

Memory of Kyoto

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Memory of Kyoto

Everything started during a trip. A trip to an island, which was said to be another world, and it was true. The place was Japan. We went there to see the ceramic biennial, go to museums and galleries related with the ceramic field and a lot more. I will not even try to describe this other world, and what a fairytale it was in some way, it needs to be seen. Maybe if you imagine that you are standing at the top of the pages in a fantastic book and then dive inside the story. A story where at any given moment something surprising could happen or you where could see something that you have never seen before. I believe that every trip changes a person, not just to see the world with another view, but through another perspective. It changes the way you see the future, and the way you are going to solve future problems. It adds a lot of new colors to the pallet of your imagination. It is as if there is something as an unconscious memory stored somewhere in the mind, just because you are not capable of memorize everything from the travel. This memory is stored somewhere in your mind ready to explode, and once it does it reveals itself as a new stripe, shape, color, or material in your work which you have not used before.

While traveling you transform yourself and your spirit is at another level where your sensitivity and perceptions of things are not the same anymore. While traveling nothing is ordinary, not even ordinary things. Traveling is a topic for a lot of artists, writers, musicians and the traveling has been a part of their works, maybe because people are natural explorers or even nomads. *"Constant emigration, internal emigration, most artists are runaways".¹ - Saul Steinberg*

I like the thoughts of Steinberg regarding traveling, migration and emigration and how he describes these experiences as the feeling of rebirth. For me traveling is the best way to refresh my mind with new ideas. Somehow it puts you in another dimension, and I would like to describe it with the popular sentence: *"Life begins at the end of your comfort zone" -N. Walsc*

Because once you are outside of your comfort zone very interesting things start to occur, and it is strange how ideas are born when the spirit is in a different condition.

Back on my trip, when I was exploring the town with my colleges and passed bridges in order to see as much of the town as possible, all I could see was the river. The body of the river was wide spread and the water level was very low and at the same time, but at some places the stream was surprisingly fast despite the level of the river. It was a very busy day so only these facts about the river catch my attention. Late in the evening when it was more calm, I decide to take a walk. I walked through the Kyoto streets and explored the town when it was not as crowded and busy. At the end of my walk, before I went back to the hotel to sleep, I decided to go to the river Kamo which was close to the hotel. It was late, maybe 11 o'clock. The night was warm, calm and I sat at the edge of the river. The street lights were very weak and you could just see a few streetlights, the lights from the hotels and electrical signboards reflected in the water. The reflections were in a strange rainbow variation of colors, almost as if there was a drop of fuel or gasoline in the water. The feeling was strange and mystical. It was quiet and you could only hear the water and the sound of a few crickets. I could see fishes under the water. A pretty big fish jumped in front of me to catch a fly, it was magical.

¹ Interview: Steinberg Saul "Talks (1967)"



View of Kamo-gawa river, Kyoto, Japan, September 2014

Then I saw the view - a group of sleeping birds. The contour of their bodies were not clear and you could barely recognize what it was. They were of different sizes and their bodies were in different positions. Because of the darkness your imagination starts to play with the volumes and you do not actually know where they start and where they end. It was as if there was a public art piece in the water. They looked like a group of sculptures standing at the waters surface, and not like living creatures. It was mystical, peaceful and a bit scary, I cannot describe why.

Later when I was searching for more information I understood that this was the main river in Kyoto and her name is Kamo-gawa which means the duck river, it is described in the tourist brochures as one of the real treasures of the city.

The concept:

There are several things which characterize the work; repetition, surreal, abstract installation, mixed media, memories, mystical dreams, boundaries and the message of peace.

