

# Paola Paronetto

**I**talian ceramicist Paola Paronetto has developed a distinctive collection of works out of a little-used material: paper clay. In her countryside studio in Porcia, in northern Italy, Paola mixes paper pulp into her clay, transforming it into a material that allows her to create her more abstract, organic forms.

“I wanted to create gentle, non-rigid forms that were more natural and gave an idea of lightness in motion, as if moved by the wind, abandoning the static nature of forms made with traditional techniques,” she says.

Paper fibre lends the clay unusual qualities, including a paper-like texture. It is, after firing, much stronger than other clay mixtures, allowing the ceramics made from it to be thinner and more delicate. It is stronger, yet lighter—and it dries faster. “Since it contains paper, which is an elastic material, it has less shrinkage and allows you to join various pieces together and make very large sculptures that are relatively lightweight,” Paola explains.

Paola’s experiments in material and form have resulted in her Cartocci collection, which has expanded to include vessels in more traditional forms as well as much more abstract, sculptural pieces, each hand-painted in her deep, earthy palette, along with some in a pure white and still others highlighted with gold.

“Cartocci’ is a name I came up with because, in Italian, it immediately evokes cardboard and the idea of a crumpled material,” Paola says. Indeed, the distinct texture of paper clay, together with Paola’s handmade touch, gives her pieces a softer, delicate,



**“What I find satisfying is the creative moment, when I can accomplish with my own hands exactly what I set out to do.”**





more natural—and more papery—look than typical ceramics.

Making her Cartocci sculptures is difficult and labour intensive. Many of her pieces are textured with deep vertical lines. Others are segmented with long, vertical folds—something made possible by the addition of paper fibre. More recently, her pieces have become oversized, growing over a metre tall or more, lending them an even more expansive personality.

Perhaps her most recognizable works are her Bottles, the first form she created using paper clay. “I am very fond of them,” she says. “I like to arrange them in groups so that they can be in dialogue with each other, like authentic animated figures.” Together they act as a family or gathering of creatures, contrasting and accentuating each other’s colours and shapes—though the exact nature of their grouping is something Paolo likes to leave up to the viewer’s interpretation.



**"I express myself according to my creativity, and what I do is a reflection of my feelings and emotions. The results are absolutely personal. Expressing myself in my artwork, without questioning whether I will like it or not, is one of my goals. I seek beauty through shapes and colours that excite and convey joy and positivity to the viewer."**

Ceramics have always been a part of Paola's creative life: "I took my first ceramics course almost by chance with a master from Gubbio, who moved to my town when I was 18 years old." She quickly fell in love with the medium.

"I began my training at a very young age, working between Umbria and Tuscany, where I learned clay-working techniques and made my first connections with a world that immediately fascinated me."

After 20 years of working with different traditional ceramic techniques and materials, she knew she needed a new challenge, and decided to focus on paper clay, studying the technique under Giovanni Cimatti, a master ceramicist. "I wanted to work with ceramics but in a less restrictive way," she says. "I wanted to be able to express myself more freely with the medium, and paper clay seemed ideal, allowing me to think outside of the box."





“The idea was to remove myself from the static, rigid shapes that I saw in ceramic making. I wanted something that was dynamic, light and poetic.” She was also looking to move away from practical ceramic pieces, toward the more decorative or sculptural.

“I experimented a lot to create new families of bottles and to create large, soft and moving shapes with this technique. Today, I focus exclusively on paper clay, which absorbs me completely,” Paola says.

“Paper clay is an elastic technique that, when pushed to its limits, poses great difficulties. But, from the beginning, the results were flattering and the shapes I found were coming to life more and more, aggregating into families in a dense dialogue of shapes and colours.”

Paola creates the raw paper clay herself, using only Italian clay and fibre from recycled paper, and works the clay using a traditional potter’s wheel. “The recipe is produced in my workshop,” she says. “I do not buy this material because I want to make it with the specific characteristics I require. I use reused paper and cardboard, so that my artwork is as sustainable








as possible. I have also been using solar power as an energy source for years.”

She works out of a bright, open workshop in the countryside. “It is completely surrounded by nature, which is my main source of inspiration,” she says. “That is why most of my collections are named after flowers, animals or plants.” These collections include Ninfee (water lily), Pistilli (pistil, the female reproductive organ of a flower), Cactus and Bosco (woods).

She once taught workshops out of her studio, as well as at a number of schools, including La Meridiana, an international ceramics school in Tuscany. “I had always held courses in my workshop, inviting internationally renowned masters such as Giuseppe Temperoni and Giovanni Cimatti, until about 10 years ago, when my work expanded so much that I no longer had time to dedicate to teaching,” she says. It is something she hopes to return to someday.

Until then, she continues to expand her Cartocci collection, creating new forms and instilling them with new personality. ✽



"What I find most stimulating  
in my research is always  
setting myself new goals and  
pushing forms toward their  
most extreme outcomes."







## PAPER CLAY

Paper clay is a relatively new addition to the world of ceramics, an innovation born out of a period of experimentation by ceramicists during the 1980s. It is, simply, pottery clay mixed with a portion of processed cellulose fibre—most often from paper, though other materials like cotton, linen, flax and jute can be used as well. These fibres give the clay a number of new qualities, making it more versatile to work with, and allowing for new forms and a greater range of sculptural expressions.

Cellulose fibres lend the clay greater strength, while also making it more lightweight (since the fibres burn off when the clay is fired). This means that clay walls or other elements can be much thinner. It also means that ceramic pieces can be much larger, as the clay can support more weight. These qualities also allow for more delicate work. Plus, paper clay makes it possible to join wet and dry pieces, or even two fairly dry pieces. This means new elements can easily be added to an already dry structure, as well as making it possible to repair work or fill in cracks.

[paola-paronetto.com](http://paola-paronetto.com)  
[@paolaparonettocreations](https://www.instagram.com/paolaparonettocreations)