

FIRED WORKS
From left, 'S243', C334;
'V78', C350; 'V87',
C450; 'S285', C577;
'V4', C169; 'V61', C413,
all by Margrit Linck,
www.linck.ch

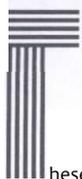


Feat of clay

As sales of Swiss-born potter Margrit Linck's work go global, it's clear to see why her ceramics have had her countrymen fired up for years

PHOTOGRAPHY: DAVID WILLEN WRITER: SOPHIE LOVELL





These days when we talk about midcentury modern collectibles, many of us are au fait with furniture designers such as Alvar Aalto, George Nakashima and Jean Prouvé, but what about the potters who made some of the era's most defining vase forms? Pol Chambost's sensual yellow curves (W*125), say, or Robert Lallemand's architectonic shapes and the Atelier Primavera glazes? When it comes to ceramics, most of us can't tell lustre from bisque. And whereas every home needs a decent vase, we don't often appreciate the difference between a hand-thrown one-off and a mass-produced crock stamped out of a mould.

The grande dame of Swiss ceramics, Margrit Linck (1897-1983), is barely known outside of her home country. Her artwork ceramics change hands for modest

prices among pottery enthusiasts, yet in Switzerland she has had an avid following since she chose to reject colour in favour of pure functional form back in 1941.

Margrit and her sculptor husband Walter Linck spent their early years in Berne before moving to Berlin in the 1920s and renting ateliers in Paris for the best part of the 1930s. Here they both soaked up the modern European artistic scene before returning home during the Second World War. The influences Linck brought back with her were those of artists such as Georges Braque, Fernand Léger and Joan Miro. She had little to do with contemporary potters of the time and retained an abiding passion for African and South Sea Island sculpture.

Linck started producing *gebrauchskeramik* (domestic pottery)

STRONGEST LINCK
From left 'V70', 6362;
'V52', €443; 'S256',
€442, all by Margrit
Linck, www.linck.ch

in the 1940s, deciding, as she said, 'to carry on where the old guard left off'. Her early forms echoed the local traditional pottery of Heimberg, where she first learnt her trade, but she soon moved on to a stricter, more modern geometric language, one which has clear African influences but also looks forward to shapes later found in Ettore Sottsass' ceramic totems.

Linck's pieces, all thrown by hand on the wheel and glazed in either black or white, are highly technical. They were baked for 48 hours apiece in two separate firings, where the difficulty of getting an even glaze and avoiding cracks and faults was not inconsiderable. Since Linck's death at the age of 86 in 1983, a team of potters has continued to turn out a maximum of 60 pieces per week in the tiny family workshop, all made to Linck's exacting specifications.

We are more used to seeing this kind of plain, formal ceramic in the context of the modern industrial process. But whereas a white vase of this era from Rosenthal, say, or KPM, is light and identical in its machine-made perfection to its neighbour on the production line, Linck's vases are weighty, individual and unique: a strange blend of modernist principles of utilitarian, functional mass-production and pre-industrial, self-sufficient cottage industry. They are neither rustic nor artsy-craftsy and, despite a powerful sculptural presence, could not be considered 'art' as a piece by, say, Lucie Rie or Hans Coper could be.

After Linck's death, her daughter-in-law Regula Linck von Kries took over the business and ran it until 2010. Twice a year, there are exhibitions and sales of the pieces in the family house and gardens, and many customers are regulars and old friends. Most pieces are still in production, but if you want something from the back catalogue you may have to wait eight to ten weeks for the piece to be thrown, dried, reworked, fired, glazed and fired again for you.

Since the beginning of this year, Linck von Kries' niece and interior designer Annet Berger has taken over as head of the company. She is passionate about the 'unique qualities of the handmade Linck pieces in an industrialised ceramic world', as well as the 'exceptionally clear formal language'. Her mission is to bring the work of Margrit Linck to a wider public by selling her ceramics in outlets worldwide. 'But,' says Berger, 'the quality and production in Switzerland has priority.' Which means if you find yourself having to wait ten weeks for your Linck vase, you should meditate on the value of patient appreciation. After all, it's a blink of an eye considering it will take pride of place on the mantelpiece for years to come. *