

The Langenthal porcelain manufactory

From industrial design to Sunday china

MUSÉE ARIANA, GENEVA | 23 MAY TO 25 NOVEMBER 2012

PRESS RELEASE

Geneva, May 2012 – The fascinating history of the only 20th century Swiss porcelain factory began in 1906 in the Bernese town of Langenthal. Deeply rooted in the Swiss identity, the porcelain manufactory Langenthal SA – affectionately known by its workers as the “Porzi” – became noted for its cutting-edge technology, the diversity of its products as well as the quality of its porcelain. The artistic output followed the dominant aesthetic currents of the century while still preserving its local character. From Art Nouveau and Art Deco to the deliciously “vintage” designs of the 1950s and 1960s, from pseudo-rustic to avant-garde propositions, from collaborations with artists and designers to the influence of the artistic directors of the manufactory, the history of Langenthal is closely linked to the evolution of taste.

This collaboration with the Langenthal manufactory has been an opportunity to update the rich archives : hand-painted design books, catalogues of forms and motifs, publicity leaflets and brochures, archive photos. Loans from public and private institutions enrich and complete the important collection of the Musée Ariana (over 1000 pieces). All the conditions have been met to allow a portrait to be drawn of 20th century industrial porcelain in Switzerland.

THE HISTORY OF A COURAGEOUS PROJECT

When some notables of the Bernese town of Langenthal decided to found a porcelain manufactory in July 1906, they were armed with a good dose of courage and staunch enthusiasm. Indeed, after a century without any porcelain manufacture in Switzerland, there were no raw materials and, more particularly, no specialized local workforce available. They had to start completely from scratch in order to rewrite Switzerland into the porcelain history books.

After a chaotic start, production became more organized and the manufactory began displaying its goods in specialized exhibitions and fairs with encouraging success. The outbreak of the First World War curbed this momentum. In 1937, in order to reduce its dependence on imported coal, the manufactory constructed the first 24-hour electric tunnel kiln. This technological breakthrough allowed the company to increase and diversify its production.

After the Second World War, the manufactory enjoyed a heyday. The remarkable quality of the Swiss-made products enabled it to fight off the competitors. In 1964, the firm recorded the highest number of employees in its history, with 950 workers.

From the 1980s onwards, despite its modernisation efforts, the manufactory struggled to withstand the fierce competition within the sector and developments in tableware. The company was bought out successively by Keramik Holding Laufen AG and then by the Czech group, G. Benedikt. Today, although its name still survives, all Langenthal porcelain is manufactured in Karlovy Vary (Carlsbad) in the Czech Republic.

WIDE PRODUCT RANGE

Hotel porcelain

Ever since production first started and up to the present day, hotel porcelain has always formed an important part of the range. Functional and aesthetic at the same time, it can be personalized for hotels and restaurants, as well as for airlines and dining cars.

Household porcelain

“Make each family meal a feast !” – such is the aim of Langenthal tableware. The attention paid to the table, whether for family or formal occasions, reflects the care that owners bring to their home.

Commemorative and promotional chinaware

Porcelain is an ideal support for commemorative, political, tourist or promotional ware. Produced in limited series, these articles are an edifying source of information on major and minor aspects of Swiss history.

Electro-porcelain and technical porcelain for industry

The Langenthal manufactory began producing porcelain electric insulators for equipment, high-tension cables and railways in 1918, coinciding with the boom in electrical energy in Switzerland. Laboratory utensils, weights, sockets and thread-guides for the textile industry were also among the sophisticated products made by the company.

Artistic production

Right from its beginnings and throughout the century, the manufactory accorded great importance to artistic quality and to the constant renewal of form and decoration with the assistance of talented artists and designers.

LANGENTHAL, A HISTORY OF STYLE

The first years of the manufactory were marked by *Heimatstil* (Domestic Revival) ornamentation, produced by the painter Rudolf Mürger, its artistic advisor. With its floral patterns and garlands and figures of soldiers or people in traditional costumes, this nationalistic style corresponded to the company's desire to offer products in tune with local taste.

It was with the arrival of Fernand Renfer at the manufactory (he took up the post of artistic director in 1920) that the company embarked on the path of modernity. The flowers on brightly-coloured grounds, reminiscent of Art Nouveau, were replaced by more stylized Art Deco ornamentation, that left much of the immaculate white porcelain apparent. This inter-war period was one of the most brilliant for the production and pieces from that time are much sought after by collectors today. Since 1925, Langenthal has been part of the Swiss work federation, the *Werkbund*, a movement that aims to combine aesthetic concerns and industrial production by fitting the form to the function.

