

Xth International Ceramics Symposium in Römhild



Doris Weilandt

Eight artists met in August in the traditional ceramics town of Römhild, Thuringia, for the anniversary symposium. A new studio had been especially set up in the north wing of Glücksburg Castle. Thanks to intensive efforts on the part of the city authorities, the former castle chapel, which had long served as living quarters over several storeys, could now be transformed back into one large hall. In the course of the building work, archaeologists found a ceramic kiln from the 13th century. The theme of the workshop was predestined to be *genius loci*.

From more than 60 applications, a jury selected Tanya Preminger (Israel), Kenichi Harayama (Japan), Irina Razumovskaja (Russia), Ucki Kossdorf (Austria), Sylvia Nagy (USA), Tziri Dempsey (Hungary/Ireland), Rafa Pérez (Spain) and Gudrun Sailer (Germany). For four weeks, they worked

intensively with variously coloured clays but also with variously grogged clay bodies, experimented with technologies and discussed forms. Kenichi Harayama found a new technique for his own work through meeting the other workshop participants in Römhild. He modelled large objects from clay in various shades. Natural structures like wasps' nests or similar finely woven paper formations gave him inspiration. Like a tornado, he spun the material into interesting shapes that developed the brilliance of their colour after the firing.

Spanish ceramicist Rafa Pérez also worked with colour and the various properties of the different bodies. What interests him is the elemental forces at work in the clay. His sculptures, which are inspired by nothing but the earth, reveal subtle structures that look like they have been deposited in layers or that they have melted and

blended with each other. Like the crust of the earth with volcanic activity beneath it, some of the forms expand, burst open and reveal the interior. Unchecked growth and rational control in its widest sense play an important part here.

Tanya Preminger and Sylvia Nagy worked on large-scale sculptures. Preminger, who has a worldwide reputation for her stone sculptures and her land art projects, made a "Fountain" more than two metres in height from brick-red clay, which lives from the tension of opposing forces. Thick pipes rise vertically on one side to then pour downwards in a twisted knot. Elegance and severity meet playfulness and delight. Sylvia Nagy's work has a scientific background. The artist transformed one of her own graphic templates into an above life-size sculpture. Based on the theory of black holes, mighty dark columns support



above - symposium participants with Reinhard Keitel (right)
left - Tziri Dempsey (Hungary / Ireland) with Kenichi Harayama (Japan)

opposite page - top row, l. to r.

- Tanya Preminger (Israel) working on her sculpture, "Fountain"
- Sylvia Nagy (USA)
- Irina Razumovskaja (Russia)
- Gudrun Sailer (Germany)

second row, l. to r.

- Ucki Kossdorf (Austria)
- Rafa Pérez (Spain)

bottom - closing exhibition



an arc. This gateway made of black clay draws everything in but cannot be closed. An alien tries to overcome the frontier of the impossible and is portrayed at the moment of movement.

The half-timbered houses of the Thuringian town of Römhild inspired Russian ceramicist Irina Razumovskaja to integrate this manner of building in her own work. Right outside her studio window she could see a building in the castle courtyard with an upper storey built with this kind of wooden structure. In a daily dialogue with the half-timbered building, a multi-piece installation was created that had a meditative character. Plinths with a light, painterly surface led to the dark, figurative sculptures.

Tziri Dempsey also used severe geometrical forms to construct black boxes. This camera obscura can project sensitive messages in porcelain, with the artist's main concern being a study of human perception. The apparatus is a metaphor for human consciousness turned upside down. Even the fine sand surrounding the piece has a symbolic meaning. It stands for the moment that can be blown away at any time. Dempsey also conducted experiments in form in Römhild. Through casts of foam material, she made series of small sculptural objects with natural looking surfaces.

For Ucki Kossdorf and Gudrun Sail-

er, the human figure was the dominant theme, which the two artists approached in different ways. Kossdorf fitted the eight participants into the cycle of life, a metal wheel, which became the globe of the world through rotation. The figures are compressed to form blocks, one side finished graphically, the other sculpturally. Bodies pressed into frames illustrate the constraints everyone is subjected to. Her other work too is reduced to essentials, made in Römhild of hard, grogged stoneware. Gudrun Sailer's figures seem fragile. She uses the properties of the material to achieve her artistic aims. The artist found walls made of basalt when studying Celtic remains on the Kleiner Gleichberg near Römhild, where they built a major settlement. One of the figures she built after this walks over dark shards. Another piece is

about Pandora, the woman made of clay by Hephaistos. This fragile, kneeling figure prompts the observer to think about her story.

The Xth International Ceramics Symposium drew to a close with an exhibition in the Werkhalle (photo below). The former chapel with its large windows overlooking the courtyard proved not only to be an outstanding studio but it also provides a suitable ambiance for exhibitions. The organisers clearly still have major plans – between symposia, a school of ceramics and crafts is to be set up there, where symposium participants can get also involved.

Doris Weilandt studied art history, classical archaeology and ancient history in Jena and Halle. She works as a journalist, writer and art historian.

