



# PROFILES

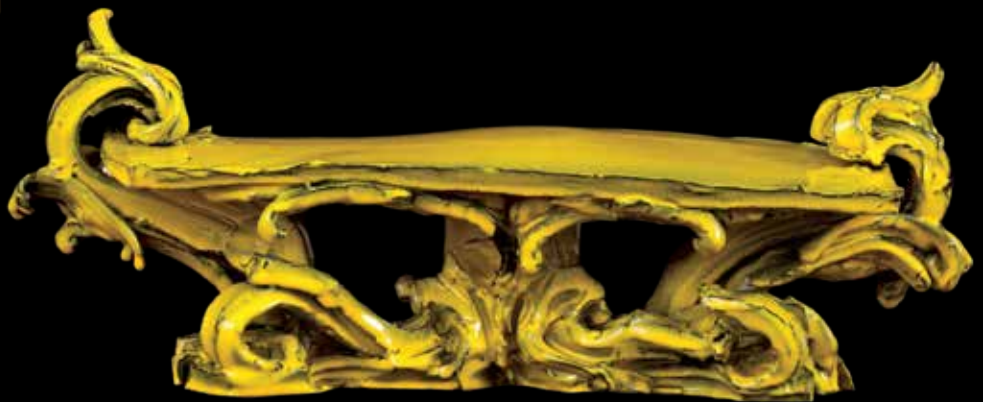


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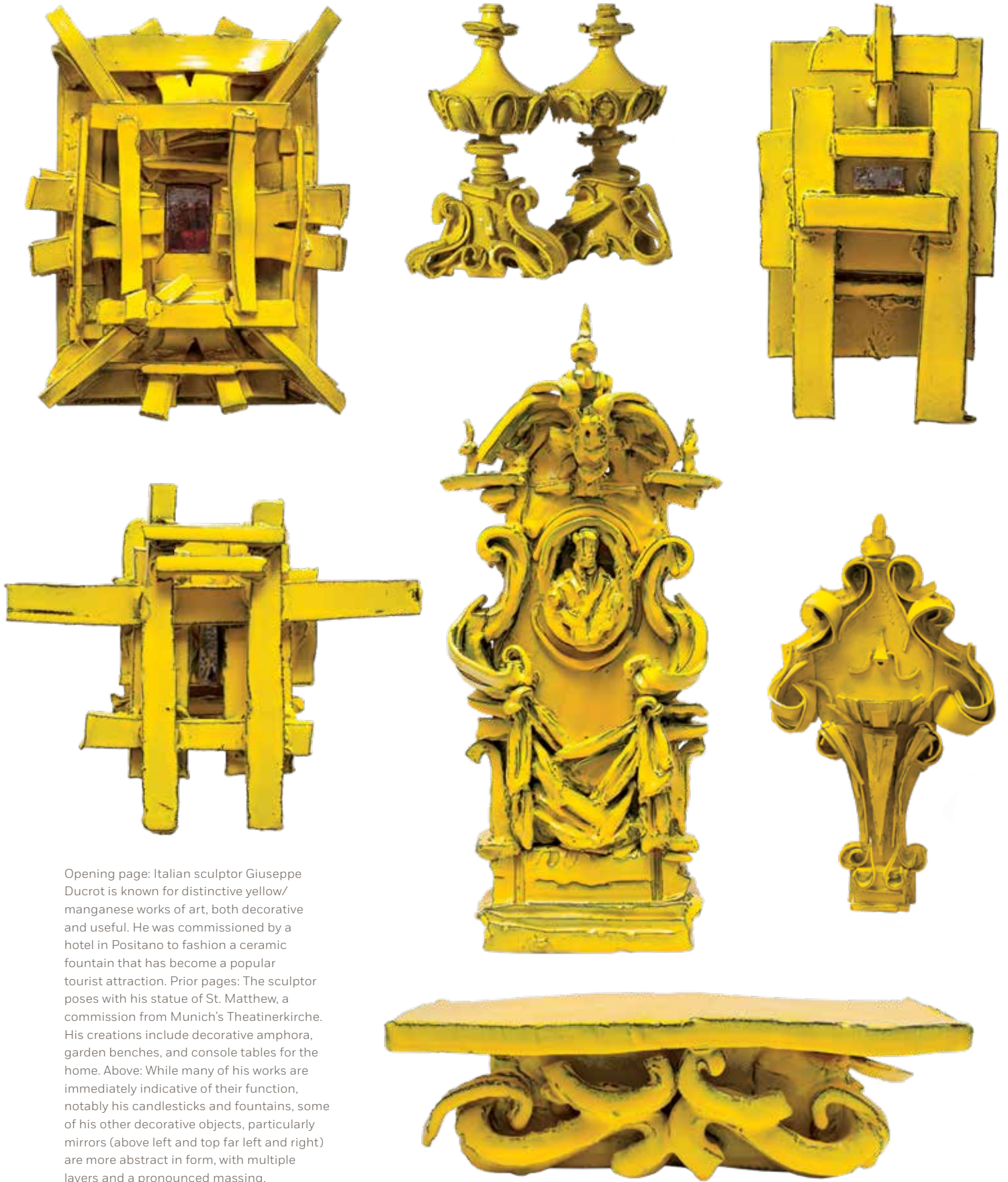
# *Yellow* FERVOR

Italian master sculptor Giuseppe Ducrot has found his form and his hue. His works stand out as both practical and decorative.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY *Giorgio Benni*  
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Opening page: Italian sculptor Giuseppe Ducrot is known for distinctive yellow/manganese works of art, both decorative and useful. He was commissioned by a hotel in Positano to fashion a ceramic fountain that has become a popular tourist attraction. Prior pages: The sculptor poses with his statue of St. Matthew, a commission from Munich's Theatinerkirche. His creations include decorative amphora, garden benches, and console tables for the home. Above: While many of his works are immediately indicative of their function, notably his candlesticks and fountains, some of his other decorative objects, particularly mirrors (above left and top far left and right) are more abstract in form, with multiple layers and a pronounced massing.