Repetition:

The process of building the shape includes repetitive movements. I always found some charm in repetition, but there are different opinions regarding it. The ones I like the most are the thoughts of Jorunn Veiteberg:

“Art is a repetitive mechanism that functions by repeating itself, or by borrowing, sampling, copying, quoting, stealing. Reiteration and re-use are the very nature of art, and artists have always been good at helping themselves to what already exist. But to say that repetition is the definition of art does not mean that repetition means eternally repeating the same thing.”²

“For the repetitive nature of working with one's hands cannot be compared with the mechanical operations that often take place at the conveyor belt in industry.”³



A work piece in progress

“They are tiny variations which reveal that the force of the pressure from the fingers has not always been the same.”⁴

Repetition can be found in both main elements of the work; the net and the clay. The net is an element containing numberless repetition of the identical hexagon shape. It has been produced with high precision and consistent quality because of industry standards. However I have tried to ruin this symmetry and preciseness. The clay ruins the order and the perfection, transforming the net and merging both elements with one another. By attaching small pieces of clay to every hexagon I destroy the shape of it but at the same time leave the feeling of it. I describe the process as being meditative. The movement repeats itself but not the shape, the objects are repeated but the shape and size differs. Even though it is a repetitive process I decidedly try to escape uniformity and the creation of absolutely identical objects, every shape is unique.

^{2, 3, 4} Veiteberg Jorunn catalogue “Différence et répétition”, La garantie, Paris 2014

Surreal, abstract installation:

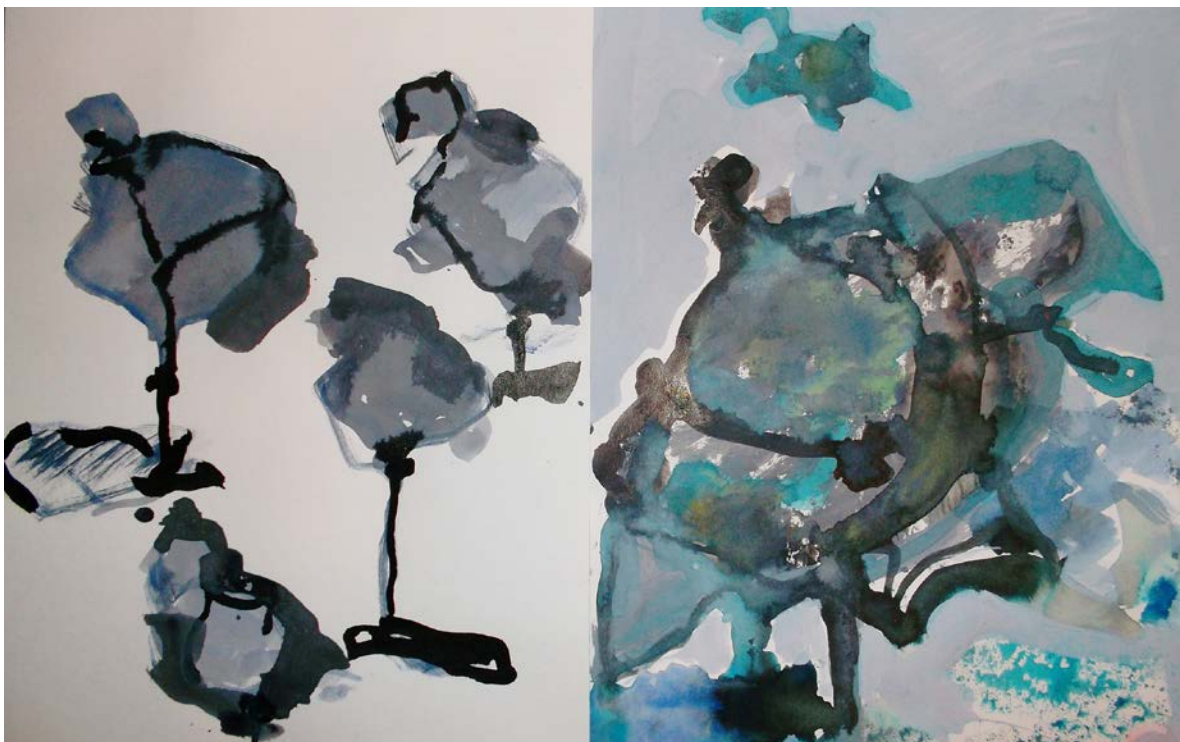
The work can be described as a continuation of a dream or a memory. The line between the two is very blurry, maybe they are the same thing as memories can often feel and look like a dream. Because of that reason I definitely connect my work with surrealistic feelings. By resuming my dream in this way I also allow others to come in, they are free to interpret it, make changes and create their own dream. Every individual has the freedom to interpret the world on its own. Through assimilating the work differently the viewer will complete the idea through his or her own eyes.



