International Festival of Postmodern Ceramics *in Varaždin, Croatia*

Bernd Pfannkuche

In a relatively small but very lovely city full of Baroque arcitecture, Varaždin in Croatia, two dedicated women, Blazenka Soic Stebih and Danijela Piculjan have managed to organise and run a competition with competitors and of a quality that does not need to fear comparison with other international competitions!

That is phenomenal! And it shows once again that is up to individuals who want to make a difference and who have the brains and the necessary sensitivity to put their ideas into practice.

This was the third time the competition, "The International Festival of Postmodern Ceramics" had taken place, and 550 entries from a total of 42 countries came in. After a preliminary selection by the judges based on photos of the entered pieces, 170 artists were asked to send in their works. And from these pieces, the winning entries were selected in March.

The exhibition of the International Festival of Postmodern Ceramics shows very clearly how exhibitions of this kind have changed over the past few decades.

The vessel used to form the vast majority of exhibits in previous years, but now it is sculptural work that predominates. This is true both of abstract and representational work.

Vessels that have survived and now take centre stage are those with a clear, minimalist formal vocabulary. Pieces that are so clearly formulated that one would not wish to add or subtract anything from them. It is impossible to imagine that a change of outline or a shift in proportions or any further surface treatment could improve on their conciseness.

We can see one example of this in the work of Ann von Hoey from Belgium. She was awarded the "Kerameikon Bronze Medal".

In a sense, this also applies to the work of Keiichi Tanaka from Japan, whose work shows a minimalist, formal severity, and who was awarded the prize for applicants below 30 years of age.

If we work our way forward through the prizewinning pieces along these lines, we can recognise a departure from sculpturally formulated, concrete reality in the work of Milivoy Segans from Croatia.

His piece, showing the Fall of Pegasus, reveals a mythological dimension, but in material terms it is strongly related to classical or even archaic ceramic objects. It was produced with a method reminiscent of pinch built pots, which has been used since antiquity, at least for vessels. This makes its use for the construction of a dynamic sculpture all the more interesting.

Ruta Pakarklyte from Norway takes us right away from a representation of reality, although she works with clearly recognisable real fragments, producing a combina-

tion that appears both morbid and surreal, juxtaposing the detritus of our consumer world with parts of the human body.

But it is the work of Barbara Schmid from Austria that shows us most clearly the tendency that I have just mentioned and which is symptomatic of a new definition of ceramics as an artistic genre. We largely depart from the realm of a material, clearly defined existence and enter into the field of the creation and definition of space – by means of ceramics.

Paperclay fired on a wire mesh, thus fulfilling the requirements of being ceramic, complemented with mixed media. At the same time, the earthen heaviness of ceramics is lost. Which must not be allowed to be the end of the development, but which in the current situation opens up spatial dimensions, allowing ceramics to become an unrestricted reservoir of personal ideas, dreams and inspirations. It was thus not a ceramic sculpture which won a prize but rather a ceramic spatial phenomenon that demonstrates and opens up possibilities, besides many other ideas, as a polar opposite to the heaviness of the material.

In the exhibition of the International Festival of Postmodern Ceramics, we thereby recognise the transition to the predominant contemporary ceramic expressive approach.

I so doing, it is important to remember that these developments should be regarded as a process of expansion, not so much as an attempt to break away from the "parent" material. Any artist who works in virtuoso manner with the medium should retain a certain gratitude towards it, and thus a sense of community with everyone who creates art in ceramics.

It is ultimately growing ever easier to diagnose that above and beyond the traditional heading of "ceramics", a new level is opening up that is involved in developing a new understanding of the material.

Or is it perhaps just a reprise of a representation of the divine once evoked in the Neolithic Age? And is not this representation the fundamental question, the theme and the task of all art?

An honourable mention was awarded to these participants who did not win a prize:

Pam Sinnott *(Australia)*
Risto Hämäläinen *(Finland)*
Petra Wolf *(Germany)*
Marta Nagy *(Hungary)*
Natalya Korchemkina *(Russia)*
Rafael Perez Fernandez *(Spain)*
Bettina Baumann *(Switzerland)*
Jürg C. Bächtold *(Switzerland)*
Paul Mason *(UK)*
Kevin Turner *(USA)*

THE PRIZE OF THE CITY OF VARAŽDIN went to
Barbara Schmid *(Austria) for*
"Krizana Hybrid" *- paperclay on wire mesh*
75 x 36 x 50 cm
illustrated on page 2

EXHIBITION in the
Gallery of Old and New Masters in the
Varazdin City Museum
and other venues in the city
from 18 April – 24 May 2009
Information from
Croation Ceramics Association KERAMEIKON
Krizaniceva 13, 42000 Varaždin, Croatia
Tel. 00 385 42 211 227 or 00385 91 1 744 000

ABBILDUNGEN *-*

opposite page
- KERAMEIKON GOLD MEDAL
Ruta Pakarklyte *(Norway)*
*"**I do not remember it**" - 43 x 43 cm*
Porcelain, cast, assembled

left
- KERAMEIKON SILBER MEDAL
Milivoj Segan *(Croatia)*
*- "**The fall of Pegasus**"*
Terra cotta - 38 x 109 x 72 cm

below l. to r.
- TALENT AWARD for young artists below the age of 30 ***Keiichi Tanaka*** *(Japan)*
*- **"Passage"** - stoneware*
h 55, 71, 68, 62 and 67 cm

- KERAMEIKON BRONZE MEDAL
Ann Van Hoey *(Belgium)*
*- **"Growing"** - stoneware*
17 x 30, 14 x 25, 11 x 20 cm