Giuseppe Ducrot spends much time in his Rome studio getting to know popes and saints, emperors, kings, the occasional angel, even Hercules, Minerva, and other figures from mythology. In fact, it is Ducrot himself who breathes artistic life into these personages through the creation of his three-dimensional ceramics. Although these figures mostly occupy his imagination rather than the actual space in which he works daily, the sculptor does continue to receive commissions from real-life entities at the Vatican, from cathedrals throughout Europe, and from mayors and city authorities in various municipalities. While Ducrot is known as a figurative sculptor, he is also one of the world's most important working artists making furniture, domestic objects, and decorative accessories, notably fashioned of ceramic in his signature yellow hue.

Ducrot does not claim to be the inventor of this particularly vibrant color, but no other artist exploits it as fully as he. "The problems with sculpture, from my point of view, are how to create volumes, how to create shadows, and how any finished piece will take the light," he says, as the buzz of Roman traffic swirls outside his contemplative studio space. "This color yellow takes the light, and it supports shadows." He claims that it took ten years of experimenting at his favorite foundry, Bottega Gatti, located in Fienza, in the north of Italy near Bologna. "I started working with Gatti more than twenty years ago," he says, "and its director, Davide Servadei, has patiently given me the time and resources to do experiments there. This yellow resulted, and it now characterizes much of my work."

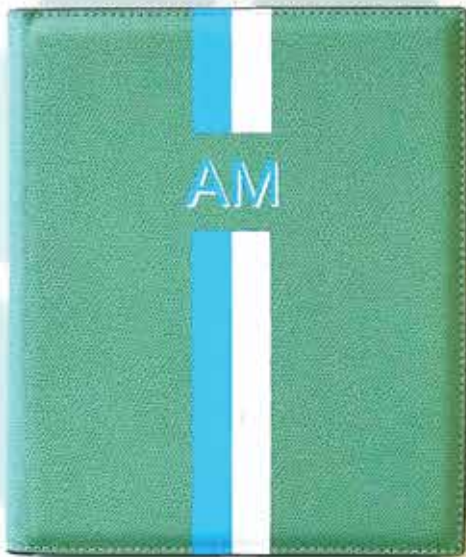
The material is also durable. The inherent flaw of working with clay is that the resulting fired work can reveal cracks, some merely cosmetic, but others structural. Were Ducrot to use the standard grades of clay that most potters employ, however, his large-scale fountains and mirrors, benches and candlesticks, fireplaces and consoles would likely collapse on their weight. To preserve the very form, as well as the structural integrity of his works, he works with a clay known as "Cecchetto," a grade that comes from the soil of the Veneto region of Italy, near Vicenza.

"Sculpture is a very architectural experience," he emphasizes, "and I used my experiences making classical works to work in a new language that mixes classicism with the modern point of view." Perhaps the most dramatic example of that historical amalgam of forms is a fountain he was commissioned to make for Le Sirenuse hotel in Positano. Scrolls, seashells, amphora, and other details of the work reference, overtly and suggestively, Renaissance and Baroque motifs. The work, though, with its bold yellow that nearly competes for attention with the yellow sunlight of the Amalfi Coast, is as much a work of today as it is a reference to the past. Ribbons fashioned of ceramic, as well as a skewing of proportions and balance, imbue the work with a decidedly contemporary vibrancy.



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Scale is important to Ducrot. After discovering a grade of extra durable clay, he has been able to go larger with his furniture, confident the material will not crack or break. "Clay is elastic—it gives you many possibilities of form," he says.

Indicative of Ducrot's penchant for many kinds of art, he cites Bernini and Basquiat as being among his favorite creators. He calls Bernini, the Baroque master of seventeenth-century Italy, "a genius of sculpture, like Michelangelo and Leonardo." As for the late Basquiat, who died in New York City in 1988, "He was a painter who was untrained, but he had an extraordinary sense of composition and color and sheer energy. He followed no rules, and yet he was able to make something full of meaning."

Of all the cities in the world, Rome is probably the one in which art and daily life coexist in equal parts; each plays a role in the life of the citizenry. There is not a day in Rome during which Ducrot does not take note of the sculpture that is ubiquitous in the cityscape. "In Rome, for an artist to go into a church or a museum is like going to work. You can't help but compare what you do to what you're seeing. Every time I see a statue again, I see it as if it's new." And as if inventing the very definition of what makes an artwork good, Ducrot says, "Bad art never changes. You don't see new things in it. Good art makes you see things in a different way every time."

Ducrot has been a practicing sculptor for more than thirty years, having begun under the mentorship of the Roman sculptor Vito Cipolla, a still-working master artist in his eighties, famous for his ability to copy and reinterpret ancient Roman sculptures. "He taught me not only how to make sculpture in a practical sense," says Ducrot, "but also how to look at sculpture."

As Ducrot continues to make his yellow works, his goal is to build an entire building out of the material and hue. "It's a dream of mine to begin with a full-scale ceramic façade and expand from there to make a work of architecture. Every artist needs to challenge himself to make different things." The sketches exist, and the models for his ceramic building have been built. In short, his dream is likely to become a reality. ■

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