

Iris Brendel 1

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‘Menschenbilder’ (Portraits of People)

Sunday 13th November 2005

14.05

Fragile Pieces

A visit to Iris Brendel, ceramics artist

The artist on her work and its appreciation

Length: 1:15 mins

Born in Berlin, 1933 to 1951 Buenos Aires, Argentina – Teaching, languages since 1951 in Vienna, 1959 Diploma at Academy for Applied Art with Professor Obsieger.

So, some short biographical details on Iris Brendel, which can be read at her numerous exhibitions at home and abroad. Behind these few lines there is clearly hidden a family history, that “could be suitable for any penny-dreadful, as she herself comments in her interview for ‘Menschenbilder’.

An eventful life

“I will not gloss over anything”, says the German lady who lives in Vienna: “That is not my style. Life is to do with losses, partings, defeat...”

And she begins to recount: stories of an eventful childhood, stories of a vivacious mother full of imagination, who moved in artist circles, of a father who had women at his feet, and who she describes, looking back, as a ‘confidence trickster’, a governess, who always stood by the children, and a charismatic, successful grandfather, who made his money in Argentina and whose life nevertheless ended tragically.

For more than 50 years Austria has been her home. For 15 years she had a relationship with the now world-famous pianist Alfred Brendel, they were married for several years. But she will only talk about this reluctantly – so it appears in our conversation in her studio: “I have told you”, she explains apologetically, “that life is also to do with learning how to deal with defeat and disappointments”.

“I contravene two taboos. I am old. And I am a female ceramics artist”. Iris Brendel in a brief, to the point description of herself.

Where form serves no purpose...

In this country, where applied art is ignored and clay work is not even ignored, the word ceramics artist is best described by means of a change in name: “Maker of objects” or “Arranger of fragile pieces”.

“I go by the name of ‘sculptress’, but I would rather be called figure turner/presser and shaper. I only work on unused balls of clay”, she explains pointedly and talks about her love of ceramics with much humour. The critical undertone in the conversation is clearly not meant to be missed:

“Perhaps you are familiar with the controversial quotation by Braque: ‘Art is only art, where form serves no purpose and has no relative purpose’...this sometimes throws us applied artists well and truly into the soup”.

Magical, fragile creations

In her home, there are not only several ceramic pieces by various artists to be seen, but also pictures, etchings, masks, old pieces of furniture, which partly come from her mother – items and objects from many countries and various cultures. In addition there are her own ceramic pieces – magical, fragile creations in bright colours, small round shapes, mysterious figures, often with wings; underneath, strikingly: an elaborate ceramic “carnival tower”, a piano player with long arms, extravagant ceramic heads of Mozart, Bach and Schubert.

With these pieces of art her love of music is expressed, for only when, after her study of singing in Vienna with well known choirs on concert trips, she had not achieved the aims she had set herself, she searched for new areas of activity and devoted herself to the possibilities of artistic creation using her hands – ceramics.

A place in the sun

So far, her ceramic works have been exhibited in New York, Cologne, Vienna, Faenza. She once wrote in an editorial for an exhibition of her ceramic work:

*Everyone, who presents their art in public imagines they will earn a place in the sun.
May her rays be gracious!*

Unfortunately, a serious illness prevents her from any further work at the moment. It is to be hoped that she will soon be active again as a “figure shaper and turner”, and as an “arranger of fragile pieces”.

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