Storks flying south, August 2014, Black sea, Bulgaria

For me it is always much more interesting and fun to escape from the logic. Going into the depths of your imagination and create a fairytale. The world is too raw to be repeated, that's why I interpret real nature by trying to recreate a dream. There is a no reason to attempt an imitation of the real world. The shape of the birds is intuitively shaped and this is my abstract vision of them, and in the creative process I also try to leave traces of accidents and spontaneousness. The work represents a fiction of a memory. The human mind cannot remember all the details, and because of this resuming a dream or memory won't be clear visually. Usually your conscious is trying to put the elements in a logic order and fix the puzzle, but unconsciously you tend to remember the feeling that the view gave you more than the exact shape and form of the object. You remember the smells, sounds, if something bit you and how strong the itch was afterwards, or if you were afraid of something in that specific moment. In my story that evening, I just saw this view not as an ordinary one, but as a public art piece.

I didn't accept the sleeping birds in the water as living creatures, as birds. I saw them as sculptural pieces in the water, as a piece of art. It was spontaneous, some part of my imagination played games with me.



Sketch

Why do I accept it as surrealistic? The main idea of surrealism is aimed at expressing imaginative dreams and visions free from rational control. I am trying to create something beyond the memory transformed through the imagination. Essentially surrealism use the same instruments and the goal is a creative process free of conscious control. It also plays with dreams, inner world, and the importance of subconscious as a source of an inspiration, magical realism.

“Surrealism is destructive, but it destroys only what it considers to be shackles limiting our vision.” - Salvador Dali

“It was matter of creating a stimulating environment, an atmosphere which would enhance the spectator’s receptiveness and arouse in him at the same time laughter, revulsion and desire, so that he was bound to approach the painting and sculpture in a state of emotional disturbance”⁵

My dream is authentic and a real experience but I am not providing you the absolute truth. If I don't create boundaries I believe the different individual senses and perceptions of every person is going to add even more to the work. I don't mind if you accept my birds as a trees, mushrooms or whatever, as long as your imagination stays in my dream.

⁵ Alexandrian Sarane "Surrealist art" Thames and Huston Ltd., London 1970

Memories and mystical dreams:

Every memory is incomplete. Very often someone else adds something in the conversation which you forgot and that's how you complete the story.

There is some playfulness of your imagination which can easily trick you. How true a memory could be is subjective. Beyond just the memory of the certain moment. We are going beyond the memory transformed through the imagination. The things which you see are not the real things which I saw, but a transformation through yours and my imagination. Away from the conventional bounds.

“the art works are something made that have become more than something simply made”⁶ Adorno

Memories are just as fragile as dreams are. When you wake up in the morning and try to recover a dream you remember more the feeling of it, but the details are blurry. The same happens when you try to fix a story which happened a long time ago; your mind can easily trick you with some details, but you remember certain parts of it and how you felt very clearly. The feeling is the dominant factor. Maybe we don't dream and memorize at all. Maybe in both cases we are just resuming the feelings which we have about something, or create new ones.

Then the task is how to resume the feeling of my memory? How to materialize the memory? I try to depict this fragileness and transparency of a memory through the clay.

I could describe the moment as vibrant and unclear. There are probably a lot of ways to interpret that vibration and transparent feeling, but I found it through the net. This material was a natural solution for me at the moment because I was working with it in previous projects. So I start to work with both of the materials in a compilation, it could be called a hybrid object. This gave me the vibration, unclearness and blurriness which I wanted to.

Mixed media:

Function less, abstract, sculpture installation.

The work could be described as a mixed media. It is a combination of different materials and impressions. The clay and the metal net is creating one group of objects. A half clay, half metal made bird. On the other hand the effect of the shadow gives another feeling. I would like to describe this as adding supplements. This supplementation completes the whole view of what my dream looks like in my memory. For me all elements have equal importance in the work, and separate elements carry their own individual meaning.

