



Exhibition opening; in the foreground a piece by Ray Chen

## The XI<sup>th</sup> International Keramiksymposium Römhild 2018

*Motto: "Ceramics speak many languages"*



Ray Chen and Simcha Even-Chen in conversation

By Armin Rieger

The 11<sup>th</sup> international Keramiksymposium in Römhild – the first ones took place from 1975 on at the pottery, Töpferhof Gramann – has now taken up residence, for the second time, at Glücksburg Castle.

The town of Römhild with just under 1,900 inhabitants was mentioned in records as far back as the 8th century and for a long period was the county seat of Henneberg-Römhild. The professional production of ceramics has been on record since 1720. Römhild lies at the southernmost tip of the state

of Thuringia, close to the Bavarian border.

In November 2017, a top-drawer panel of judges selected the 8 participants for this year from the 115 applications received from all over the world. And so it came about that on 5 September this year, Eva Pelechova (Czech Republic), Martin Harman (UK), Simcha Even-Chen (Israel), Ray Chen (Taiwan/USA), Maria Bosch (Spain), Megumi Naitoh (Japan/USA), Monika Patuszynska (Poland) und Joachim Lambrecht (Germany) all arrived, along with myself, Armin Rieger, responsible for the technical

side of things.

The hall, measuring a good 10 x 20 mtr., provided splendid surroundings and a workspace for everyone on brand new flooring. The work places were shared out without delay, 90% of the materials ordered were ready for use. The nine kilns ranging from top loaders for samples and electric kilns with a capacity of 1,000 ltr. to gas and woodfired as well as raku kilns waited cold and hungry for what was about to come.

Whole palettes with various clay bodies stood ready, from the crucible body that can withstand 1,500°C to the most delicate porcelain, from the simple, reddish firing terracotta mix to packets of clay called "deep black". Oxides and glaze ingredients as well as the usual miscellany of measuring jugs down to wooden battens were either already there or speedily delivered. Some of the raw materials and bodies only reached the ceramists after some effort, with outside help and a lot of patience, but they always arrived, even of nerves were sometimes tense.

I very soon realised that working on my own account as I had hoped would fade into the realm of dreams. Utterly.

Outside, the weather was really very hot, but inside, behind the ancient castle walls, it was generally pleasantly cool. The nearby lake in the woods and the surroundings with the Celtic Steinsburg castle, woods and hills, all provided attractions.

No, it wasn't a holiday. Everyone worked busily, usually from 9 in the morning until 9 at night, intent but relaxed, but always concentrating fully on the demanding, even audacious ceramic objects. There were setbacks that gnawed at people's self-confidence but in the end, skill, knowledge and mutual assistance were victorious.

After a few days, the first samples were fired, moulds were built and final plans were laid.

What was very special about this symposium, however, was the culinary hospitality by members of the support association. Every day, a freshly baked cake awaited on the table for afternoon coffee and for dinner there were different delicacies and treats, which transformed the atmosphere between the participants and the support association into one of friendship.

This kind of symposium is always characterised by ups and downs. Rest-





Stacking the kiln

lessness alternates with concentration or times of gnawing doubt. It is a creative process that promises many intellectual and material hurdles.

Maria Bosch from Spain with her large scale vessels, reminiscent in their delicate earthy colour of prehistoric cave paintings, a metre away from Megumi Naitoh (Japan/USA) with the extreme opposite. At the computer, she designed tool-like objects that were 3D-printed, providing the basis for slipcasting moulds. As if this were not enough, the "ceramic" casting slip, a clay-plaster mix, also contained thousands of pre-fired mosaic pieces. The result was stunning, pointing the way to the ceramics of the future.

What possibilities!

Three steps further on sat Joachim Lam-brecht from near Lake Constance. Severe almost to the point of asceticism, his constructions put one in mind of architectural models that left nothing to be desired with regard to a bold sweep and sophisticated linearity.

The works of Monika Patuszynska also put one in mind of geometry. She has used abandoned plaster moulds from a defunct porcelain factory, creating new porcelain spaces with a power saw, hammer and chisel, but above all with a highly developed sense of form.

The work of Ray Chen (Taiwan/USA) is monumental, precise, deeply spiritual and of profound technical skill. Do West and East meet in his work? The work of Simcha Even-Chen (Israel) seemed to be a counterpart to the work of Ray, her neighbour, but let us not fool ourselves. The extremely delicate, multiply twisted porcelain bands, whose severe geometric patterns seem so different, follow a precisely planned choreography, fired on kaolin mats and collaps-



Megumi Naitoh

ing to create new contexts of form.

Eva Pelechova (Czech Republic) is quite different. Large back masses, like geological strata or chunks of lava, these fissured sculptures often weighing hundreds of kilos and veined with fluxes, and fired above the usual firing range, are either rejected or fired again. Geological era or the end of time? Distressing or illuminating? I forgot to ask ...

Another major leap: Martin Harman (UK). His work careful, planned, precise, painstaking, but wow! Here comes something quite new and unexpected.

The thrown porcelain elements like those that appear every day in every pottery in the world metamorphose. From something every day, something entirely unusual emerges. Forms merge, find completely new ways of joining. That was the intention. With the hint that no one knows any longer how exactly the parts found in archaeological digs really belong together, perhaps quite differently.

All of this, except not quite finished, was seen by the invited ceramists who had come to an all-day meeting of all the previous symposium participants on 28 August that lasted long into the night.

Each of the eight participants at the Keramiksymposium in Römhild left behind a very special piece of contemporary ceramic history. Thank you! But the thanks are also and specially due to all the initiators, donors helpers and those who were simply there after their normal day job for the eight invited ceramists!

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The participants with the chairman on the left

