

Expressions of Form and Line

PÄIVI RINTANIEMI'S TABLEWARE AND SCULPTURE

by Lauren Kearns



I met Päivi Rintaniemi, a gifted Finnish artist, during a residency in France in 2016. I was immediately struck by her elegant approach to working with clay in both sculptural and functional bodies of work. During the residency, she created wall sculptures that were prototypes for a future large-scale installation.

Päivi began exhibiting her sculptures after completing her studies at The University of Art and Design of Helsinki, now known as Aalto University, with a Master of Arts degree in 1987. Her focus was a five-year study in ceramics, design, and art. After graduating, she created her brand and product line, Amfora. Originally, her plan was to work as a sculptor, but after her studies, she had a vision of an interactive tableware set. By design, each person could build their set with pieces that are useful and work with different food cultures, from Eastern to Western. All the forms coordinate for beautiful dining, food presentation, as well as superior functionality.

In 1996, Päivi opened a gallery in an industrial part of the city, Seinäjoki, where she also lives. To expand her market, she began exhibiting at international fairs. In 1997, she did her first fair in Japan, where she achieved tremendous success. After that, the public response to the work was so positive that she opened her current production studio in the back of the Amfora gallery to have sufficient space to fulfill the orders. To date, she sells her line internationally in Denmark, France (Paris), Germany, Italy, Japan, Norway, South Korea, Sweden, Thailand, Taiwan, the UK, and the US (Dallas, Texas).

A Well-Designed Product Line

Interestingly, and perhaps counterintuitively, the tableware product line started with a candle holder—Päivi challenged herself to create a smooth, seamless transition from candle to holder. Her line of ware consists primarily of three sizes of curved plates, four cups, four mugs, one goblet, three bowls, two sizes of leaf-shaped dishes, a tray, a creamer, a pitcher, a round vase, a cylinder vase, a candle holder/vase, four bowls, salt and pepper shakers, and a few other items. The plates have elegant curves that coordinate with the bowls to create additional shapes as the forms interact with one another and organize and

Opposite: *Ovo* mortars for spices, 4 in. (11 cm) in diameter, cast porcelain, hand painted, fired to 2300°F (1260°C). **1** *Thesaurus*, 35½ in. (90 cm) in diameter, handbuilt stoneware, grog, fired to 2282°F (1250°C). **2** *Flamma*, 37½ in. (95 cm) in height, handbuilt stoneware, grog, fired to 2282°F (1250°C). **Opposite, 1, 2** Photos: Sofia Rintaniemi.



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display food. Each size of the various forms, from plates to bowls to candle holders, is designed to work with other pieces to create a statement on the table.

Päivi's production ware is a thoughtful, well-designed line of functional pieces; the simplicity of line movement flows into each piece. Form is her passion, and, as she says, "I am not a color person." The palette she uses is only black and white, which simplifies the large studio operation. Each of the forms have an assigned pattern of black and white. This allows for food to be displayed as the focus and main element of color in the composition of the place setting. One green glaze is used occasionally for the shakers, vase, and leaf trays. All of the work is made of English porcelain and fired to cone 10.

Päivi and her husband, Markku, do all of the production, and have made all of the slip molds. She has a large ram press that she bought from Meissen Porcelain Manufactory. Much of the equipment has been purchased secondhand and altered by Markku for their specific needs including an adjustable-height table, a two-door kiln, a walk-in spray booth, and a large tank with a blunger mixer and large outflow pipe for casting slip. Each

greenware piece is painted by Päivi. She receives special orders for new pieces to create and has completed many large installations of her tableware. I have visited hundreds of ceramic studios in my life and I have never seen any private studio of such scale.

A Renewed Enthusiasm

In 2003, she started to create sculpture again, her primary passion. In 2008, she won the Finnish State Design Prize, receiving a monetary award, a 3-year stipend, and an exhibition of her work. In 2013, she won the Faenza Prize at the Museum of International Ceramics in Faenza, Italy, for her sculpture *Avis*. In 2018, she received the Artists Special Honorary Prize from the Finnish government, giving her a stipend for life. This will allow her to focus on her sculptures with renewed enthusiasm. The scale and texture of Päivi's sculptures are impressive and the work is elegant in the quiet and powerful forms. As with her functional work, space and form are her palette for sculpture. Unlike the tableware, when making sculpture, she doesn't have to think of clients or users, and can concentrate on her own concepts and wonder about how unique, fragile, and powerful life is at the same time. She





3 Group of molds filled with casting slip. All ware is cast in molds made of Päivi's original models. The molds are made by Markku Rintaniemi. **4** Päivi working with sculptures. *Photo: Sofia Rintaniemi.* **5** Markku and Päivi at work in the Amfora studio in Seinäjoki, Finland. The studio is behind the sales gallery. **6** The adjustable-height table that Markku constructed. **7** Display of dinnerware creamers, 3½ in. (9 cm) in height, and individual serving leaf-shaped bowls 6 in. (15 cm) in length, high-quality porcelain. **8** Candlesticks, tea lights, vases, to 5½ in. (14 cm) in height, cast porcelain, hand painted, fired to 2300°F (1260°C). **9** Dinnerware plates and bowls, to 11 in. (28 cm) in diameter, high-quality porcelain. **10** Tri-leaf plates, 11¼ in. (30 cm) in length, cast porcelain, fired to 2300°F (1260°C), wood. **11** Espresso cups, 2¼ in. (6 cm) in height, cast porcelain, hand painted, fired to 2300°F (1260°C).

explains, “This miracle and paradox of life is my most important power and passion.”

The movement of the physical and compositional line and a focus on space and form connect the two bodies of work. In both the functional ware and sculptural vessels, lines and curves flow harmoniously throughout each piece. Päivi states, “I’ll get inspired by observations and analysis of life and people’s behavior around me. As a designer, I like the quality of physical lightness, a multi-functional design for everyday objects that is also important for long-lasting, timeless design.”

As Päivi describes it, the difference between her work as a designer and an artist is that as a designer she lives an everyday life, but as an artist, she lives a holiday life. In the latter, her days are free to structure as she wishes, and to work as her passion and sculptures demand.

I see the simplicity and beauty of Päivi’s work not only in the design of the plates, but the totality of all the pieces for the table. The sculptures are a separate expression of the quality of form and the line that flows within it; like a planetary force where gravity contains the mass, the compositional line flows and is contained in the space of the vessel.

In one of our conversations Päivi said, “Love is the only thing that truly matters in the world.” I will conclude by saying that love emanates from every thoughtful, beautiful, graceful aspect of Päivi’s work, and from her being.

the author *Lauren Kearns is a professional artist, teacher, and creator/owner of the International Artists Residency Exchange (www.internationalartistsresidencyexchange.com), a residency program located in Saint-Raphaël, France. She has assisted students of all ages and abilities in ceramics and continues to actively promote the ceramic arts.*