The net is a product of mass production, it has certain qualities and serves certain needs. I like the idea of using materials which is considered to be commercial or fabricated, and put them in another scene. Then the mass produced product become a part of something else. They are no longer a part of their ordinary use. Through that process it gives them another individuality, puts them in another context, and even changes the value of them.

⁶ Adorno, Adamson Glenn *“Thinking through craft”* Oxford New York, Berg Publishers 2007

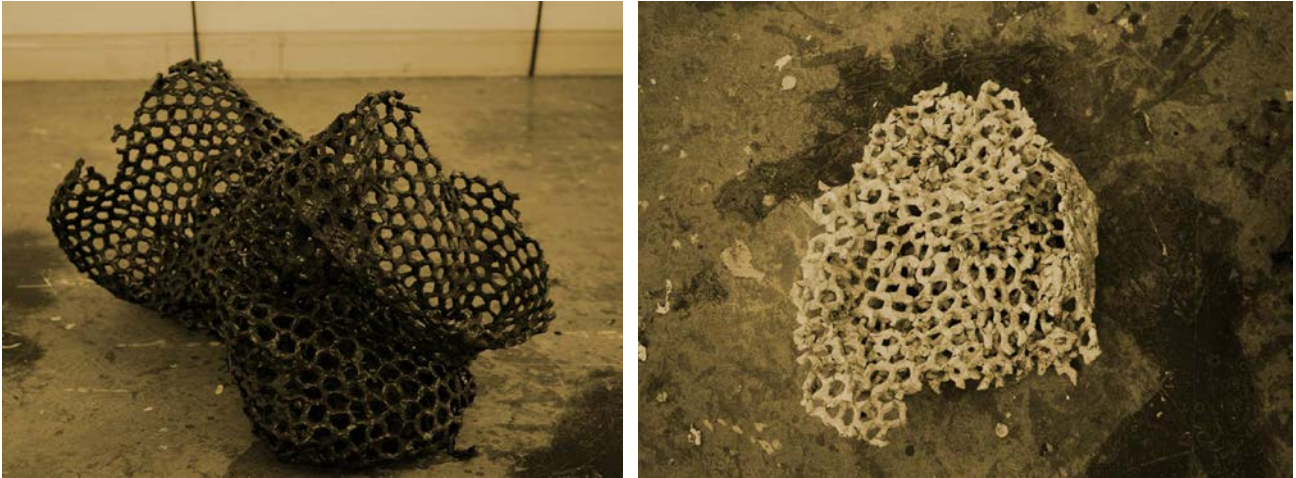


A work piece in progress

The supplement in that case, the net, is working as an armature but also has a place in the conception of the idea. I wanted to look through another prospective to that material and escape from the usual properties which it has. But at the same time to use the ordinary purpose of the net, her function. Usually the net is used to separate, to make borders, and I wanted to use that meaning. So there is a logic of the supplement and its importance not just as an armature. The bird is considered to be messenger of peace and the net the limitation of freedom.

Boundaries and the message of peace:

Question of intent (peace)



Detail

In a connection with the body of the bird - built by a material which purpose is very often connected with a limitation. If we accept that as a metaphor to our personalities in some way. We are built of limitations of the society, self-limits, family, countries and political situations. And with our own will we very often build our own freedom by self-limitations.

I want the fiction of the bird which I made to be a messenger of peace, to be positive. But I cannot point the fact that even though we are a very modern society, we still cannot handle peace. The net is a tool which makes borders, separate living things or just a land. Used in battlefields and trying to solve problems of war by creating a border for people, but not solving real human problems. Even now there is a war for land somewhere on earth, for independence, or a disputation of a border. So I am representing the reality in some way, the bad and the good in our human nature.

People want to be the messengers of peace, but our own believes sometimes rope us like nets and do not allow us to do that. But I do believe in the good of human nature and I try to make the work vibrate a positive feeling. There is a not a direct connection between my representation of a bird, and the traditional Japanese ones, or another symbolism such as peace. I present the waterfowl the way I saw them and the feelings they gave me that evening.

Throughout history, birds have been viewed as animals of special value and have been loaded with meanings often derived from legends and stories that have survived through many generations. Some of them connected with the peace and hope like the story about the origami cranes.

