded the slogan “Wir sind das Volk” with “We are the World”, bringing together calls for humanity and democracy.

In 2005, UNESCO published its report entitled *Towards a Knowledge Society*. As a democratic, holistic new age, the knowledge society has superseded industrial society, corresponding to freely accessible information and communications technologies – the management of knowledge – and to knowledge machines as social constructions to answer questions. They are social because not only do they multiply knowledge but also the desire to know, which combats poverty. On the basis of Wikipedia and other sources of knowledge, Hermann Helbig in Düsseldorf has developed a search engine that he calls *Sempria* (like his company). With it, it is possible to simply ask questions, as if from one person to another, no matter how the question is formulated. In this way, knowledge machines are increasingly developing into communication machines. Alexandria, a “collaborative knowledge machine for the retrieval of semantically structured knowledge”, is being funded by the German Ministry of Science and Technology. A further knowledge machine (computational knowledge machine) is *Wolfram Alpha* by Stephen Wolfram. Werner Rammert has published a book, with others, on “*Wissensmaschinen*” (“*Knowledge Machines*” – Frankfurt am Main, Campus Verlag, 1998). The subtitle is “*The social Construction of a Technical Medium*”. In 2009, the visual knowledge machine *vionto* received the international Red Herring Award. The company *vionto* was founded in Berlin in late 2008 with the intention of taking up a leading role in the knowledge machine market.

But as a system, art is completely differently structured to the system of science, which moves on and comes to a boundary it cannot cross. Scientific findings are something that can be collected, that has always been there but which has simply not yet been discovered. In contrast, the system of art is infinite, and it creates what has never existed before, but it also allows things to be discovered which have always been there but which are ineffable. In contrast to science, it can retrieve extra-linguistic phenomena with extra-linguistic means, and these phenomena have something like a soul. Ceramics must not be excluded from the knowledge society. As the art of the hand, which has hitherto continued the



Porcelain from the time of the Enlightenment; tureen from the 2,200-piece Swan service by Johann Joachim Kändler 1737 based on a painting in Dresden by Francesco Albani, *Galatea in a Shell Chariot*, 1635.

past as tradition, it is on the way to moving forward with its craft tools like human knowledge moving forward in the quest of greater knowledge. Over the past hundred years, ceramics has split into an artistic and an technical branch. Whereas the techni-

cal branch is based on “pure reason”, and has achieved a high level of excellence, the artistic branch, which is closer to craft, is subject to the freedom from criticism and doubt, duty and inclination. It is the power of judgement that determines the idea and the technology on the one hand and finding the general in the finished specific piece on the other. Philosophically speaking, this kind of ceramics fulfils Kant’s demand for the unity of the senses and the intellect in his *Critique of Pure Reason* and even in his two other *Critiques*. Freedom wants to become practical by finding complete expression in the world of the senses.

Everything that is in the process of emerging is like a comet with its tail of exploding matter. It is not widely known that while he was a student, Immanuel Kant studied comets with growing enthusiasm. This led to his first major work, the *General History of Nature and Theory of the Heavens*. For the awakening of ceramics as a mediator between nature and freedom, the comet would be an appropriate symbol.

*) C. Bradford Welles: “*Die hellenistische Welt*” in Golo Mann and Alfred Heuß: *Propyläen Weltgeschichte Vol. 3*. Berlin / Frankfurt a.M. / Vienna: Propyläen Verlag 1962. Pages 416, 405 and 408.

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Towards Knowledge Societies. Nina Hole: *The Bridges Advance*, 2002. h. 83 cm.