1956 saw the opening of an artistic studio for forms and decoration, directed by Fernand Renfer and assisted by his son, Pierre. In addition to the creation of original and innovative designs for tableware, the studio developed a high quality artistic section : flambé enamels, *pâte-sur-pâte* decoration produced by slip painting on porcelain tinted celadon green, as well as surfaces animated with striations or dots that are either painted or in relief.

The studio was also the centre for artistic collaborations with external designers, painters and sculptors. In 1993, in order to revive the market and to adapt to developments in tableware, the company launched the concept Bopla! The principle is a simple one : to produce annual series based on simple forms with brightly-coloured printed motifs by famous designers. The principle of the collection adapted to tableware makes it possible to create composite and evolving series.

Today, the range of products offered by the manufactory and made in the Czech Republic is mainly targeted at hotels and restaurants and responds to the contemporary taste for stylised forms and minimalist designs.

This exhibition has received the generous support from

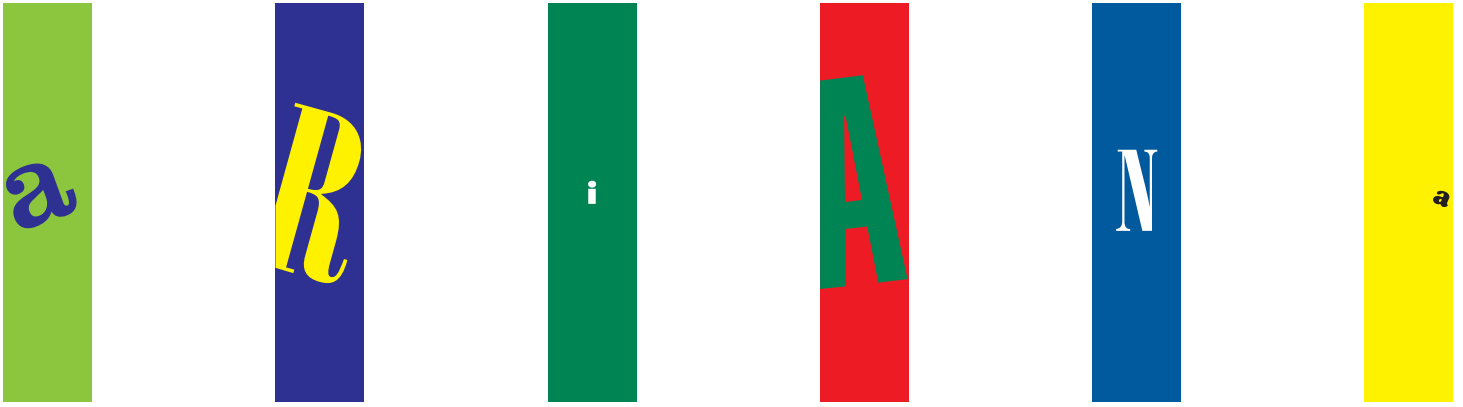
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Langenthal revisited

MUSÉE ARIANA, GENEVA | 23 MAY TO 25 NOVEMBER 2012

PRESS RELEASE

Geneva, May 2012 – Within the context of the exhibition devoted to the Langenthal porcelain manufactory, the Musée Ariana has invited five ceramists to offer their uninhibited artistic vision of this company, through a piece of work created specially for the occasion : Müller-B, Margareta Daepf, Magdalena Gerber, Michèle Rochat and Paul Scott.

In 1990, the Zurich ceramist **Müller-b-** (1953-) spent a month at the Bernese manufactory. During her stay, she took the traditional forms produced there, in particular the coffee pots, which now belong to a past era (the development of coffee-making machines has rendered this utensil obsolete), in order to reinterpret them and to produce an installation entitled “*Heisser Kaffee*” (Hot Coffee). The artist will propose a larger-scale vision of this conceptual work.

It is also the form of the coffee pot, in this case, the elegant Landi mocha coffee maker of the 1940s, that **Margareta Daepf** (1959-) has taken as a basis for her work. Here, the container has disappeared and from this gesture belonging to the past only the content remains, the aromatic coffee that pours in a perfect trajectory from the spout of the pot to fill the cup. The content has become object and everything surrounding it – the social ritual of drinking coffee in pleasant company, just like the Langenthal porcelain – seems to have evaporated.

