

# INGRID RIPKE-BOLINIUS



*“You must be totally immersed in the form”*

DONATA HOLZ

Still and white they stand. Small bowls and sculptural vases fill the shelves of Ingrid Ripke-Bolinus's studio in Worpswede, North Germany. After throwing, she has not simply put them there but has consciously arranged them so that they form pairs or small groups with an aura that deeply moves the viewer. It is almost impossible to stop looking, and one looks and looks again, sensing the calm and the aesthetic of these porcelain pieces. It is in this that secret of the Ripke-Bolinus's work lies.

Ripke-Bolinus first encountered porcelain as a fifteen year-old. While she was training as a shop-window designer, she was often tasked with arranging porcelain objects. Even then, the material fascinated her to such an

extent that she purchased porcelain bowls, not realising that they were harbingers of her future. Her career as a craftswoman began with a study of clay. She says the experience that she gained of this material sealed her fate. “It sharpened my perceptions, shaped me and gave me the feeling that there was a point in living this way.” Life and work thus formed a unit where emotions and experiences from both areas flow freely to and fro. Ripke-Bolinus is familiar with a fundamental connection to daily work having grown up on a farm. In both areas, one is affected by crucial questions and problems involving matters of one's very existence that directly influence one's work.

In the development of her work, the transition from earthy clay to delicate porcelain may not have evolved



opposite page

top -

Small teapot and bowl on a table

bottom -

Bowls - d 12.5 - 9 cm, h 8.5 - 6.5cm

right -

Sculptural vessel - h 40 cm, d 11 cm

solely from developments inworking with the material; it may instead be based on fundamental individual processes. Ripke-Bolinius turned to porcelain to express greater lightness and openness in her vessels. She explains, "The delicacy, elegance and demanding level of craftsmanship required in making porcelain fascinate me."

She works in a state of utmost concentration in an almost meditative atmosphere of outer and inner calm. Sometimes a piece is made in a matter of minutes. The artist feels these moments are of existential value, when she moves simultaneously inside and outside a form, sensing the flowing movements of the porcelain. "I am always fascinated by the internal and external tactile perception of the growing vessel," she says. Consequently, the haptic qualities of the finished piece play a vital role. Discovering the smooth surface becomes a sensual experience.

Composure is an essential partner of concentration in the moments on the wheel; only thus can the ceramist arrive in a state in which the interplay of the hands takes the lead: as she says, "You must be totally immersed in the form." Only then can truly coherent results be achieved. This experience of inner and outer forces being in a state of tension in order to be able to form a harmonious whole also can be seen as a reflection of life in a philosophical sense.

When we follow the development of Ripke-Bolinius's work, it emerges that she concentrates more and more on the expressive qualities of material and form. In this process, her study of Far Eastern culture plays a major part. Zen philosophy, which strives to achieve a





Bowl - h 12 cm, d 30 cm

state of meditative contemplation, is reflected not only in her working methods but equally in the aura of her individual works. It is the beautiful simplicity of a teabowl, accentuated by an almost imperceptible ridge, the silent aesthetic of a teapot or the simplicity of a plate that lead the viewer to the atmosphere of a Japanese tea ceremony, expressive of respect for the beauty of things in connection with calm and contemplation. A similar emotion may be sensed when observing her sculptural vases. Stretching upward with their slightly round-bellied or elliptical forms and their fine, delicate necks, they have such expressive force that they scarcely need further enhancement through a bloom or a branch.

Her powerful affinity for Far Eastern culture led Ripke-Bolinus to study Japanese woodcuts, to which a special place is dedicated in her work. This technique, which evolved in the second half of the 18th century, focuses on representing people and things in stylised fashion with distinct, flowing lines; few of the planes thus created are filled with colour. The aim is to portray a certain character, which the artist only hints at. The final image only comes together in the viewer's mind. Hokusai is considered the most famous woodcut artist, and Ripke-Bolinus has devoted particular attention to him. She transfers elements from his work onto her own pieces, emphasizing the black lines and accentuating them with an individual colour. These elements represent moments in human relationships, couples, scored and painted on the white porcelain like a frieze. The ceramist succeeds in introducing small, fragmentary narratives into the stillness of the white objects, which through the harmony with the form and the white of the porcelain find their own expressive voice. Even when the figures seem to be in motion, they enable the viewer to become engrossed in the scene, stimulating their imagination, without disturbing the sense of calm.

Sculptural vessel: Shoulder - h 19.5cm, w 11 cm





Sculptural vessel: Sickle - h 13.5 cm, w 32cm

When Ingrid Ripke-Bolinius speaks of her work, one of her main concerns is the responsibility for the form that she feels as a ceramist. Forms that are created and are then placed in the public domain influence the viewers' perceptions and visual faculties. This role, involving direct contact with people and the way they react to her art, is an important aspect of her work. This is why she loves to leave the meditative calm of her studio to enjoy meeting and talking to her customers at ceramics markets, when she is often able to follow where her individual pieces go.

In this harmony between profound, meditative contemplation in her work and contact with her customers, Ingrid Ripke-Bolinius finds both fulfilment and new stimuli for her work. External and internal forces work together and form a whole, in her life and in her work: you must be totally immersed in the form.

**DONATA HOLZ**

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**Ingrid Ripke-Bolinius**

was born in 1961 and grew up as the sixth child in a family of farmers in North Germany. After training as a shop-window designer, she attended a CFE focusing on design in Bremen. She first worked with clay in the ceramics studio there under Lisa Jenneskens. Her intention then to study graphic design now changed into the desire to become a ceramist and she began her career in ceramics self taught. She came to Worpswede in 1984 and learned to throw at the Ursula Kohne Töpferei. She has been a freelance ceramist with her own studio in Worpswede since 1989. From this time on, she has exhibited her work at ceramics markets and in exhibitions in Germany, the Netherlands and Austria. In 2012, she won the Krefeld Lower Rhine Ceramics Prize. Judge Knut Michalik commented on the award, "Her work unites an impressive sense of design with outstanding craftsmanship. With their prevalent whiteness, the vessels she has submitted display a harmonious and exciting formal vocabulary."

**Technical details**

Limoges porcelain, thrown, assembled, altered. Elements from old Japanese woodcuts are drawn on the dried surface of the pots, then incised in the surface; after the first firing they are painted with porcelain slip and fired in an electric kiln.

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