

Jewish Museum Berlin



Background Information

Margarete Heymann-Loebenstein/Marks

1899 (Köln) – 1990 (London)

Born into a wealthy Jewish family, Grete Heymann was the second child of Emma and Max Heymann, a textile trader. Grete's formal training as a potter was limited, but she was a gifted designer. Widowed at the age of 29, she ran a successful household ceramics company, near Berlin, also designing its products. Her designs featured bold, modern forms, abstract decorative motifs and vivid glazes. The products sold well in Germany and abroad and the firm Haël survived the financial crisis of the late 1920s. Loebenstein was later denounced by the local National Socialist group for "subversive activities." She sold Haël in 1933, well below its value, to an NSDAP member. He invited the young Hedwig Bollhagen to take over as artistic director of the workshops. In 1935, a defamatory article was published in an anti-Semitic newspaper. It compared designs by Marks and Bollhagen and stated that the design forms produced by the Haël workshops were "degenerate." Grete had business contacts in Great Britain, where she arrived in 1936. This enabled her to initially work freelance in Stoke-on-Trent for several well-known potteries. The modern "International Style" of design, with its lack of ornament and simplicity of form, had not taken hold in Britain. Grete found the local household ceramic market dominated by traditional forms and floral decoration. She made attempts to adapt her artistic style to the locality; she even changed her name to Margaret Marks. Yet, she failed to repeat the huge success that she had experienced in Germany, leaving her reliant on her husband's income and embittered. Grete focused on painting and travelled widely to discover new landscapes. In all, she lived in Britain for 54 years and continued to paint until the age of 88, when failing health forced her to stop.



Biography

1916-1918/19 Studies at the Cologne School for Decorative Arts and the Düsseldorf Art Academy

1920 Preliminary course at the Bauhaus in Weimar. Breaks off studies

1923 Marriage to Gustav Loebenstein, founding of the ceramics firm Haël with husband and his brother Daniel

1928 Death of Gustav and Daniel Loebenstein in a car accident

1933 Death of son Stefan, in a house fire; sale of Haël

1936 Immigration to Stoke-on-Trent, England, with son Michael; Teaching post at Burslem School of Art

1937 Marriage to Harold Marks, an adult education tutor

1938 Founding of the short-lived firm Greta Pottery with husband

1941 Birth of daughter, Frances Marks

1943 Mother Emma Heymann (née Feith) murdered in Sobibor, age 71

1950s/1960s Experiments with ceramics in her London home studio; takes courses at Camberwell School of Art to use the facilities

1970s/1980s Travels, paints and exhibits in British galleries