

Margrit Linck - Sculptures

16.2 - 30.3.2019

Opening: 15.2.2019, 6pm

After the artist-couple Margrit and Walter Linck came across a nuns' convent building in Saint-Romain-le-Haut during a trip through Burgundy in 1957 and acquired it as their second studio, Margrit, a ceramicist, created a series of works there; statuary objects whose form and impact differed significantly from her earlier vessels. The initial absence in Saint-Romain of a potter's wheel, which constituted the crucial technical tool in the production of functional ceramics in their workshop in Reichenbach near Berne, led to a preoccupation with hand-crafted ceramic vessel-objects. These objects largely addressed the theme of the female form, reproduced as a torso, missing arms and including just a small part of the upper thigh. And where the head should be there is an opening, enabling a view into the hollow body built up out of clay. These are three-dimensional creatures formed out of earth and reproducing the earth in their colourfulness. They are vessel-like figures that take up the existentialist discourse of art of those years by reproducing the figure in a threatening fragmented and deformed way. At the same time, stylistically, these objects exude the spirit of Informel art and the Nouvelle Ecole de Paris, given their non-figurative colourfulness and the emphasis on the material.

Margrit Linck's artistic career started as of 1915 when she painted Heimberg Ceramics in a workshop in Wichtach. Having trained in the early 1920s at the Keramische Fachschule in Berne and the Kunstgewerbeschule in Munich, she turned her attention to modelling animal figures, which mutated into "Schaugefäße" (display vessels) as of the 1940s, undergoing a metamorphosis from jug and vase to animal and female figure. Her figurative ceramics of the 1940s and 50s particularly emphasised the ornamental painting underscoring the figures' corporeality and bringing out the characteristics of what is being depicted by means of linear and arabesque accents. During those years, and alongside her object like ceramics, Margrit Linck further developed her functional crockery at her own ceramics workshop, and initially this provided the family income. As Master Craftswoman in the workshop, she directed her colleagues at the potter's wheel, and finally, from the 1950 to the early 1980s, created the white craft- and design-oriented ceramics that are still made by hand in the manufactory today based on models.

In Saint-Romain she created archaic-looking figure-vessels that have abandoned functionality. They could sometimes be used as vases, but only for dried flowers as water would seep through their base. Given that their statuary, figurative qualities outweigh everything else, they easily stand just for themselves. The vessel-objects of the 1970s crafted as female figures emphasise the motif of striding and movement. In them, artistic questions prevail over the functional considerations in the vessel ceramics.

A series of works that she began after these striding leg-less figure-vessels, so to speak, illustrates that the hand-crafted objects raise new formal questions. Around 1978, Margrit Linck demanded that vehement interventions be made in the pieces which her colleagues were turning according to her specifications. The vase-objects, designated as "Zämetätschte" (also, more seriously, as the "Gestauchten" or squashed pieces), were turned axially and distorted, resulting in the body becoming fantastically rotated or buckled, collapsed. Drawings were done in preparation for their implementation as ceramics, which now went out of shape and sometimes even acquired cracks. Functionally, these vessels are very akin to vases, but the ironic

infringement of their utility-value turns them into striking individual objects with which flower arrangements are possible but not necessary. With these crushed, slumping constructs the artist Margrit Linck defiantly thinks vessel-ceramics anew, and also the sculpted body. Here the same basic existential questions raised by the torsos of her early years in Saint-Romain are discernible again. Thanks to the rigorous freedom with which the harmonically turned form is dissolved, these vessels cause an artistic disturbance and so confuse our visual expectations by stimulating the most varied emotions and reflections.

The figurative late oeuvre of the ceramicist Margrit Linck, who is over 80 years old, makes a surprising and blithe impact. In view of the head-section completing the hollow body – an intriguingly puzzling mixture of bird and fish – these late works mark a new direction.

The shapes, hermaphrodites hovering between the animal and the human, archaic figures, chimeras and doll-like idols, some of them quite tall, betray their formal origins in the "Zämetätschten" in view of their individual rotating movements. Their bodies partly recall vase forms, and the composition out of several formal elements has its roots in the working principle of designer ceramics from the workshop studio. But unlike those ceramics, these figures act out a narrative potential which becomes particularly graphic when works are grouped together. For example, when several of these happily chattering, lamenting, sulking, ironically gazing or shyly introverted but always female figures meet, a narrative dynamism is generated that provides direct and sometimes caricatural information on human types and behaviour patterns. These primal figures also recall mythical narratives and thus point to one origin of art.

The painter and graphic artist Rolf Iseli was so enthusiastic about this lively late oeuvre, among other things, because he was able to experience the genesis of the figures, having had his attention drawn to Saint-Romain by Margrit Linck in 1960 and become her neighbour. "In Saint-Romain her much-loved surrealism put down new roots, added to that her Bernese liking of the humorous and bizarre. All of that can already be identified in her early works." (Catalogue *Hommage à Margrit Linck*, Galerie Medici, Solothurn 1984, no pagination)

Rainer Lawicki