Statuette - Motherhood symbol

Ceramics and Glass Collection

Accession Nr.:	82.46.1
Artist/Maker:	Kraitz, Ulla (1936 -)
Date of production:	1977
Place of production:	Sweden
Inscription:	jelzetlen
Materials:	stoneware with chamotte
Techniques:	ash glaze; celadon glaze (presumably); hand-shaped; high temperature wood-fired
Dimensions:	length: 39,5 cm width: 34,5 cm depth: 12,6 cm

Torso of a lifelike representation of a female body: side view of pregnant abdomen, hips and thighs with irregularly terminated edges. Her graceful, slender hand rests on the rounded abdomen, the gesture both protective and affectionate. The granular, groggy clay was fired in a traditional, high-temperature wood kiln. The uneven surface of the object is coated with a light green celadon glaze and a yellowish ash glaze; the wood ash deposited during the firing formed fine specks along the line of the hand. On the other side, the warm earth-toned marks of the fire and the heat can be seen (along with three metal hangers, so that the object can also be defined as a wall sculpture).

The firing technique is well suited to the chosen theme of the sculpture: the natural processes of the birth of a child and of this object are quite similar. Both labour and wood firing can take a long time, 12 to 14 hours on average, with immense forces at work. Along this analogy, the sculpture may be more than the representation of a single person, and may symbolize Mother Earth.

Wood firing is not very special in itself; historically, all cultures fired their ceramics in wood-fired kilns, though these were mostly made from materials that are fired at low temperatures (600–960 °C). Ceramic materials (stoneware and porcelain) that solidify at high temperatures (1200–1400 °C) were typically produced in East Asian cultures, with a few isolated European exceptions. There are thus many differences in the aesthetics of the ceramic art of the East and the West. In the East, the heat from the kiln and the ashes of the wood produce (partly) spontaneously formed, unique and unrepeatable heat impressions on materials that are often fired without glaze, which is highly valued in these civilizations, as are simple homogeneous or transitional, warm-toned, earth-coloured glazes. In the West, by contrast, porcelain with a snow-white body, colourfully painted and richly gilded, became the standard, so porcelain has been placed in the kiln in firing boxes. In the East, where the making of artisanal ceramics did not fall out of custom even after the introduction and spread of industrial mass production, there is a distinct aesthetic to, and vocabulary for, the various ash deposits, glaze runs, deformations and asymmetries caused by the firing. British studio potter Bernard Leach (1887–1979) was the first to attempt to bridge this cultural gap in the first half of the 20th century. After his study trip to Japan, Leach started the studio pottery movement in England, based on Eastern craft traditions and high-temperature wood firing. After Britain, the United States was the next to adapt the East Asian traditions of ceramics, transforming them in innovative ways. High-temperature wood firing arrived in Europe in the 1970s, and its influence went on to be far-reaching the world over.

This piece was created by Swedish ceramic artist Ulla Kraitz, whose works—along with those of her Hungarian-born husband, Gusztáv Kraitz—were on view at the Budapest Műcsarnok (Kunsthalle) in the spring of 1977. Motherhood was featured in the catalogue of the display.

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