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Otakar Slíva's Raku fired ceramic figures

'I am at home wherever my kiln is set up.'

This is the motto of the Austrian ceramic artist Mag. Otakar Slíva, emigrant from former Czechoslovakia. He has often moved, taking with him the various self-made, portable Raku kilns and has travelled with them all over Europe to introduce and teach his special field, the combination of Raku and paperclay.

In the 1970s, Otakar studied sculpture and ceramics in Ostrava and Olomouc (now the Czech Republic) and later on, taught at an Art school in Moravia.

When he emigrated to Austria in 1987, he got in touch with Camille Viot's Raku book and took part at an inspiring 'kalkspatz' workshop with the Japanese potter Mitsuya Nyiama. This made him turn away from formal clichés and technological traditions. With the courage to break new ground, he experimented with shape, material and firing techniques. The results surprised even experts.

Modelling with his self-mixed mass of grogged clay and paper cellulose, he adds metal parts to his work. He fires raw, even moist and sometimes already glazed pieces in the Raku kiln. Contrary to the doctrine, he does Raku firings with paperclay and paper porcelain.

His figures are sculptured by removing and adding material and he lays emphasis on the structure of the surface. The clay - malleable and fragile - should not lose its material-related identity.

The matt glazes, which contain a lot of metal oxide, are self-made too. Similar to the ash in his wood-burning kiln, they lead to subtle coloring and a mysterious aura.

Technical perfection and objectivity, which prevail today's ceramic art, do not interest him.

Nevertheless, it is a long and well-considered process to reach the sculptures clear shape and the desired effect on the viewer.

For as individual as an animal or a group of figures might be designed, they also represent the inherent symbolic elements, the archetypes. Changing proportions seem to be made with no care, but instead they are consciously chosen to convey emotionality and to increase the drama and dynamism.

A quote from a lecture for "kalkspatz" about leading courses makes Otakar Slíva's attitude clear: "Many of my course participants work with clay in their leisure time and it should also be fun. In today's world of virtual technology, two things become more and more important: to satisfy one's wish for something solid, earthy, that you can touch, and to express one's creativity. The metamorphosis from a shapeless and uncolored mass to a beautiful glazed piece is full of mysticism. The attraction of fire, that makes this mystery possible, is irresistible and fundamental".

(text: Astrid Sängner)

personal record:

- 1952 born in Mistek, Czech Republic
1973 - 80 studies of Fine Arts and Czech language in Ostrava and Olomouc,
sculpture at Prof. Z. Kucera
1981 - 87 teacher for Fine Arts, own ceramic studio
1987 emigration to Austria
1989 setting up the "ceramic studio Sliva" in Vienna, first Raku-firing experiences
1995-2001 employment as an occupational therapist
2000 first working trip to New Mexiko, exhibition in Santa Fe
since 2001 freelance artist in Burgenland, Austria
2002 study tour to Great Britain;
first Anagama – firing in Burgenland
2003 study tour to Japan, IWCAT, Tokoname;
First Prize at the Competition Gmunden (A)
2004 working trip to New Mexico (U.S.A.),
exhibition in the Justin Robert Galleries, Santa Fe
participation at "Biennale de la Sculpture en Ceramique" Mamer,Luxembourg
2005 building own Anagama kiln in Burgenland,
working trip to Almaty (Kasachstan) and New Mexico (U.S.A.)
2006 moving to Lutzmannsburg, continued teaching in 3- to 6- day workshops
in-house "Beim Storchennest" and with course organizers across Europe
(German-speaking countries, France, Holland, England, Slovenia, Italy, Greece,
Poland, Belgium)
2013 invitation to Fuping (China), working for local museum
publication of the book "Paperclay, ein besonderes Tonmaterial" with Astrid
Sänger
2016 travel to Great Britain, lectures in (Carlisle) and Wales (Cardiff) in terms of the
book presentation "Paperclay, the Perfect Union" (translation 2015)
2018 lecture for Japanese ceramists about paperclay in Sasama (Japan)

Selection of exhibitions:

- 2001 Holland Art Fair (Den Haag, NL)
Galerie Im Ersten Stock (Mödling, A)
2002 Gallery Rooyart (NL), Untergrub (A)
2003 "Kunstforum" Salzburg (A)
Gallery "Inax", Tokoname, Japan
2004 Justin Robert Galleries, Santa Fe, New Mexico (U.S.A.)
2005 Gallery Tengri Umaj Almaty, Kazakhstan
Justin Robert Galleries, Santa Fe, New Mexiko (U.S.A.)
Galerie Pyramida, Prague, Czech Republic
2006 Arte Binningen, International exhibition (CH)
Ferrette Art (F)
Art Expo 'Tout Feu Tout Flamme', Paris (F)
2007 Gallery De Stegge (Winterswijk, NL)
2008 Gallery Time, Vienna, „Integration in der Emigration“ (A)
Galerie „Medizin und Kunst“ Neuhofen (A)
2009 „Keramik im Steinbruch“, Oberpullendorf (A)
„Salon Jardin“, Wien-Hetzendorf, Vienna (A)
„Kunsthau Weiz“, Weiz (A)
2010 Kunsthau Rapp, Wil (CH)
2011 Musee de la Ceramique Bernard Palissy, Lacapelle-Biron (F),
2012 Garten und Kunst, Bella Bayer, Hartberg (A)
Saint Leu La Foret, Paris (F)
2002 – 2019 „Galerie im Ersten Stock“, Mödling (A)
2013 – 2018 „Kunsthau Rapp“, Wil (CH)
2021 exhibition "Solstice" in Ferrette (France)