

10th International Terra Cotta Symposium in Eskişehir, Turkey



Petra Lindenbauer and Prof. Bolgehan Uzuner



photos – Petra Lindenbauer

One by one, the six of us ceramists landed at Istanbul airport, from China, Thailand, Georgia, France and Germany. We were picked up punctually in a comfortable minibus and driven to Eski ehir. I had travelled around Turkey countless times as an archaeologist and a tourist but I only know about the Hittite and Phrygian history of this region to the west of Ankara, where the province capital is located. Now I had been invited to take part in the 10th International Terra

Cotta Symposium. Because of the current difficult political situation in the country, for a while I had no longer been entirely sure if I should go ahead with my participation. Up to that point, I had not realised what would be awaiting me there: one of the biggest cities in Anatolia, which is described quite rightly by its inhabitants as an oasis. For over 15 years, Dr. Ahmet Ataç, from the social democratic party CHP, has been mayor there and is visibly concerned to actively support the wellbe-

ing of his citizens. He is popular with the people and on top of this he is very fond of ceramics. Together with Prof. Bilgehan Uzuner from Anadolu University he has turned the city into an open air gallery for large scale ceramic sculptures and reliefs. In the eight parks in the city as well as in the brand new town hall, there are around 140 works that have been made since 2000 during the symposium by a total of 100 participants and their assistants. The region has great importance in the field of ceramics because of its clay deposits. There were a number of brickworks in Eskişehir and their chimneys made of red bricks stretching up into the sky are a reminder of that time. Nearby the ceramics centres of Kütahya and Iznik are located, and we are all familiar with the Ottoman tiles from the 16th century that come from here with their azure flower designs. Basak, a modern brickworks located just outside town, is the largest sponsor of the Terra Cotta Symposia – we were invited to a guided tour of the extensive area. The tradition now lives on with artists from all over the world invited to work together with their Turkish colleagues using the local clay. In this symposium, the artists from Turkey taking part were Burcu Öztürk Karabey, Serdar Tekebasoglu, Hüseyin Özçelik and Selami Torun. The international participants were Say-

Wang Shengli working on his sculpture



Serdar Tekebasoglu and assistants





S. Kasornsuwan with his work



Hüseyin Özcelik working on his piece



R. Keitel's fire sculpture

umporn Kasornsuwan from Thailand, Reinhard Keitel from Germany, Nato Erstavli from Georgia, Shengli Wang from China, Ariane A. Coissieux from France and Petra Lindenbauer from Austria.

The concept is interesting: each of the ten artists was assisted by six students, who had been selected from the various universities of art in Turkey on the basis of their ability. With the artists and students working together, a learning process was expected to take place. Techniques were used jointly, visions and opinions were discussed while working. After busy days at work, the artists' presentations took place so that we were able to immerse ourselves in the world of each individual personality.

For us as artists, it was a challenge to hand over a fine piece of work after these two weeks. After the sightseeing tour of the town, it was obvious that we could work in huge dimensions and were probably expected to do so. We were overwhelmed; the presence of works in clay everywhere made our ceramists' hearts

beat faster, but at the same time, we were also somewhat subdued by having had no idea of the immense presence of ceramics in this city.

Even if we extended our concepts in places after this tour, we still had to keep the drying, the duration of the firing and the assembly in mind, and also that we would be working with materials that were new to us. It also had to be considered that we did not have ideal conditions like in our studios at home, but that is the point of a symposium – daring to break out of routine and to be open and receptive for the local conditions. Learning, accepting help and suggestions from colleagues and the assistants too, but also not falling victim to a sense of crisis if things didn't run like clockwork – all of this was an important experience.

The Anatolian expression for working together, "imece" is of great importance here. Various generations and origins, different levels of knowledge – what was important here was solely working on this major project with joy and energy,

taking part in "art imece"! To involve the local populace in events and enable them to share in them, a range of different activities had been organised to supplement the studio work. Exhibitions, a permanent bazaar with local craftspeople, concerts, pottery competitions for great masters and for students, a cooking competition with chefs from leading Turkish restaurants, workshops for children and a photo competition for amateurs brought people together and made them curious, involved them in the symposium, making it a major event for the whole city across all strata of society. In fact, we were working in the workshop of a former biscuit factory located in the centre and there was a steady coming and going of visitors: a group of small children, with their teacher cautiously trying to find a route for the little ones, toddling between the growing clay sculptures, cutely holding hands and with their eyes wide, amateur photographers, families, architecture students – everyone had been invited to come and was welcome to share in the



Petra Lindenbauer glazing



creation of the works, which later found sites in the city.

A good atmosphere, personal contact and mutual respect had top priority, this was the spirit in which the artwork was made. This was also made possible by Prof. Uzuner's tireless team. In the parks, plinths were cast in concrete in the locations chosen by the artists, metal constructions were erected. If there were technical difficulties, skilled workers were made available and all kinds of materials that were required were conjured up.

During this symposium, which was the tenth, 26 pieces were made over the two weeks, which all found suitable sites in the public spaces of the city. I created a multi-piece work for which a spacious wall area was made available in the entrance of the elegant restaurant in the town hall complex.

For my installation, "Sitting Together at a Table Encourages Intimacy, Eating and Drinking Together Creates Bonds", I included the spirit of togetherness that was perceptible everywhere and which made this symposium so special.

Whenever we had a brief interlude, we

were invited to make bowls at our table. At the end of the symposium, everyone could select a glazed vessel like in a bazaar, eat their desert in it and then take the pot home with them so that the ceramics found their way into the houses of the town.

As the closing event of the symposium, all the visitors of the celebrations could share in a special experience. For this occasion, Reinhard Keitel and his Turkish team had made a 230 cm sculpture in clay that consisted of two interlocking forms, symbolising the links between our two cultures.

Specially for this sculpture, the German fire specialist built a gas kiln on site and fired the piece to 1220°C in twelve hours. In the evening, after dark and when the final temperature had been reached, it was breathtaking to see the shell of the kiln

removed by hand. Before the eyes of the speechless watchers, a glowing object was revealed that showed various-coloured surfaces during the cooling process and that made the miracle of ceramics impressively tangible for us all. It was a unique performance that brought the two-week Terra Cotta Symposium in Eski ehir to a worthy conclusion.

PROF. DR. BILGEHAN UZUNER

is head of the ceramics department in the faculty of art at Anadolu University in Eskisehir, Turkey. In 2000, he launched the International Terra Cotta Symposium that was now taking place for the 10th time.

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