With “Dschinn”, **Magdalena Gerber** (1966-), questions in a politico-poetic manner the disappearance of artistic and traditional savoir-faire in Swiss porcelain production. Totemic piles of Langenthal chinaware are covered with a froth of bone china porcelain, which softens the contours of the pieces, recalling the cargoes of Chinese porcelain lost at sea. Oscillating between beauty and ugliness, “Dschinn” associates industrial rigor and random form in sculptures from which a transparent cloud escapes – the spirit of a bottle.

Michèle Rochat (1971-) has worked for several years on ceramic decoration, attempting by different means to bring to light daily objects by taking a fresh look at them. Here, she adapts as her starting point a decorative frieze from a Langenthal service, which she disproportionately enlarges before reproducing it on a set of plates. Each piece bears a random decorative fragment that only makes sense when the whole series is juxtaposed.

The British artist, **Paul Scott** (1953-) is the only foreign ceramist in the group. For the Musée Ariana, he has recycled plates from a blue and white Langenthal service found at the flea market in Geneva. Onto these, using a transfer-printing process, he has transposed landscapes comprising the four Swiss nuclear power stations : Beznau, Gösgen, Mühleberg and Leibstadt, as well as elements taken from old engravings, in a critical and provocative juxtaposition that combines an idyllic vision of Switzerland and contemporary reality.

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VISUALS FOR THE PRESS

1 Vase, 1928 ?

Pale yellow and black enamel ground,
acid-cut gold decoration

Height 28 cm

Collection Musée Ariana, Geneva

Inv. AR 2006-17

Photo : Mauro Magliani and Barbara Piovan



2 Vases, 1928

Mauve and orange enamel and gold painted decoration

Height 23.6 cm and 18.3 cm

Collection Musée Ariana, Geneva

Inv. AR 2001-173, AR 2002-311

Photo : Mauro Magliani and Barbara Piovan



- 3 Airolo cups and saucers, 1929-1932**
 Polychrome enamel and gold painted decoration
 Height 4.5 cm
 Collection Musée Ariana, Geneva
 Inv. AR 2011-12/13/20/22
 Photo : Mauro Magliani and Barbara Piovani



- 4 Bellinzona coffee pot and sugar bowl, 1930**
 Polychrome enamel and gold painted decoration
 Height 17.5 cm and 10.5 cm
 Collection Musée Ariana, Geneva
 Inv. AR 2006-26
 Photo : Mauro Magliani and Barbara Piovani



- 5 Cup and saucer, vase and bonbonnière, 1932**
 Porcelain with celadon tint
 Blue and black enamel and gold painted decoration
 Height vase 20.8 cm
 Collection Musée Ariana, Geneva
 Inv. AR 2003-537, AR 2004-75, AR 2011-76
 Photo : Mauro Magliani and Barbara Piovani



- 6 Stone marten and penguins, Michael-Rudolf Wening, 1935-1941**
Rabbit, Edouard Marcel Sandoz, 1948
Marmot, Robert Hainard, c.1964
 Transparent glaze and ivory glaze
 Height penguins 23.8 cm
 Collection Musée Ariana, Geneva
 Inv. AR 11982, AR 2002-034, AR 2002-229, AR 2005-275
 Photo : Mauro Magliani and Barbara Piovani



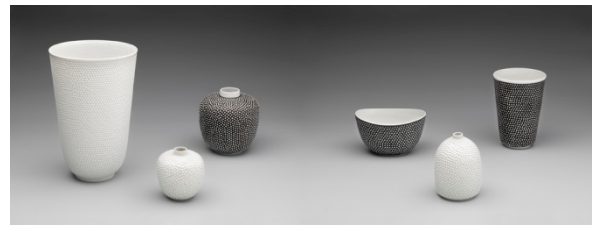
7 Vases and bowl, 1956-1960

Small dots in relief in white or on black ground
Height 31 cm max.

Collection Musée Ariana, Geneva

Inv. AR 2001-82/187, AR 2004-079, AR 2006-231, AR 2003-33

Photo : Mauro Magliani and Barbara Piovan



8 Plate, 1957

Pierre Renfer

Printed blue decoration under crackle glaze

Diam. 33.5 cm

Collection Musée Ariana, Geneva

Inv. AR 2000-399

Photo : Mauro Magliani and Barbara Piovan



9 Vases, 1958, 1959

Printed striations in grey enamel and gold

Height 16.5 cm max.

