

# the zauli residency

by Jeff Shapiro

Having the chance to work in a past master's untouched studio, surrounded by a museum filled with his work, and using his very clay body is an opportunity we would all jump at.



In the summer of 2012, I had the very good fortune to be invited to work in the Carlo Zauli studio in Faenza, Italy, located with the Zauli Museum. I first learned about his artwork when I visited the studio and living museum in 2002. It immediately struck a resonating chord with me. The work I experienced was formidable: large-scale pieces that seemed to flow off the pedestals and thick clay wall murals that looked like carved water. The work was mostly finished in Zauli's signature white and black glaze. Occasionally Zauli also used a beautiful black clay that was waxy and organic.

The Zauli compound is now administered by his son, Matteo. Although Matteo is not a potter or an artist in the sense of making work, he is an educator and a carrier of the torch, determined to spread the word about his father.

Carlo Zauli (1926–2002) was one of the most important Italian breakaway ceramic artists in Italy. During the period of 1965–80 there was a loosely knit, breakaway movement in Italy (akin to the Sodeisha movement in Japan), that included Zauli, Nino Caruso, Pompeo Pianezzola, Alfonso Leoni, Alessio Tasca, Nanni Valentini and just a handful of others. Nino Caruso is perhaps the only living artist of the group, but they each made their mark on the field of ceramics. Zauli started as a potter in 1949, but even then his vessel forms were a departure from the traditional forms being made in Faenza.

Ten years after my initial visit, I had the chance to see another exhibition of Zauli's work in Cervia, Italy, in an old brick building that was a salt storage warehouse by the ocean. And once again Matteo and I bonded over the works of his father. At the time, Matteo

was working to secure funding for artist residencies in the studio in the Zauli Museum, and by late summer of 2012, he had succeeded.

## A Surreal Summer Dream

My personal experience during my summer residency there was like a dream, albeit a surreal dream that took some adjusting to get used to. Black and white photographs of Zauli sometimes dressed in his lab coat, or casually sitting amid a newly plowed vineyard; the freshly turned clumps of clay surrounding him like so many

organic sculptures, adorned the walls of the museum and studio. I was emotionally moved the first time I entered the studio and work area. The studio was left just as it was the last day Zauli worked there: clay still in the pug mill and the mixer, bags of clay lining the walls of the basement on one side, while sacks of glaze materials were piled against the other.

When I first entered the compound (the museum, studios, and courtyard), Matteo showed me the apartment I would be staying in. It was simple but wonderful because it was within compound. If I awoke in the middle of the night, I could wander the spaces where Zauli made his great works. My mind was racing, projecting ideas of what I would create in this environment. First I was

asked about what clay I would like to use. Having seen Zauli's black clay works, I was drawn to the dark body but thought it may not be available anymore. When I mentioned it to Matteo, he immediately called Emedio Galassi, Zauli's first assistant, to help locate the black clay body. Galassi, who is a man with lots of character and



1 Inside the courtyard of the Carlo Zauli Museum with sculptures made by Zauli on display. 2 Carlo Zauli sitting in a newly plowed vineyard with fresh clumps of clay—inspiration for his sculptural ceramic work.

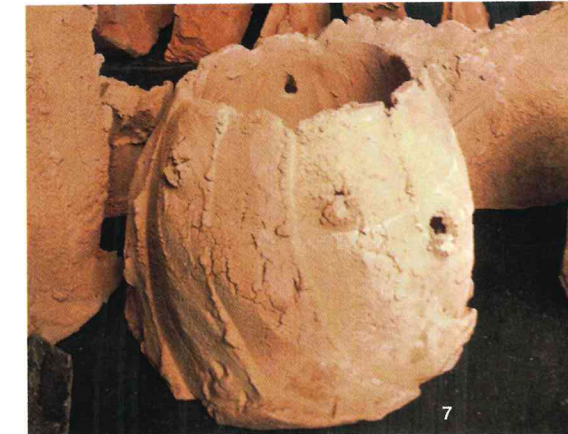


who speaks English with a lilting and heavy Italian accent, immediately took on the task of searching for the clay that he remembered making 20 years ago. He pulled at my shirt and with a couple of expletives mumbled out loud "I know it is here. Where the \$#\$ is it"? We crawled through the depths of the basement searching, moving through water on the floor, cobwebs, and unlit hallways. And then, Galassi exclaimed, "Here it is. I knew it was here!" We moved the last few boxes to get to the black clay and upon opening the first bag, found that the clay was still quite plastic and pliable. We also stumbled upon a sculpture body that was actually made over 30 years ago, and it too was still plastic and ready to use. Later that night my mind was racing with ideas of what I would make from these special clay bodies.

When I arrived at the studio the next morning, I was introduced to Aida, the studio's technical assistant. When I inquired from Aida where I could locate some used plywood to make a template, she asked what it was. When she finally understood, she told me emphatically, "No, we don't have this plywood." When I asked for a hammer and explained what it was, she told me, "No, we have no such thing. I suppose you also want those pointed metal objects you hit with the hammer too?" "Yes," I said "NAILS." "Well, we don't have those either. This is not a wood shop. This is a clay studio!" she stated. At first I was frustrated, but then I told myself that this was a good way to step out of my own comfort zone and work with what was available in the environment at hand. Once I accepted that, I actually felt very liberated.

The experience for the next week was magical; simple techniques and forms that, hopefully, expressed the material and the essence of being in the Zauli workshop. There was a presence of Carlo there for me that cannot be explained, but it was palpable, and tangible.

Two students assisted me from the ceramic art school in Faenza, both were very helpful and hard working. The interaction with local artists and students was a big part of the experience. My residency culminated in a ceramic fair, called Argilla that takes place every two years in Faenza. I took part as the artist-in-residence from the Zauli studio, but the fair also included events at the



3–5 Carlo Zauli's studio, left just as it was the last day he worked in it, and now displaying his sculptures among his kilns and tools. 6 Jeff Shapiro working in Zauli's studio. 7 One of Shapiro's vessels that went into the solo exhibition at Galleria Comunale D'Arte in Faenza.

International Museum of Ceramics in Faenza (MIC), as well as many booths of various ceramic artists and vendors. Thousands of people filed through Faenza during this weekend.

## Final Thoughts

I returned to the Zauli Museum/studio this past summer to complete some unfinished work and to make a few new pieces, and recently had a solo exhibition of the works I made at the Zauli studio at Galleria Comunale D'Arte in Faenza. The experience of the residency and the time spent surrounded by Zauli's living history has given me an appreciation for the man and his work, in a way that feeds my imagination. I am thankful to both Matteo and to Carlo.

For more information on the Carlo Zauli Museum and residency opportunities, visit [www.museozauli.it](http://www.museozauli.it). For additional information on pottery classes at the Carlo Zauli Museum in association with the Hotel Vittoria, located in Faenza, Italy, check out, [www.hotel-vittoria.com/en/pottery-classes\\_27.html](http://www.hotel-vittoria.com/en/pottery-classes_27.html).

the author Jeff Shapiro works and lives in upstate New York with his wife, Hinako. He studied ceramic arts while living in Japan for nine years from 1973–81. He gives workshops and seminars and his work has been exhibited internationally and can be found in numerous international museum collections. To learn more visit, <http://jeffshapiroceramics.com>.