

## **Laudation for the exhibition opening on the 8<sup>th</sup> of July 2006 in the Kulturhof Krönbacken in Erfurt, by Dr. Kai Uwe Schierz, Director of the Kunsthalle Erfurt**

„ On the day I lost my passport, at 58 years old, I discovered that when one loses one's homeland, one loses more than just a patch of land“ - Stefan Zweig, Memories

“ Foreign lands are wonderful, as long and there is a homeland waiting somewhere“ - Erika Mann

Heimat - Home

The moment of encounter –this is the title of the project, the result of which we are to hear and also see, today. At least Homeland seems to me to be a title only really ambivalently readable. In the Internet Encyclopaedia “Wikipedia” one can find the following definition:

Home is the complete environment in which one grows-up. This environment forms ones psyche; one is “grown” there. Home is, where it is not necessary to explain ones-self. Homeland cannot be described merely geographically (by location or surrounding landscape). What one associates as one's home is more accurately and even more appropriately defined by the people with which one grew up, their language, their stories, their needs, through all their cultural achievements, the objects and the relationships, via which they express themselves, in short : through their way of life in its broadest sense.

Psychologically, home is a subjective invention, independent of political or legal definition. It exists as an individual perception of place, social and cultural relationships. Out of this grows the possibility for a homeland of choice. Home as a chosen way of life is, for example, meant when an exiled German writer declares that his home is the German language or German literature. Home as a way of life is also meant by the well-known sailor's expression “ My home is the ocean”

Alongside “chosen homeland” are other corresponding expressions: Homesickness, national love, local history museum, at home, inheritance, tradition, roots, security, domesticity or fatherland. Here it can become patriotic. Or national chauvinism. The relationship between France and Germany for example has been shadowed for hundreds of years by this kind of chauvinism and revanchism. The word „home“ obviously represents complex interpretations. Additionally it is main source for identity. We are therefore, whether we like it or not, deeply connected to our homeland, in that our very being has been formed by it. It sounds paradoxical but the more our living perspective globalises, the more important this aspect of our roots becomes, be it as origin and biographical or be it as chosen circle of friends, ideas and lifestyle.

And all because it can't be taken for granted any more. Today home needs an additional explanation to clarify it. One could also say that it has become questionable. The short quotes from Erika Mann and Stefan Zweig are examples of this.

Falk Zenker said, Home can also be a melody, which one carries with and within oneself. His wife, ceramicist Petra Töpke-Zenker, said home is also a piece of earth, from which one originates, from which we all originate. That illustrates, roughly outlined, the idea for an international music and ceramic symposium, which both of them initiated and organised and which took place in the Wasserburg Kappelendorf during the last few weeks.

The reason for this symposium lies two hundred years back. From the 10<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> October 1806, on battlefields between Thuringia's Jena and Auerstadt, Napoleonic's French troops and the Prussian army delivered a bloody slaughter in which over 30,000 people lost their lives. The Prussian Lords were destroyed. Bonapartes rule led to a new phase of conflict between the two great European nations, which re-revealed itself in the German National freedom party, later in the German French war 1870-71 and again in first World War 1914-1918, - always with wide stretching effects, until it was quelled post 1945, through deliberate peace initiatives and constant, intensive programme of cultural exchange. Following along the lines of these cultural transfers, this year the region of central Thuringia (Jena, Apolda and Weimar) have offered a cultural programme event as under the motto “ Rendez-vous 2006”

One may ask oneself, why the region of central Thuringia wishes to celebrate such a crushing military defeat for which it has suffered in the past. Perhaps one can be convinced by the fact that it is being celebrated, that it can be celebrated today, because of the qualitative new relationships between the European nations, from the newly gained sovereignty over the own historical scars as a symbol of the post-war declaration after 1945, which was and is, an anti-war declaration.

To achieve this state of sovereignty takes several generations and is, in a global sense, often the exception. When both organisers of this event placed themselves alongside French guests, Laurence Bourdin as musician, and Philippe Godderidge as ceramicist, and also invite participants from Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia, Israel and Palestine, it is obvious that the themes “homeland, native rights and exile” are being explored from situations of the highly acute conflict in the recent past and present. But this project isn't about a politically correct human rights seminar rather it is about a communal action, which the respective personal and cultural

individuals not only accepted but also take as a prerequisite in order to achieve an equal partnership. There is hardly a more appropriate medium for this kind of meeting as art, where there is no right or wrong, but rather an other, an other way of doing, an other way of being.

Falk Zenker asked the invited musicians from Bosnia, Serbia and France, to bring a traditional melody to the symposium. Kamenko Kulap, Laurence Bourdin, Bogdan Rankovic and last but not least Falk Zenker himself proved how each had interpreted something different in the words "traditional material" be it a traditional instrument or melody. This was irrelevant as to whether the modus was jazz, improvisation or jam session. They have spent the last weeks playing to each other and improvising. The results of the harmonious collaborations were played in the concert earlier.

In contrast to musicians, ceramicists are artists whose working methods concentrates on solo production rather than group actions. Consequentially on offer here in the exhibition in the Galerie Waidspeicher are individual interpretations of a certain theme. That could be a personal, brought along theme as well as the theme of the symposium: Home in its broadest sense. The word "symposium" derives, after all, from the Greek "symposion" literally meaning, "drinking together" but referring to a social discussion. The ceramicists have also grown closer to one another over the course of days and weeks of living together and working together, helping each other technically and artistically, wholeheartedly an exchange of experiences.