Collection Musée Ariana, Geneva

Inv. AR 2006-234, AR 2001-330

Photo : Mauro Magliani and Barbara Piovan



10 Cosmopolitan Services, 1975

Printed decoration in shades of brown, platinum ground

Height coffee pot 17.3 cm

Collection Musée Ariana, Geneva

Inv. AR 2005-211, AR 2006-87

Photo : Mauro Magliani and Barbara Piovan



Langenthal revisited

- 11 Müller -b-** : "Heisser Kaffee", 1990
Langenthal porcelain
Collection and photo of the artist



- 12 Paul Scott**, "Three Gorges after the Dam", 2005
Langenthal porcelain, blue printed decoration, gold rim
Width 25.5 cm
Collection Musée Ariana, Geneva
Inv. AR 2010-14
Photo Mauro Magliani and Barbara Piovan



- 13 Michèle Rochat**, 2012
Transfer print on Langenthal porcelain
Collection and photo of the artist



14 Margareta Daepp, 2012
Resin
Height 19 cm
Collection of the artist
Photo : Dominique Uldry, Berne



15 Magdalena Gerber, "Dschinn #IV", 2012
Langenthal porcelain, bone china, plastic
Height 90 cm
Collection and photo of the artist



NOTE TO JOURNALISTS

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With our thanks

Musée Ariana – Press Office – 10, avenue de la Paix - 1202 Geneva - ariana@ville-ge.ch

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MUSEUM EVENTS

Exhibition opening Tuesday 22 May at 6.30 pm

Guided Tours

Tour of the exhibition in the company of an art historian, on **Sundays at 11 am**
27 May, 3 June, 2 September, 7 October, 4 and 25 November 2012

No booking required, entrance fee payable except on the first Sunday of the month

Thematic Visits

Commentated visit of the permanent collections, **Sundays at 3 pm**

3 June 18th century Swiss porcelain

2 September From bowl to cup

7 October Ceramics as objects of memory

4 November The Roaring Twenties from Art Nouveau to Art Déco

First Sunday of the month, admission free

Guided tours in English

At 11 am on Sundays

June 10 and September 9, 2012

Entrance fee 5 CHF / 3 CHF

Führungen auf Deutsch

Um 15 Uhr am Sonntag

10. Juni und 9. September, 2012

Eintritt 5.- / 3.- CHF

Visits in sign language

At 11 am on Sundays

17 June and 16 September, 2012

Admission free for the participant and his/her companion

Thursday Talks

Talk by the Curator of the exhibition, followed by a lunch

Thursday 14 June at 11.00 am

19 CHF including lunch. Pre-booking required at least 3 days in advance

Summer workshops for children : *To your brushes ! (A vos pinceaux !)*

Painting on porcelain

For 8 – 10 years

Tuesday 21 August from 10 am to 5 pm

Thursday 23 August from 10 am to 5 pm

For 10 – 13 years

Wednesday 22 August from 10 am to 5 pm

Cost : 55 CHF per child, 45 CHF as from the 3rd child or for holders of the card *20 ans/20 francs*

Register online at adp-ariana@ville-ge.ch . Please indicate the surname, first name and age of the child, your contact details and specify the dates of the workshop requested.

Summer workshops for adults : *To your brushes ! (A vos pinceaux !)*

Painting on porcelain

Saturday 25 August from 10 am to 5 pm

Cost 70 CHF

Concessions 60 CHF (AVS, Association of Friends of the Musée Ariana, students, unemployed)

Concert

Sunday 16 September at 4 pm

“La Tasse” (The Cup), music and songs, with or without sugar, with the aroma of coffee, the taste of tea and the bitterness of chocolate

With Etienne Privat, Luis Alberte, Philippe Clerc, Jacques Vincenti, Jean-Luc Riesen, Julien Paillart and Lorena Parini

Pre-booking required

Cost 35 CHF

Concessions 25 CHF (AVS, Association of Friends of the Musée Ariana, students, unemployed, *20 ans / 20 francs*)

Writing workshop for adults

Saturday 22 September, from 1 to 5.45 pm

Led by Naël Lafer, in the presence of the artists

Pre-booking required, at least 5 days in advance

Cost 60 CHF

Concessions 50 CHF (AVS, Association of Friends of the Musée Ariana, students, unemployed, *20 ans / 20 francs*)

Schools

Guided tours of the collections of the Musée Ariana and of the temporary exhibition are free for classes from the Canton of Geneva. For schools outside the canton, the cost of the visit is 50 CHF, payable upon booking, at least 15 days before the selected date.

Groups

Commentated visits of the permanent collections and the temporary exhibitions

Number of places limited to 25 participants maximum. Cost : 150 CHF per group (75 CHF for institutions serving the community, subsidised by the City of Geneva).

Payable upon booking, at least 15 days before the selected date.

Bookings and registration

Visitor Services

Monday to Friday

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