



ART BY ESSENCE IS NOTHING BUT PURSUANCE

HEREND PORCELAINS ON ANTON MOLNÁR'S PAINTINGS

Anton Molnár (Molnár Antal) was born in 1957, in Budapest. He graduated at the Academy of Fine Arts in 1983, where he attended the courses of an MA degree in the following three years. He was offered a position as a graphic artist by the Geneva office of the UNO in 1986. This assignment influenced his decision to settle down with his family in France, in 1988. Molnár tries to seize the atmosphere of the turn of the Millennium in his creations. He works to invent an artistic language that is able to express his personal visions of the blending of different cultures and his own experiences. Painting is a form of behaviour and self-expression for him, permanently researched and redefined. In the last twelve years, besides highly ranked French galleries, Anton Molnár has been regularly exhibiting his works in New York, Tokyo, Singapore. Many of his works are part of collections owned by highly ranked companies and private individuals. The public in Hungary could visit his entry exhibition after fourteen years at the Secco Gallery, within the framework of the Budapest Spring Festival in 2002.

Herend Herald: Which personalities influenced you as an artist?

Anton Molnár: The creators I consider my paragons-irrespective of when they worked and in which artistic form- authentically reflected the atmosphere of their own age, the good and evil of their worlds. In my view, this is the primary purpose of art. I had very good masters in Budapest: first at the Technical School of Fine and Industrial Art, later at the Academy of Fine Arts. I am forever grateful for the years I have spent here, since that was the time when I got in contact with many different styles, ways of expression.

I feel that, just like the porcelain painters of Herend, I represent the current, last stage of a process. Just like an artist of the porcelain cannot paint saying: 'I just had a splendid idea!' I cannot become independent of the past ages, styles, masters either-we are all the present part of a gigantic history, to which we can add our contribution, making it become more complete. The greatest challenge for me is to immortalise the world that is swirling in my head. It is a great feeling that successful galleries, highly ranked collectors are interested in my works, yet I constantly feel the urge to seek further, to progress: that is why I am never satisfied. My searching, restless temper originates in my Hungarian background: something I cannot take off either in Paris, New York, or Singapore. This characteristic of mine made me leave Hungary in 1988: no one at that time could foresee the fall of the Berlin Wall in only a year, neither the large changes it has brought about, how much the world unfolded in front of us. I wanted to be measured by the entire world: there had not existed a single truly private gallery at that time in Budapest. I felt then like a painter that amuses himself with painting at home and nobody can see his work except his family: I wanted to get farther than that, in a foreign environment, into sharp situations.



HH: Why did you choose exactly Paris?

A.M.: Art for me by essence is nothing else, but pursuance: I consider Paris a huge cross point, a traffic junction, which has been a constantly renewing, exceedingly exciting artistic centre. There are some places in the world where it is good to create: it was not by mere chance that Chagall,

Picasso, Van Gogh, Modigliani and thousands of others have found in Paris the atmosphere that helped them open up, to accomplish themselves far from where they had been born. You can find here the effervescent contemporariness of the 20-21st centuries, the cathedrals of the Middle Age, and the large, rich museums: there is plenty of space for pursuance in Paris. Yet, in the same city there are thousands of places to sit down and forget about the whole world smoking a cigar.

HH: You are working with an unusual set of patterns. The audience can see a plentiful collection of various objects on your paintings, some of them are strangely combined, most of them appear regularly, which seem to congregate as peculiar self-portraits made over an endless journey.

A.M.: My father headed the Department of Mathematics of the Eötvös Lóránd University in Budapest: in the mid-sixties he was sent by the UNO to Mali, in Western Africa, to collaborate in the doctoral programme of the University of Bamako, the capital city of that country. I have an older sister and a brother, I am the youngest of the three. My sister and brother were already studying at the university at that time, therefore my parents only took me with them. This is how as a child I could already breathe in the atmosphere of journeys that can best be captured with the help of objects, the colourful world view of the traveller, while on the other hand I learnt to quickly adapt myself to exciting extremities. In addition to that I could acquire a diplomatic way of looking at things, respect, understanding for and of otherness. But one hasn't got to go very far for that: on my father's side I have Transylvanian roots, and I just started to carry through and older plan of mine, painting a series of Transylvanian portraits. I feel best when I succeed to express myself: and



