



Three vases, all 8in high, porcelain, £80 to £100.



Bowl, 6in high, 8in deep, porcelain, £150.



Dish 12 x 10 in wax resist and brushwork, unique design, stoneware, £65.

our continuing and popular craft pottery series focusing on the history, the market and the prices of Marianne de Trey - magic and misery

by Joan Witham

This is how Marianne de Trey describes her life as a potter. For almost six decades she has experienced the 'crazy sort of passion' which motivates potters and carries them through. She has felt the joy and exhilaration, which come occasionally from the sense of real achievement, the making of a pot which meets all expectations and fulfils all the requirements of a good piece.

The technical side of pottery is far from simple, clays vary and glazes are all different. It is a matter of repeated testing and experimenting. It is hard physical work; some processes are routine and tedious and financial rewards are few. But imagine the thrill of opening a kiln to find that all has gone well and a new technique has turned out to be totally successful. Here then is the magic.

Conversely there is real misery when a newly opened kiln reveals glazes which have not behaved as expected. Such failure brings frustration after weeks of hard work come to nothing. It all has to be abandoned or a completely new start must be made. Marianne de Trey is a potter who, despite tragedy and disappointment has kept faith with her craft and sought to achieve the best.

Born in 1913 and brought up in a highly conventional family her hands always itched to be busy. She learnt to knit and sew and use domestic tools, with the emphasis always on techniques. These had to be just right, there was only one way and anything else was unacceptable. Creativity certainly needs techniques but it thrives on freedom to experiment, to do and to see things in different ways. Not until Marianne met and married

Sam Haile, an established potter and a revolutionary thinker, did she begin to take a new view of art, music and life itself. A three year textile course at the Royal College of Art had not given her the fulfilment she needed but regular visits to the V & A next door had taught her to look at things, at colour, shape, form and composition, all of which must have contributed to her later exploration of pottery.

Her first attempts in this field were in 1940 in America where Sam was teaching. When in 1945 they returned to England and set up a small pottery at the Bulmer Brickyard in Suffolk, she began to acquire a certain expertise in throwing, scarcely knowing that this was to be her life's work. Moving next to Dartington in Devon in 1947, they took over the old pottery at Shinners Bridge previously run by Bernard Leach. A small electric kiln was built specially for Marianne and they were both set to establish a career in ceramics.

Tragically Sam was killed in a road accident and Marianne was left to support herself and a coming child. Thus began a new life at the place where she has lived and worked for fifty-one years.

The domestic pottery produced at Shinners Bridge found a ready market. There was little competition at that time; after the war people were starved of colour and were tired of plain white crockery which was all that potteries were allowed to make for the home market. With three assistants Marianne was able to produce attractive tableware of good durable quality. Collectors will recognise the red earthenware body of this period and the mark (drawing of a shell) in a square or circle.

Plates, mugs, jugs, cups and various shapes of press-moulded dishes are readily available and may now be bought for prices between £15 and £35.

A variety of techniques was used for decoration - slip (liquid clay), combing, graffiti (patterns scratched through one colour to reveal a colour underneath), sponging and wax resist (a wax design is applied to an underglaze then a top glaze is applied, the wax resists this glaze and after firing, reveals the decoration). After ten years of this production disaster struck and the pottery burnt down. So, in 1959 she was faced with the decision either to rebuild and start again or give up altogether. Fortunately for the many people who love her work and have benefited from her example and her teaching, she started up again, changing from earthenware to stoneware. Using the readily available best quality clay from South Devon she produced robust and extremely practical pottery, still largely tableware but in a wider range and including bowls, dishes, lamp bases and pots specially commissioned for flower arranging classes at Dartington. The bases of these pieces are a creamy grey colour and the marks remain the same, a shell in a square or circle. It is possible to find tableware at prices in the range of £10 to £20, with bowls, dishes and lamp bases from £35 to £65. During the latter part of this period Marianne was able to undertake a good deal in experimentation in different techniques and concentrate on her personal pieces.

The hallmarks of her work are to be found in the delicate confident brush strokes, the economy of line and the mixture of strong and

subtle colours. Many motifs are derived from nature and could equally find their place in textiles. It seems likely that her early years of drawing with a brush, rather than a pencil, contributed to the confidence of her brushwork decoration.

After 1980 no more domestic pottery was produced and the change over to decorative porcelain was made. Marianne concentrated on her own work and collectors will find that individual pieces bear her monogram in a square or a triangle. (two drawings dTe in a square and dTe in a triangle)

It is difficult to price but expect to pay between £20 and £150. In 1983, she gave up the Shiners Bridge premises to Dartington Pottery and moved to a new workshop on the edge of the site.

During the whole period of tenure at Dartington Marianne had worked totally independently of the trust but had always enjoyed and valued the opportunity it afforded her to associate with crafts people from all over the world. She found time in her busy schedule at Shiners Bridge to found the Devon Guild of Craftsmen, to travel widely abroad, to give demonstrations and lectures and run courses. Her work was and is exhibited not only in Britain but abroad and sold in galleries, in Heals of London and the Design Centre. There are fourteen examples in the V & A and exhibits in other museums throughout Britain. Students who came to Shiners Bridge were welcomed by Marianne over a number of years and acquired not only the processes and techniques involved but also absorbed her enthusiasm and the wonder and joy of being a potter. A good many of her students are now well known potters including Jennie Hale who makes beautiful raku animals. She describes her time with Marianne as a great learning experience, illustrating her own feelings of magic and misery by relating how she often stayed up all night in the wood kiln shed feeding in the wood, watching temperatures and wondering how the firing would turn out. When 'gems' emerged there was general rejoicing. When failures appeared they were ceremoniously smashed on 'laughing rock' - on outcrop of rock nearby. Somehow this helped to ease the misery.

Collectors who already own examples of her work are constantly seeking to add to their collection, particularly looking for unique examples. Consequently the name is heard at fairs and in shops which deal in studio pottery. Whilst prices are still reasonable and examples are readily available new collectors would be well advised to buy now. Still potting in her 86th year albeit half time now, it is as if Marianne de Trey must go on trying, seeking the illusive something that defies definition. It is as if she cannot let go either of the magic or the misery.

Acknowledgements to Marianne de Trey, David Binch of Oakwood Gallery, Edwinstowe, Notts and Andy Bridge, Newton Abbott, Devon.



Punch bowl, 8in high, 14.5in deep, cups, ladle, 'birds on wire' pattern stoneware, £120.



Jug, 7.75in high £35, jug, 8.5in high, standard pattern £50, coffee pot, 7in high £45, all stoneware.



Tankard, 3in high, jug 3.5in high, two 'duck' dishes 2.5in dia. all painted decoration, tankard, 4.25in high, slipware; all earthenware, £15 to £25.



Lamp, 10in high, wax resist, stoneware £45, two dishes 3 x 3 x 3in £35 each, blue leaves decoration unique.



Domestic earthenware, lidded bowl 3.5in high, beaker 5in high, jug 3.5in high, sgraffito, all £20.



Tankard, 5.5in high, sgraffito decoration, earthenware £35, footed dish, 10.5 x 5.5 x 2.25in, sgraffito lines £40, pot, 4.5in high, ribbed stoneware £35.



Four vases, 2.5in - 5in, porcelain, £35 to £45.



Dish, earthenware 12 x 12in, relief and painted decoration, £100.