

MARCH 2011 OBJECT UNTITLED BY RUTH DUCKWORTH

DATE 2007

MEDIUM PORCELAIN

DIMENSIONS 60 X 60 X 10 INCHES

ACCESSION 2007.80 A-C

LOCATION G 275

THIS IS REALLY AN AMAZING PIECE OF WORK AND THE ARTIST HAS A FASCINATING HISTORY.

PROBABLY NOT AN OBJECT FOR CHILDREN. GOOD FOR TOURS REGARDING: 1. CERAMICS. . 2. LIGHT AND SHADOW AND 3. SHAPES??

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS:

1. WHAT DO YOU THINK IS GOING ON HERE?
2. WHAT SHAPES DO YOU SEE ?
3. WHY WHITE?

QUICK SYNOPSIS:

DESIGNED BY RUTH DUCKWORTH. SHE WAS ORIGINALLY FROM GERMANY. STUDIED CERAMICS IN LONDON.

IN 1964 SHE WAS OFFERED A TEACHING POST WITH UNIV OF CHICAGO AND STAYED LIVED IN CHICAGO PERMANENTLY. SHE DEVELOPED CERAMIC MURALS WHICH WAS SOMEWHAT OF A TOUR DE FORCE AS SHE WAS A FIRST TO DO MURAL CERAMICS WHICH IS A VERY DIFFICULT MEDIUM TO CONTROL. .

THE CHICAGO CULTURAL CENTER HAS DESCRIBED HER MURALS AS "CONVEXES, CAVITIES AND HOLES CREAT THE SILENT MYSTERY OF SOME KIND OF INNER SANCTUM AND CAN SUGGEST THE SENSE OF BODY AND LANDSCAPE SIMULTANEOUSLY. '

SHE WAS INFLUENCED BY HENRY MOORE, BRANCUSI AND ISAMU NOGUCHI AMONG OTHERS. SHE HAD A LARGE EXHIBITION AT THE MIA IN 2006. THERE IS A CATALOGUE IN THE LIBRARY OF THIS AND A GREAT WEBSITE: WWW.ARTSMIA.ORG/RUTH-DUCKWORTH.ORG. SHE DIED IN CHICAGO IN 2009.

BIOGRAPHY OF ARTIST:

Ruth was born 4-10-1919 maiden name Windmueller in Hamburg Germany. She was the youngest of 5. Father Edger, who was a Jewish attorney and her Lutheran mother Ellen. Raised in an ecumenical

fashion. She was a very sickly and tiny child. At 6 yo had pneumonia and almost died. She was not an academic like her sibling. Ruth was interested in sculpting at age 14 she was busy trying to sculpt clay/brick. When Ruth expressed interest in art school she was turned down as Jews were not accepted to the school at that time. Soon thereafter her father saw fit to move the family out of Germany. Her brother Hans refused the move for some time and later finally fled to the East Indies. The literature said that as she was a "half Jew" that was worse as it implied "a product of an unholy union".

At age 17 after being denied an art education in Germany she emigrated to Britain and lived with her sister in Liverpool. She studied at the Liverpool School of Art 1936 to 1940. In 1940 she travelled in N England doing her own puppet show. . During WWII she worked at a munitions factory. The literature said that she wanted to support the British in defeating Hitler and had actually defaced a Nazi monument as a young girl in Germany. Above her desk at the munitions factory a sign read "For every bullet more a German less" Her work was in polishing dyes for bullets. . After doing this for 2 yrs she was given a medical certificate as she suffered an emotional collapse.

"I was a rather depressed young women of 17 or 18 she recalls."My favorite artists were Rembrandt and Duerer and the poet Rilke. And these things got me over my depression. I thought if they can do this for me maybe I could do this for other people" (Chicago Cultural Ctr 2005)

She then moved to London, and began psychoanalysis for the next 3 yrs. . which was fairly unusual in the UK unlike the "continent". This analysis proved to be very helpful. She studied stone carving at Kennington School of Art. She and her future husband Aidron Duckworth worked together carving cemetery stones. . They married in 1949 and divorced in 1966. Aidron and Ruth set up a sculpture workshop in Surrey UK carving tombstones. One successful sculpture was Stations of the cross and can be viewed on their website: www.stjoseph-newmalden.org.uk. After meeting Lucie Rie a famous Austrian potter, she felt that was more training was necessary. She then enrolled at the Hammersmith School but stayed only a year. She found "the teaching was too doctrinaire. A pot must have a foot a middle and a lip" She spent a further two years studying at the Central School in London. About 1959 she began working more with clay in London. Her first kiln was paid for by suing the German Government for "loss of education". At that time she was known for producing beautiful coffee sets.

