

Beneath the Cherry Tree — Reflecting on Influences from Japan

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Abstract

There is a Japanese word mederu, meaning "to look," "just looking."

When sitting in a Japanese garden simply looking, not seeing, you can feel the inner emptiness. The study of Far Eastern philosophies seems to be a means of attaining this inner calm.

A brief introduction to Maria Geszler Garzuly, Zsafia Karsai, Julia Nema and Agnes Husz's exploration of the impact of traditional Japanese notions to their work, these are examples of Europeans being enveloped in what might be called the "New Orientalia."

Cherry trees blossom at the same time in Hungary and in Japan. In Hungary, we are surrounded by this Japanese atmosphere, without knowing the significance of the flowering cherry tree. Young ceramists were also inspired by the Japanese artists who come to work in international studios. But the strongest influences occurred when Hungarian artists went to Japan as resident artists.



Fig. 1. Maria Geszler Garzuly, *Samurai*, 2000, porcelain, copper wire, wood firing, salt-glazed, 108 x 39 x 17 cm

Maria Geszler Garzuly (Fig. 1) first went to Japan in 1966, inspired by the woodblock prints of Utamaro and Harushige. Images of these old prints appeared on the surfaces of her ceramics.



Fig. 2. Maria Geszler Garzuly, *Cello*, 2007, series from Dream of Seto, porcelain, silkscreen, hand painting, 80 x 29 x 14 cm

Her work (Fig. 2) reflects the passing of time: uniting ancient ways and contemporary Japanese life. Today in Kyoto, ladies in elegant silk kimonos are seen talking on mobile phones.



Fig. 3. Zsofia Karsai, *Aphorism*, 2008, Sentences can be read by rolling the two separate cylinders. Stoneware, metal accessories, glaze, 30 x 47 x 10 cm

Zsafia Karsai (Fig. 3) stayed in Japan for several months for a residency in 1993, where she was deeply impressed by the temples and gardens.

Aphorism resembles a Buddhist prayer wheel. In rolling the cylinders, can be read the words: "dust is rushing" and "stone has patience." A reflection of Buddhist's teaching.



Fig. 4. Zsafia Karsai, *You Needed*, 2018, Sand Press series, coloured stoneware, 30 x 21 x 8 cm

The Sand Press work has influence from the stone gardens (Fig. 4).

Similar to enjoying the freshly raked white sand: a means to attain inner silence.



Fig. 5. Julia Nema, *Breath*, 2010, natural ash-glaze, porcelain, natural deformation in fire, 8 x 50 x 6 cm

Julia Nema (Fig. 5) first went to Japan in 2005 to do research in ceramic wood firing, where she was fascinated by the natural impact of the flame. In the work *Breath*, feels like the shape has been deformed into translucency when abruptly interrupted while taking a deep breath under fire.

She developed the use of thin porcelain stripes to create simple rectangular forms with stunning natural flame marks of shadow and light.



Fig. 6. Agnes Husz, *Spirals*, 1993, installation, stoneware, black engobe, wood sticks, 300 x 300 x 300 cm

The matrix of my work is a series of spirals. (Fig. 6) With the circular movements of dynamic drawings in and swinging out, come reflections on never ending motion, on circumvolution.



Fig. 7. Agnes Husz, *Torso*, 2002, stoneware, painted with engobe, glazed, 45 x 35 x 22 cm

In my work (Fig.7), one of the very important aspects is the active life force of the clay.

I let myself to be carried by the mystery of a process that is repeated again and again. Stretching the clay strip by hand, flinging it up into the air, and slapping it down on a board. Hence, the inside structure of the clay is modified. The clay particles are reconstructed, giving a beautiful relief to the surface that adds a particular aesthetic to the work. However, this beauty is not my goal. I need the long flat clay strip to make a shape, which is only possible in this way.

As the Japanese philosopher Soetsu Yanagi: "To create something is not a simple technical process, it is more a contemplative experience."

In conclusion, I ask, why is New Orientalia influencing the world today?

There is a Japanese word *mederu*, meaning "to look," "just looking."

As when sitting in a Japanese garden simply looking, not seeing, you can feel the inner emptiness.

The works shown are about calmness.

The study of Far Eastern philosophies seems to be a means of attaining this inner calmness.

The small spiral held in two hands is like an innocent life. The vulnerability of life, as with the cherry blossoms, reminds us of the fragile and briefness of life. All of that is living.