

THE DISCOVERY OF SLOWNESS

The Work of Roland Summer

Roland Summer (born 1955) lives and works in Velden am Woerthersee, a small place in Carinthia in the South of Austria. The fantastic scenery invites to stay and relax but as you can imagine, in such surrounding creative working is possible too.

In principle Austria is not the country for ceramics. Going back to historical roots so as "Gmundner Keramik" which came into being close to the German border and later the ceramics of the "Wiener Werkstaette" but all in all here the modern ceramic was not able to find convenient structures. All over Austria museums are not to be found which are dedicated specially to this type of Applied Arts, no galleries to represent the ceramic artists internationally, no centres and hardly collectors for contemporary work. The more it is amazing that this small country produces ceramic artists who are able to pass an international comparison and even find immense approval. Without any doubt one of them is Roland Summer. His work does not have much affinity to Austria, it is only the place for creation. Independent of this place it is a product in a globalized world. His forms and technics show the examination to past cultures of different continents. Africa especially Sudan plays a certain role the same as Asia and of course Europe. Summer works with Raku, an old Japanese pottery method which was inseperable of Zen Buddhism and Tea Ceremony in former times. Just as important for his work is the use of Terra Sigillata original from Italy of the Roman's period, applied in a very specific way. His wide knowledge of ancient cultures and technics means only the starting point for his own creations which have to be placed in the presence – here and now – overcoming traditions, indicated to the future.

Roland Summer 's turning to ceramics arised late. First he passed his studies of architecture at the Technical University of Graz (1974-80). Although he decided against this branche, the contact to architecture and its questions

which are a matter of humanity at least, determined. Above all the encounter with Hugo Kuekelhaus (1900-1984), one of the most important initiators for pedagogy (Erfahrungsfeld der Sinne – Field of Perception for Senses), architecture and ecologic way of thinking, considered consequently was the determined impulse for Summer's turning to ceramics. Impressed by the versatility and ability to connect the most different things in front of the mental eye he decided to create something by using hands, not to plan extensive but to create and build in detail.

After a long period of experimenting, many wrong and roundabout ways Roland Summer found his own way end of the eighties. Time did and still does play an important part. Looking at his work you find and realize it – in an absolutely positive manner. Not using the fast pottery wheel he coils his ceramics inch by inch. Slowly organic, soft rounded forms grow out of themselves. This is in accordance with his technics of burnishing and using the Terra Sigillata and its characteristics.

The "magic moment" does not only happen after the firing but already in the moment when the moistly gleaming look of the handbuilt and burnished piece is evident. This is one of the most exciting moments of the processing. It does not mean that the further treatment is not important. Another step follows – the application of the Terra Sigillata which could be different regarding the colours and will have a decisive meaning for the final appearance. The Terra Sigillata does not only bring back the shiny surface which was lost by the drying process of the work but is also the layer for the smoke traces which are so characteristic for his work.

After having developed his own methods Roland Summer calls it "Lost Glaze". After the biscuit firing the vessels are covered with a separating slip, sometimes in combination with glaze. Lines are drawn into but even without processing craquelés are appearing after the raku firing. The coat bursts during the cooling phase by plunging in water leaving the negative at the surface just as smoke traces.

Out of a certain distance the pieces look like conventional glazed ceramics, coming closer irregularities of the drawing become evident, lines and craquelé patterns start to be blurred. They are not really existent but only their

negative picture. At the same time they form an unseperable unit with the vessel not appearing as coat but as a material itself. This the difference between Summer's work and glazed ceramics. For him the glaze is a supplement, a surface cover which does not arise out of the piece. Typically the glaze is crackling away, it is only a medium for the purpose but not part of the completed object.

The smooth and burnished surfaces give depending on drawing and colour totally different aesthetic qualities. The vessels with their lines do get nearly an etheric character and the latest light coloured work with its tender clouded smoke traces let us associate marble.

Important for Roland Summer is the opportunity to look into his ceramics. They have an opening to make inside and outside visible and touchable. This makes obvious that they are vessels – also for his latest works with asymmetrical protrusions which let us think of Hans Arp or of kind of idol shapes. Always vessels not objects, and nearly constantly round forms play the important role. Beside this round forms appear more erotic than square ones. And in Summer's work eroticism play an important although hidden part. One of those who admire him, a Korean lady expressed it in the way that the bodylike forms with the smooth flattered surface might be compared to the "skin of women" .

A further aspect in this context are the "Pairs" which lead like a red thread through his work since middle of the nineties. It is not only a side by side of two vessels, they do not only correspond with the space around but above all together and build up a certain relationship. The space between appears as negative space ("empty space") and reaches a special importance. Out of the vessels developes architecture in space. Just in case of the Pairs it becomes evident how Summer's view on space is influenced by his former studies of architecture.

Regarding Summer's work over the years shows constants and changes become noticeable. Mutual for his work is a very meditative character which does not concern only the outer forms but also the processing which developes out of his methods.

Above all the vessels of Roland Summer show a special austerity which starts to dissolve recently. In spite of austerity and precision the work does not appear lifeless, cold or tedious. Hardly visible irregularities, small movings, slightly diagonal instead of straight lines make the vessels always being full of life and tension, supported by irregularities and accidents of smoke traces. Some forms let you know and realize clear lines of developing – this in case of growing together of pairs like melting to an unique one. Some of pieces reminding of fruit forms do have their origin in this development, others follow a further line so as porcelain objects which were produced out of an exhibition project of the Meissen Manufacture in 1999.

Even it was an unique trip to the world of porcelain it shows the character of his work: his eyes open and his being interested in experiments. Each step is well reflected This state of mind makes his work independent and the reason for his being international honoured and awarded numerously. Countries where his work was shown include Germany, France, England, Spain, the Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, USA, Australia, India, Taiwan and South Korea.

It is to realize that Roland Summer belongs to the very few ceramists in Austria who finds worldwide appreciation.

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