In 1964 she moved to US at the invitation of Univ of Chicago and taught at the Midway Studios. 1964-1965 and then 1968 to 1977. During that time she made frequent trips to Europe and Central America to study pre Columbian pottery. She also appreciated the British Museum display of pre Columbian artifacts which was an inspiration to her work. In 1982 awarded an Honorary Doctorate with DePaul Univ.

In the next twenty years she had many exhibits throughout Europe and America. She was at the MIA and Cranbrook in 2006 to just mention a couple. She remained in Chicago after retirement in 1977. She moved to a space in the Lakeview neighborhood in a former pickle plant. This area was large enough to appreciate and manage her murals.

ARTIST STYLE AND WORK:

“A sculptor in clay she continues a subtle understanding of scale with great sensitivity to her chosen material” (Gaze 1997)

Initially she produced finely made tableware using stoneware and porcelain. There is a large exhibit of these items in Buckinghamshire Country Museum UK website: www.buckscc.gov.uk I will try to put an early teapot on this page from that Museum This pot is made in 1969.



The Mexican pots in the British Museum tempted Ruth to try making forms using hand-building techniques such as coiling rolls of clay and joining them to create a form. At the time this technique was rarely used studio pottery. She also used the technique of pinched porcelain with an example at the Buckinghamshire museum. Examples and further technical information can be found on the website www.pottery.about.com/od/handbuildingtechniques. Duckworth made numerous trips to the British Museum especially to view the Egyptian art and the prehistoric Cycladic figures.

Ruth's work were reminiscent of the natural world an impression heightened by the use of glaze poured on to the pot to create neutral colored surfaces. The ceramic process was not disguised. Because of her interest in natural mediums and always experimenting she developed from tableware to decorative forms. In Chicago she became involved in abstract sculptural pieces and murals. The relationship between sculpture and architecture was of interest to Ruth. An example of this can be seen in her piece "Clouds over Lake Michigan". On our website: www.artsmia.org.Ruth-Duckworth. This is interesting as it was commissioned by the Dresdner Bank of Chicago and placed on their wall. . .Dresdner of course being a German bank. ?! It is 27 ft long It was later moved to the Chicago Board of Options exchange. Her life work grew from being a potter in Britain, to a sculptor in the US then transforming the art to be a modernist ceramic muralist.

In Addition to Clouds over Lake Michigan she completed 2 other murals. . . ! that are monumental. Earth Water and Sky her first mural for Univ of Chicago which was the defining point and first attempt at a mural almost 12 ft tall . She also did The Creation in 1984 a mural for the Congregation Beth Israel synagogue in Hammond Indiana. She was asked to select the theme. She selected the story of creation

as told in the book of Genesis. The concept sequentially unfolds the story of the seven days of creation outward. . .In the band that encircles the spiral of the universe to Adam and Eve she has carved Hebrew script. Similar to carving the tombstones back in Surrey. This is also on the MIA website.

Her medium as well as her style also changed over time. She began with stoneware clays tan, grey brown,. But as a medium is dense coarse very forgiving and plastic. But she went on to investigate the properties of porcelain which is lightweight, smooth free of impurities and intensely white or translucent when fired at high temperature. They appear to be opposite types of work. However she has made them both appear organic and asymmetric as in nature. . She spent equal time on the two.

Renwick said that Duckworth's works often set smooth and open shapes against sharp taut lines. . . .There is dramatic poetry in this intense and directed forging of flux and substance.

Her life and her life's work appear to resonate when she said: "This process is intuitive not intellectual. You have to learn to be spontaneous and trust yourself" Duckworth

There is a poem "Homage to a Sculptor" on www.writingwithoutpaper.blogspot.com/2009/10/homage-to-sculptor-ruth-duckworth-poem

A tour idea may be to use an IPAD and download her early work to see the transition also a piece "untitled" at the MOMA . Also download the process of the types of pottery she was involved with as about pottery website demonstrates.

RESOURCES:

www.artsmia.org/ruth-duckworth and the exhibit catalogue which is just behind the door at the MIA reference library

Chicago Cultural Center www.web.mac.com/dianethodos

www.timesonline.co.us/tol/comment/obituaries/article6906712.ece

CLAY TALKS Reflections by Ann Master Ceramists N Clay center MN 3004

RUTH DUCKWORTH, MODERNIST SCULPTOR Jo Lauria Lund Humphries 2005

DICTIONARY OF WOMAN ARTISTS VOL I edited by Delia Gaze 1997 Fitzroy Dearborn Pub Chicago Il

