

In Studio with Zsolt József Simon

Evelyne Schoenmann

Zsolt is primarily a Hungarian ceramic artist, sculptor and designer. He also teaches spatial dynamics and Bothmer gymnastics. He studied music, drama and painting at Jelenlét school of art. In this interview, I will be trying to discover if these interests have had an influence on his ceramics.



Zsolt, let us begin with music. In a video, you can be seen playing a piece called *Aethra Siderea* with friends. Can you tell us something about the music?

I don't play music on a regular basis. But for an exhibition that was called *Aethra Siderea* (The Light of the Stars) together with a textile designer, I asked my friends to this musical rendezvous. The tune, setting a Persian poem to music

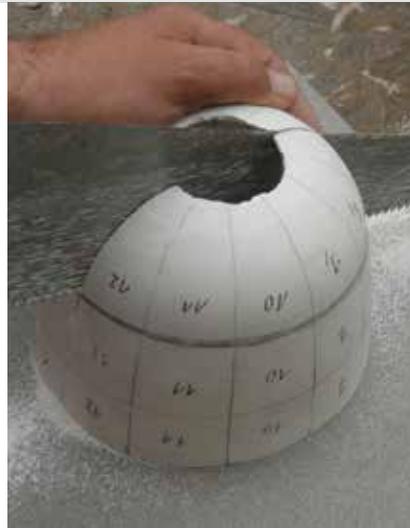
stands for a second shared interest: the art of the East.

Aethra Siderea is also the title of the work that won first prize in the category of art ceramics in the 2014 *Officine Saffi* competition. I would be curious to know what is going on in your mind when you choose a name for your pieces.

The harmony of the stars and the flowers, so universal harmony is what I want

to represent in my work. So the title refers not so much to my most recent piece but to the work of the last 4-5 years. On top of this, mediaeval architecture and art is a great source of inspiration for me.

According to your website and what you say in interviews, I get the impression that you often think about the world and your role in it. In your heart, are you a philosopher or a poet?



As artists, we shape our works on the basis of two sources of inspiration. One is the intellectual level, the world of ideas and thoughts. The other is the physical world, nature, where we find the forms, colours and the material for our work. Behind every action, there is first of all an idea, a thought, even if we are not philosophers.

I freely admit to being one of the reflective, thoughtful kind of people. This is manifested not so much in the final result of a piece of work as in the way I make use of traditional techniques, modifying them to make a unique object.

“My pictures and sculptures are studies of movement with no actual form”, and “I do not wish to understand the form itself but the process of forming”, is something you have said. Do you prefer to be travelling than to arrive?

I believe it is time to put what I have said in the past into perspective, or to add something to it. My most recent work in porcelain shows a more complete picture.

A creative process contains both the development phase and the phase of completion. I find it difficult to portray these two aspects as opposites or as something of equal value. We should far rather pay attention to creating a balance between working actively and phases of rest.

If you look at your slipcast sculptures, you see frozen nature with a touch of the surreal: flowers, minerals, rock formations. Flowing tactile and smooth at the neck, and on the inside; sharp-edged, pointed and fissured on the outside. Attraction – repulsion. Light – shade. Would you like to express a sense of antagonism in your art?

An important part of modern art is to point up oppositions, or rather to establish links between oppositions. In this way, from oppositions, elements emerge that cross-fertilize each other.

I would like to push things closer together that lie far apart, in the same way that the blood circulating in the body is part of the whole circulatory system.

The Aethra Siderea group at Officine Saffi in Milan had a magnetic effect on me with its cellular structure. I walked around it several times and wondered: how on earth did he do that? May I ask you to explain your technique?

The starting point for my work is always a sketch, and that is the basis for the plaster mould. The exterior form is very important to me. I make multi-piece moulds (foot, belly, neck, crown). This makes it possible for me to vary things and I can make minor alterations without having to recast the whole form. I allow the plaster form to dry thoroughly in my studio before I cut it up. When I am planning and sketching, I have to take into consideration that I must hold all the individual pieces together so that they don't fall apart again, and also that I can remove the plaster elements easily from the finished item. This determines the shape of the plaster pieces, which should be wider towards the outside and narrow towards the inside. This technical aspect leads ultimately to the “radial” form of the object. The sawn-up and reas-



sembled plaster mould created a fissured texture at the neck and in the crown along the cuts. To shape the belly, I do not fit these parts of the mould tightly together, but with wedges I create gaps between the individual plaster elements. Depending on their size and shape, I then assemble the pieces for the foot, belly, neck and crown with adhesive tape or plasticine. I then place the final form on a plaster bat with a hole in the surface to pour out the excess casting slip. In this way I don't have to move the object to pour off the slip, which always has the danger that the individual parts slip or warp or break. At the same time, I can retain the lovely surface of the crown. After pouring off the slip, I close the base of the form, which had remained open until this point. Dismantling after the piece is thoroughly dried always requires the most patience. I always work from the top down, first removing the adhesive tape, leaving it to dry long enough that I can pick the little pieces of plaster off the form. To finish, I work on the surface with a wet brush to remove any surplus. I don't

use glaze. For coloured pieces, I mix pigment into the casting slip, which gives me colour not only on the surface but through all the layers.

Watching you work calmly on the plaster mould with a pencil, a saw and sandpaper, and then putting the pieces back together again, you get the feeling that this complex task requires a lot of patience. Have you got a recipe for patience?

(Laughter) I haven't got a recipe. But the prospect of a beautiful result gives me the energy for this time-consuming task. Visualising of the finished piece, to me, is like the sight of an oasis for a thirsty traveller in the desert. I simply have to walk towards it.

Did the year spent studying in Indonesia have an effect on your work?

The trip did not have a direct influence on my forms or the patient working method. Instead, I had the opportunity to gain some distance to my previous work both in time and space. The whole thing was like

a deep release of breath. It permitted me to liberate myself from certain things, to rethink some others and to develop them without any external pressure.

This leads me to the question of current and future projects.

For an overall presentation of my work, I am planning to give my white pieces a colour coating. I would like to frame my sculptures with my pictures. This exhibition is planned for Galerie-Museion-Nr.-1 in Budapest for April 2015.

Zsolt József Simon

24 Madách Street

2083 Solymár / Hungary

szsjindian@gmail.com

<http://nomisart.carbonmade.com/>

<http://simonart.carbonmade.com/>

Evelyne Schoenmann's next interview will be with **Brenda McMahon**, USA.

Evelyne Schoenmann is a ceramist. She lives and works in Basel, Switzerland and Liguria, Italy.

www.schoenmann-ceramics.ch

