



1978 – 2013 35th ANNIVERSARY OF GALLERY MARIANNE HELLER



It is always enthusiastic individuals who make a difference. Marianne Heller is just such an enthusiastic individual who sets things in motion. As a gallery owner, she has dedicated herself to publicising contemporary international ceramics, and she has been doing this for 35 years. One thing has remained in all this time: her untiring enthusiasm for contemporary ceramics and her uncompromising desire to make quality ceramics accessible to the public that are otherwise rare in this part of the world. That is what has remained, but quite a lot of other things have changed in three and a half decades...

The 1970s – the time of self-fulfilment. A passion for peasant pottery had taken hold of Marianne Heller. Were there no contemporary ceramics? She looked around. Inevitably a pottery course followed. But she soon left making ceramics herself well alone. By chance, she got her hands on Bernard Leach's *A Potter's Book*. It was a revelation! Leach's doctrine of the wheel-thrown vessel, which was to combine functionality with a down-to-earth aesthetic and an anti-industrial ethic of unalienated craftsmanship became sacrosanct to Marianne Heller – at least for the time being. An old love of England was reawakened by her discovery of studio pottery. She went to see the potteries of the Leach school. These visits became the basis of lifelong friendships between the potters and the would-be gallerist. Ceramics and England – a field that was largely unknown here. The world of German ceramics, which was booming mightily at the time, had only just begun to open up to other countries. Some museums and galleries with pioneer-like zeal were trying to broaden collectors' horizons to include the international scene. Marianne Heller took the decision to try something similar with a gallery in her own house in Sandhausen not far from Heidelberg. And what could a Leach adept exhibit except the Leach school? Educating the public became her manifesto: "Simplicity is the standard" was the title of the first show at the "Gallery for English ceramics" in November 1978, with nothing but functional pots by makers including Michael Cardew, Colin Pearson and Bernard's grandson, John Leach. From the start, the response was overwhelming. Not only the number of Heller's Leachists grew rapidly – Janet Leach, Richard Batterha, Mi-

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The tale of someone who set out to bring the world of ceramics to Germany ...

chael Casson, David Frith, John Maltby, Svend Bayer and others debuted here with their pots – the whole business grew in no time. Once a year from 1982, the Festhalle in Sandhausen became the venue for the English Potters' Seminar: a public workshop after the English model, and previously unknown in this kind in Germany, intending to teach techniques and at the same time to develop taste and judgement. For a decade, this entertaining combination of demonstrations of craftsmanship and aesthetic education took place with over 250 participants, with legendary ceramic artists like David Leach, Colin Pearson, Henry Pim, Mary White and Mick Casson – Sandhausen became a place of pilgrimage for ceramics enthusiasts.

But in the meantime, Marianne Heller's vision had widened. She fast-forwarded through the developments in England in the post-Leach era. From sleepy, rural, functional pottery, an urban art form had developed whose ceramic statements had gained a freedom that ran contrary to Leach's doctrine. Even former disciples of Leach had gone through a transition which placed a personal aesthetic above the dictate of functional form. Marianne Heller's renunciation of the true doctrine was an organic process with infinite possibilities – the contemporary world of ceramics was opening up to her in all its diversity. She grasped

top l. Marianne Heller at the exhibition with Alev Siesbye, 2012
top r. the exterior of the new gallery
below opening of the exhibition with Sandy Brown, The Still Point and the Dance, 2007



below l. to r.

- interior of the first Gallery Heller in Sandhausen
- Far East Meets West, Isezaku Jun, Jeff Shapiro, Uwe Löllmann, 2008
- Marianne Heller talking to Kerstin Abraham and Ewen Henderson, 1999
- solo exhibition with Setsuko Nagasawa at Collect, London, 2009

right top to bottom

- Marianne Heller with Colin Pearson and David Leach, 1998
- English Potters' Seminar, Festhalle Sandhausen, 1986
- opening of the exhibition, Einen langen Weg gehen, 2003



this opportunity, guided by a broader concept of ceramics coupled with an extraordinary feeling for quality. The idea of group exhibitions or exhibitions with a motto went far beyond the capacity of a gallery in her own home: many times, the former synagogue in Sandhausen was to become the venue for major ceramics exhibitions – with the show for the 15th anniversary of the gallery, Towards the Future, showing work by 30 young British and German ceramic artists an absolute highlight. Before this, exhibitions with Czech and Hungarian artists had marked the transformation of the gallery. That the vessel was no longer the sole linchpin was proved demonstratively by the exhibition Aspects of Sculpture. Despite the internationalism, which was not neglected by German ceramics, Marianne Heller remained faithful to British ceramics – the elite of British ceramics exhibited with her: Gordon Baldwin, Ewen Henderson, Alison Britton, Ken East-