some sort of a collage world helps me most in achieving that. I don't like literary examples, but I have to mention here 'Froth on the Daydream' by Boris Vian or Bulgakov's 'Master and Margarita'. These works help us step into a world that continues to open up all the time, one can step from one world to another over a process that seems almost endless. This is how I try to use new or returning patterns. This kind of eclecticism is also characteristic of my own taste: I could hardly tell for instance whether I love more the music of Tom Waits or Mozart. Unlike many others, I enjoy speaking about the background of my work: if I tried to cover up things, or pretended that I am more or different than I was, I would only lose time. Therefore I like to choose the straightest possible way. In Eastern Europe we were not really made much of by the possibilities of technical development. While in the West Polaroid and video techniques were already common, we had to learn how to portray exactly by the hand. My audience often refuses to believe that what they see is not a collage or coloured photograph, but actually a painted picture. For me this archaic, old-fashioned way of portraying also belongs to straightforwardness. This is not only true for painting but also for porcelain art, or medicine, that serious work is always heroic and persevering.

HH: In what circles of collectors are your works popular?

A.M.: By now I succeeded to break into two circles at the same time: In the collection of Fournier, the largest French Pharmaceutical Company, for instance there had only been classical paintings until they discovered my works. I could get into a collection hall-marked by Raffaello, Rembrandt, Van der Meyden. At the same time, my works -primarily their particular mixtures -have soften the hearts of those who only collect abstract, contemporary, performance art. It is quite rare to be present in non-figurative, contemporary, conceptual art collections and classical collections at the same time. However, I have never deliberately tried to achieve that: the reason for that resides in a single decision of mine. I have seen my earlier works set in frames, placed well or badly, until I realised that it was better if I myself prepared a special space for my own paintings. The space is the unique, laboriously executed frame, about which sometimes it is hard to decide whether it is more important than the painting itself.

HH: Table art has got an outstandingly important role in your art. Fine drinks, cigars, noble porcelain, the remains of gourmet feasts attract the audience...

A.M.: My work can be classified into three large categories. These are: portraits, still-lives and the complex message, multi-dimensional composition, which in my case is a peculiar mixture of the first two. Still-life in French is called nature morte (dead nature). I am said to be discovered a type of still-life which is not dead at all, but very much alive. Classical still-life lays the emphasis on composition, on objects, details, beauty: in my table still-lives I am trying to grasp a feeling as if someone had just stood up from table, left the plate, glass, ash-tray or cup a second ago.

Portraying the table composition is only a pretext for a meeting, a starting point: after someone took a look at it, (s)he is free to build up his or her own scenarios from his/her own memories, fantasy with respect to what had been portrayed.

HH: Herend porcelainware can be found on many of your pictures.

A.M.: They have a magical effect, which is basically related to table art all over the world. Whenever I am in Budapest I always visit the Herend brand-name shops in Kigyó street, or in the Castle district, and I discover a new piece for myself. That is how I found the porcelains with the 'Japanese spring' pattern for instance, the ones I used in my painting. Besides wine, cigars, antiques, Herend has become one of my important passions.

When we saw the light in the early nineties, it was already very difficult to obtain antique Herend porcelain for an accessible price. That was the time when my wife and myself found a complete service bearing the year of 1941. We are also very proud of an 1839 Herend teacup, which we



consider a precious jewel. I do not keep anything under glass: I love to live together with these objects, this is part of my philosophy: These noble pieces have to be used, one must take delight in their sight all the time. A cup under glass is merely an object, but when coffee or tea is poured into it, it starts having its own history.

Our friends often come over to us for dinner: they feel great even when they are only offered some fine cheese or a sausage on a simple piece of board, for the friendly atmosphere of the evening is the most important for them. But my wife, who is an excellent cook, was in the lucky position that once. When master chef Bernard Loiseau, our French friend dined at our place my wife who's an excellent cook had the luck to come up with something extra none of our guests, friends or collectors could



repeat (of course she did not compete with the first-rate cook, I would not produce cigars for Davidoff either). Krisztina, my wife, prepared a chicken soup Újházi Art, and chicken paprika, and these gorgeous Hungarian dishes were served in the 1941 Herend service for twelve people. When the soup has arrived in the bowl, with a cover that has a plastically shaped half-lemon as an ear, the wonder had produced, some sort of a magic encounter. The soup, the porcelain had had an effect beyond description. We were traveling between cultures: it became clear that evening once again, that gastronomy and the art of serving up represent a part of primary importance in that journey.

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