

A WHISPER IN CLAY



Archetypal to Belgian aesthetics, the serene and understated works of ceramicist and sculptor Pierre Culot (1938-2011) encourage a meditation upon time, depth and silence.

WORDS BY NICOLAS SCHUYBROEK

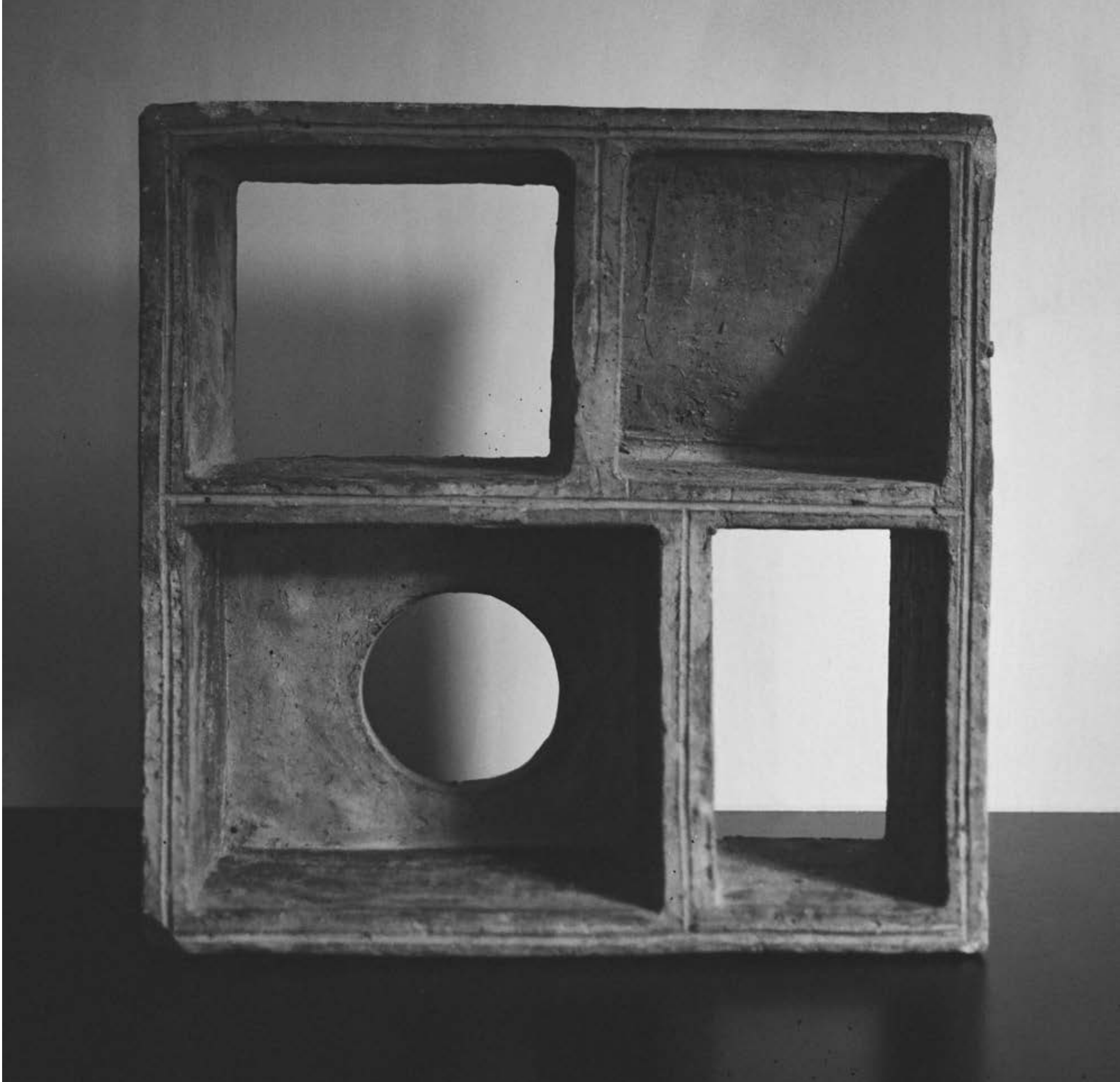


There is a particular silence that lingers around the work of Pierre Culot. Not an empty silence, but one charged with earth, fire and the trace of the hand that shaped it. To encounter his ceramics is to enter a dialogue between matter and spirit, between the archaic and the modern, between what is functional and what is profoundly poetic.

Culot was never interested in decoration for its own sake. His bowls, vases and architectural interventions carry within them an elemental necessity, as if they could not have been otherwise. They stand at the intersection of sculpture and vessel, of gesture and permanence. Their power lies in paradox: monumental yet intimate, austere yet sensuous, humble yet unforgettable.

This quality recalls the still lifes of Giorgio Morandi: the repetition, the restraint, the way simplicity becomes revelation. In his larger works, arranged in rhythmic fields or embedded in architecture, Culot leans toward the sculptural language of Carl André and Richard Nonas: rigorous, raw, yet deeply human. And there is, too, a kinship with Arte Povera: the trust in elemental matter, the refusal of spectacle, the conviction that truth resides in modest gestures and humble clay.

In a Belgian context, Culot's practice feels almost archetypal. Belgium has long balanced influences from elsewhere with a quiet, singular identity. Culot absorbed the lessons of Japanese pottery, the austerity of Bernard Leach, the rigour of modernist architecture and yet his work is unmistakably his own. Rooted in soil and landscape, his ceramics are not objects of spectacle but vessels of presence.







To live with Culot's pieces, which has been my case for many years, is to understand their true force. They inhabit space with serene authority. A Culot vase in a room does not shout, it listens, it grounds, it creates atmosphere. It stands, it waits, it breathes. And in that stillness, it teaches us something about ourselves.

This sensibility is not unrelated to what the world now calls 'Belgian'. An understated elegance, a refusal of excess, a layered materiality, a certain melancholic poetry. Culot embodied these values long before they were branded as Belgian style. His ceramics are more than objects: they are cultural signposts, revealing who we are, or at least who we aspire to be, quiet, nuanced, resilient.

When asked to write about Pierre Culot, the first word that sparked in my mind was time. Time in the throwing and firing, time in the patina that accrues through use, time in the living with. His pieces do not age, they absorb and they deepen. Against the noise of speed and disposability, they remind us that beauty is slow, discreet, inexhaustible.

Today, as Atelier Pierre Culot works to safeguards and share his legacy, these works feel more urgent than ever. They stand against excess and noise. They invite us into another rhythm, one of silence, attention and depth. A rhythm that, like clay itself, is both fragile and enduring. In the end, Pierre Culot gave us more than ceramics. He gave us a way of being in the world, which, in today's context, is certainly not a faint thing.

