

Nina Malterud

Nina Malterud (b. 1951) created quite a stir in 1987 when she embarked upon the construction of what is probably the largest vessel ever made in Norway. The urn was made to mark the entrance to the Museum of Applied Art in Oslo, where it stands today. The large earthenware structure needed to be fired in a custom built wood-fired kiln, and the finished product weighs in excess of 200 kilos. It was not surprising that such a task went to Malterud, a highly skilled artist who has a strong interest in the history of ceramics and has worked extensively with handmade, monumental vessels.

Malterud's vessels may be grouped in various series according to common form themes. Inspired by a metal wastebasket, for example, she made a series of square jars with sides that fan out from the bottom, which rests on four short feet. These serve as an important basis for a later series in which vessels are also square-bottomed, yet progressively narrow and end in a circular shape at the top. Cylinder and cube have become integrated. Although the theme is concerned with geometric figures, many of these vessels conjure associations with the animal kingdom as well, particularly those with small feet and surfaces reminiscent of skin and leather. One such example is *Armadillo* (1990) in the collection of the Museum of Applied Art, Oslo.

In her choice of material and technique, Malterud belongs to the pottery tradition based on the use of blue clay, slips, transparent lead glaze and firing at low temperature. As such, she works within a classic Norwegian tradition. Yet whereas function and utility have determined traditional forms, the aesthetic dimension of Malterud's expression seems to assume greater importance than the functional. This is apparent in the sculptural qualities of the vessels, for example, and the emphasis on the visual qualities of the plates. However, this is not to suggest a rejection of functional ceramics. For Malterud, there is no conflict between art and function or between working in large or small format. Issues related to form and expression, decor and surface are the same whether she is making large vessels or small cups, decorative tiles or functional dishes.

The plate series to which *Nebula* (1990) and *White Day* (1989) belong contains large, fragile works that are not suited for everyday use. On the other hand, these pieces are full of visual poetry. The plates are made as a thin shell in the

plaster mold of a limpet shape. The surface is treated several times with slips, glaze and lustrous colors, requiring most to be fired four to five times. There is no fixed idea beforehand as to what the end result should be. Instead, the plates are the result of a process in which "errors" occurring underway in color, glaze and firing are used to determine the next step of the process. This productive dialogue with the material has since become an important work method for her.

In the past decade, Nina Malterud has had a series of public commissions for larger works, where she has worked primarily with floor and wall tiles. In addition, she has been Professor at the National College of Art and Design, Bergen since 1994. These two factors explain why her production of unique objects has been modest in recent years, a situation that will likely change upon giving up teaching.

JV



"Ceramic Vessel" 1990 earthenware h. 60 cm