

## Helene Kortner

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Vases have been a consistent part of Helene Kortner's (b. 1966) production ever since her Master's studies at the National College of Art and Design, Bergen in 1995. Some are large, others small, they may appear in groups or on their own. Some are ornately decorated while others are reduced to "pure" form. A common trait is that they are white, massive and heavy. They are constructed of rough stoneware, but porcelain is compressed into the surface. Where the inside is visible, there is also a porcelain layer or it has been glazed.

The first vases of Helene Kortner often had round, bulbous forms that recalled the female figure. Arranged in groups, they reminded one of women clustered in conversation. There are long traditions in which vessels are intended to personify women. The function of the vessel as a receptacle for water, a necessity for life, has its parallel in woman's life-giving abilities. In this sense, it is not surprising to see the shapes in these groups of vases playing on woman's rounded forms. In art, the vessel often symbolizes the womb, in which all life originates, or it may be interpreted in a broader sense as a general symbol of fertility. Kortner's vessels have a natural place within this realm of associations.

Over time, the vessels assume less the character of classical vase and female forms to become more closed, with a more indeterminable form and even more indeterminable finger holes. The form itself has remained quite organic, however, and these vases also give the impression of being a kind of "creature" where various openings allude to mouth, eyes and finger holes for handles. This corresponds to Helene Kortner's intentions for these forms, that is, that the vases should appear as organisms that "breathe." These organisms are easily likened to animal skulls, machine parts, archeological finds or ghost-like figures.

The ambiguity of the forms thus invites more than one interpretation, many possible associations. At the same time, they are vases. Even the most autonomous forms have an opening to an inner empty space. As such, they are true to their origins, craft art and the ceramic tradition, while teetering on the border of the recognizable and broadening our understanding of what a vase can be.

JV



"Vases" 1998 stoneware h, 90 cm