Each has completed one or more "Berg-Skulpturen" for Kappelendorf, which can now be seen there and will stay there.

And each has brought with him, of course, his own trusted and, in this sense, traditional melody, his particular artistic impression. The differing uses of clay are not simultaneous as by the musical performance but can be viewed sequentially one after the other.

Phillipe Godderidge's work appears to stem far back in the time of the beginning of our human existence. He has flattened straw and clay into sheets, in the way the early crop growers used to make their clay tiles. He has then sanded two of these slabs and, fired them with the help of an improvised kiln. We find ourselves standing before these fired slabs like archaeologists before the remains of an ancient fire, which have left darkened rings in the buried layers. The circles of fire, the first home of man in a still unknown wilderness.

His floor installation of footprints made from pressed and fired clay mixed with tiles, also suggests a metaphoric bridge into the earlier ages of mankind. One is inevitably reminded of the famous discovery by the palaeontologist Mary Leakey in 1978 in the Tanzanian Olduvai region, near Laetoli, of footprints left by two upright walking pre-human's fossilised in the volcanic ash. Leakey suggested the prints belonged to the species Homo, whilst other researches categorise the species as Australopithecus. Anyway, there are millions of years separating us from the originators of these so familiar, and likewise so gracefully homely footprints. The tiles remind one again of early architecture and of the already existing complex, social and manufacturing differences between human cultures

We also receive a glimpse from the present into our origins in the work from Petra Töpke-Zenker. Many of her pots, which are not "thrown" on the wheel, but worked from inside out by pressing and moulding the material into its hollow form, are reminiscent of the Neolithic, ie band ceramics which were typical in central Europe. Following a visit to the archaeological city of Petra in Jordan, Töpke-Zenker is inspired by the small round huts, in which the human body squeezes into as into the uterus. In a similar way she has layered blocks of clay in an architectural way around the curved back of a colleague, who had positioned herself in an embryonic form on the floor. A large, red ceramic form, which lies on the floor like a fallen vase, is reminiscent of the Omphalos of the ancient Greeks in Delphi, the "navel of the world", which other cultures, such as Buddhism recognise: the middle point, origins, home, first nutrition – here in the "navel of the world" an unseparated, naïve unity of understanding, can still be formed. Petra Töpke-Zenker deliberately uses her free ceramic work as a possibility to remind one of the distant past, to visualize the roots of our origins. One can place home very deeply.

Still further back go many forms, as in the ones we find in the work of Ruth Schomronin from Israel. She takes her inspiration from the fossilised remnants of life in the primeval oceans, which are now found in the deserts of the near east. Life meant creation, creativity – at least this is what we assume of the frugal regions of deserts. The fact that we find these signs of pre historic sea life there shows us that nothing stays as it is. In change lies the chance of life.

In Margret Weise (from Hamburg)'s work one finds quotes of the past, which are constantly ironically broken. So appear her graphically modelled heads, which lean in style towards the terracotta warriors of Xi'an, placed on a map of the Thüringen-Sachsen-Anhalt borders like a surprise invasion: Help, the Chinese are coming! With the wink of an eye she brings the long-time stranger directly into her studio, calmly manipulates it and playfully incorporates it into her own design intentions.

The humorously ironic gesture of Margret Weise unexpectedly meets an opponent in the work from the Palestinian, Mervat Essa. She has used the relief prints of headscarves in clay as a subject in her work for a long time. They are the scarves that the Islamic women wear to cover their faces for celebrations or ceremonies. The intense patterns of creases she used to model onto reliefs of faces in her earlier work, she exhibits today simply as scarves. Clean and neatly folded in a pile they appear to be waiting for the right

occasion to be worn. Crumpled, they suggest collective ritual. Mervat Essa works her own family history into the objects which itself is a history of exile from her homeland.

The very recent history of exile and war in her homeland has also inspired the Croatian Danijela Piculjan to spontaneously create a collage of illustrative photographs and clay forms. A work has developed which through the delicate ceramic construction questions the fragility of forms from nature such as sea and snail shells. The results are complex three-dimensional objects that allow us a glimpse into the normally hidden and highly fragile interior. This undertone of vulnerability, highlighted by the theme of the symposium, is translated in a direct illustration of the sorrow and hope of mankind.

Finally, Radenko Adnadj from Serbia uses the ceramic surfaces as an alternative to canvas: he paints on it. He aims to see his gestural expressions captured in the treatment of the glaze. Like a graphically structured undercoat the Raku technique prepares the painting surface. In this way the objects offer not only a fascinating graphical and painted-like surface. They also relate a fracture, are structured like vases, but in fragments, captured before they are completed. This tension between the painted like attraction of the surface and the fractured pieces of the sculpted design lend the work a saddening undertone.

" We are moved by tales of good deeds, by the sight of every harmonious object. This makes us feel that we are not totally on the outside, we delude ourselves as to be nearer to home, after which our best, most inner patience desires." This sentence is delivered by the apparently inevitably in Thuringia, Johann Wolfgang Goethe, in his novel "Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship."

Here in Erfurt there is now another place in which Goethe's view of harmonious objects can be seen. When we art interested visitors feel a bit at home whilst we wander through and view the exhibition it must have something to do with the theme of the symposium in Kappelendorf.

*Kai Uwe Schierz*