There is a story about the folded origami cranes and how they become symbol of hope and peace. After the end of World War II Sadako Sasaki was diagnosed with leukemia after being exposed to

radiation, after the bombing of Hiroshima. She became determinate to fold 1,000 cranes in hopes of recovering good health, happiness, and a world of entire peace. She completes just 644 the rest were folded by her classmates Later to her honor and to memorialize her strong spirit, statue was raised in the Hiroshima Peace Park Today this practice of folding 1,000 cranes represents a form of hope during challenging times. After the events of September 11, as a gesture of support thousands of cranes were folded and linked together in chains, send to fire, police stations, museums and churches thought New York City.



Detail

History connections and meanings

I need to return back to the starting point from where inspiration came from - the river. Back then I remember I was excited and knew that I will make something of that view. When I came back I started to search for information. I wanted to know about the river and the kind of birds which are living there. The information I found gave me even more inspiration to continue my work on the topic.

Waterfowl in Eastern cultures:

Waterfowl have a special place in eastern art and painters depicted waterfowl and portrayed them with sculpture like accuracy. Numerous scenes have been produced showing them in a variety of ways,

presented through painted ceramics, metal sculptures and woodcut. Such depictions can also be seen in western art where the waterfowl can be found in pottery, terracotta figures and cast metal objects.

One example is the crane which in Japan is most famous for its symbol of long life, peace, good fortune and longevity. Cranes also symbolize marital love and fidelity because they are monogamous, pairing for life and devoted to one mate throughout all seasons. Japanese families honored it as a bringer of good luck because of its courage and alertness. It is also thought as a guardian watching over the poultry and fish. The Chinese believe they were symbols of wisdom. The same goes for herons of all kinds, the egrets together with cranes, which are extremely sociable by nature. In mythology they also very often have the same meaning.

The cormorant teaches us how to dive into the waters of life creatively, like a symbol of rebirth. When it appears in our lives as a message, it is a reminder for us to dive in to what we have been hesitating about. The Cormorants have been used as symbols of nobility, indulgence, and in more modern times a totem for fishermen for a bountiful catch. Ukai is a traditional fishing method, which uses trained cormorants to catch river fish. It is a very old type of fishing and today ukai takes place in the summer months in about a dozen rivers across Japan.

Gion Festival:

Gion Matsuri is the most famous festival in Japan which takes place in Kyoto. The festival continues the entire July month. Yamaboko Junko is the name of the parade which is holding on July 17 and 24. Festival takes its name from Kyoto's Gion district. The beginning of Gion Matsuri was in 869 when in the town appear many natural disasters: floods, fire, pestilence, and earthquakes. Then Emperor Seiwa said to his people to pray to the godhead of Yasaka Shrine, Susanoo no Mikoto. In order to appease the god's people from Kyoto created 66 halberds, representing each of the old Japan provinces, and present these, along with portable shrines from Yasaka Shrine, in a garden called Shinsen-en. After that each time when an epidemic occurred, the people followed this practice. In 1533, the Ashikaga announced the end of religious rituals, but the people demanded the continuation of this possession, for more celebratory than religious purposes. The festival had gradually transformed into a means for powerful merchants to demonstrate their wealth. Today the tradition of extravagant float parades, music, dancing, comical plays, and the display of historical and cultural relics continue. The tradition today despite its name, Gion Matsuri isn't actually held in Gion District but on the other side of Kamo-gawa river. Gion Matsuri is a month long celebration, characterized by local festivals, performances, foods, and music.

Book source of information:

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Quotes:

¹ Interview: Steinberg Saul "Talks (1967)"

^{2, 3, 4} Veiteberg Jorunn catalogue "Différence et repetition", La garantie, Paris 2014

⁵ Alexandrian Sarane "Surrealist art" Thames and Huston Ltd., London 1970, chapter eight :
Festivals of the imagination, p.151

⁶ Adorno, Adamson Glenn "Thinking trough craft" Oxford New York, Berg Publishers 2007,
chapter: Supplemental, p.11, from Aesthetic Theory p.179

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