man, Sandy Brown, Julian Stair, Takeshi Yasuda, Felicity Aylieff or Edmund de Waal. And just as studio pottery had become urban, Gallery Heller moved into town: the more sharply defined profile of the gallery demanded a new immediate proximity to the public and a presence in an urban, cultural environment. In 1998, the "Gallery for Contemporary Ceramics" moved into generous new quarters in the centre of Heidelberg, in a pavilion in the Stadtgarten, and she immediately created a sensation with the exhibition Women in Europe presenting 45 female artists. And it could all have continued sedately, with programmes of international exhibitions, offering innovations on the one hand and demonstrating loyalty towards the gallery's artists on the other... but then, at Easter 2002, disaster struck. A fire broke out in the adjacent restaurant severely damaging the whole protected complex, and the gallery was gutted. The fateful question arose: What

is a gallery without gallery space? Anyone else would have given up. But not Marianne Heller. Her defiant answer was: A gallery is a gallery. For three years, she continued to run her programme at various venues, cooperating with museums and institutions that offered the homeless gallerist interim quarters, in the process demonstrating enormous respect for her dedication. It is also true that in exchange these institutions benefitted from phenomenal exhibitions: the Frankfurt Museum für Angewandte Kunst with the enigmatic porcelain vessels of Pippin Drysdale from Australia, the Hetjens Museum in Düsseldorf with the star British quartet of Gordon Baldwin, Alison Britton, Ken Eastman and Julian Stair, the Badisches Landesmuseum with a major Colin Pearson exhibition. The Gallery celebrated its 25th anniversary at the German-American Institute in Heidelberg with an anniversary exhibition of Gruppe 83. The London Fair for Applied Art, Collect, at the

l. to r

- Karl Scheid in conversation with Marianne Heller, 2011
- Edmund de Waal, setting up an installation in Gallery Heller, 2011
- Dr. Elke Ritt, British Council, presenting roses for the 35th anniversary, 2013
- birthday cake for Isezaki Jun's 75th birthday, 2011
- Edmund de Waal, first exhibition, 1997
- Isezaki Jun, 2011





above l. to r.

- sculpture garden
- interior of the new gallery, 2005

right, top to bottom

- Japan zu Gast, presentation, Munich, 2013
- Art Walk Heidelberg, 2012
- artists from the exhibition, Figurative Sculpture, 2012

Victoria & Albert Museum, provided an international forum for galleries to exhibit. This makeshift state ended with the official reopening of the Gallery in June 2005: Edmund de Waal and Michael Cleff in the inaugural show, Uwe Löllmann at 50 followed and a show of superlatives finished a year for celebration with an exhibition of 45 international artists. In the 30th year of the Gallery, Marianne Heller conducted a distinct reorientation of her repertoire: with the exhibition "Far East meets West", she turned her attention to contemporary Japanese ceramics. With the celadon glazed porcelain objects by Masamichi Yoshikawa and elemental works by Satoru Hishino, she opened a window on Japanese ceramics to the German ceramic world, which, with exhibitions showing National Treasure Isezaki Jun and cooperation with Yufuku Gallery in Tokio, have brought breathtaking quality in ceramic creation to Heidelberg. The ceramic series has been enlivened by little intermezzi with jewellery design. Finally, this year's 35th anniversary programme gives evidence of the Gallery's unique standing: old master of the avant-garde, Gordon Baldwin, Gustavo Perez from Mexico, Sandy Brown from the UK, Japanese porcelain and Gruppe 83. Without exaggeration, nowhere else in Germany can contemporary world ceramics of such quality be seen.

The 35th anniversary of the Gallery Marianne Heller – centre of attraction for ceramics lovers from all over the world – the unique creation of an enthusiastic individual. Yet she has never grown rich with her business. Her gallery remains a project that is to a large extent fuelled by idealism. The true reward for half a lifetime's work tends to be immaterial: Marianny Heller, now a board member of the Académie International de la Céramique in Geneva, enjoys the respect and trust of the ceramics world – the real, big, wide world. And she has filled countless people with enthusiasm for ceramics. She will continue to make a difference. Her enthusiasm for contemporary ceramics remains. Even if a lot of things have changed in the meantime...

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