

„The Sound of One Hand Clapping: The Art of Andres Klimbacher“

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Speak softly and carry a big stick – Theodore Roosevelt

Andres Klimbacher is a man of action. His original artistic intention was to become a painter. For that purpose, as a young man he left the countryside for Vienna. His first solo painting exhibition, arranged by his artist mother, was in the City Hall of Feldkirch, Carinthia. His mother was a painter and ceramicist, his father a carpenter and lathe operator. Klimbacher grew up in a home full of color and imagination. He also grew up in his father's company, working there in summers. From the earliest age on, Andres Klimbacher was involved with creating shapes and forms, encouraged by parents who themselves understood and loved tools and materials. After some attempts to establish himself in the Viennese art scene, he decided to return to Carinthia. Klimbacher then made an artistic reorientation in the direction of sculpture, in order to get to "der Kern der Sachen" (the heart of things).

Experimentation is one of Andres Klimbacher's greatest joys, and his career is marked by his use of a wide range of materials. He makes small or large sculptures of wood or cast aluminum, which are notable for having constructions that allow one to see into the sculpture. Klimbacher speaks often of "das Innenleben der Skulptur sichtbar machen" (divulging the inner life of a sculpture). These sculptures are revealing of Klimbacher's philosophy of life. They exude a meditative quality, and are at the same time in equal parts, intricate and unpretentious.

Building the negative form for casting, where one can see through the form, is both laborious and time-consuming. Yet in the final sculptures, only the essence of the elaborate process of creation remains. As Milan Kundera aptly described, they have a touch of the unbearable lightness of being, even the massive works. Klimbacher makes sculpture in the art historical tradition of an Auguste Rodin. He creates objects that are bursting with the vitality of the material, yet also indicate the complex thought process that goes into them.

Two exhibitions, both held in the Herzogburg Gallery in St. Veit an der Glan, illustrate well the spectrum of Klimbacher's work. The first, **STRUCTURE** (2014 SOLO), concerned the interior life of sculpture. The second fest für zeitgenössische skulptur: hrdlicka und Klimbacher was an extremely fruitful project for Klimbacher. It was initiated in 2016 by the St. Pölten gallery owner Dr. Karl-Heinz Maringer. Klimbacher showed works alongside those of Alfred

Hrdlicka, one of the most important 20th century Austrian sculptors in the heroic tradition.

As a starting point for the works in that exhibition, Klimbacher asked himself what makes Hrdlicka's sculptures so powerful. The idea of the fist (*Faust*, the name of this catalogue), is the same word as title of Goethe's literary work *Faust. Eine Tragödie*. Klimbacher photographed his own fist, and created a photomontage and sculpture of it. His concept was to use photography to visually explain to the observer how his ideas came into form. When viewers reacted to Klimbacher's fist, they often referred to the Goethe play. This inspired Klimbacher to explore that theme, and he weaved conceptual elements concerning the *Faust* characters Mephisto and Gretchen into further artworks in the series.

Klimbacher is amused that the sculptures he made around the Mephisto idea found the most resonance with the public, because his intention was to make works that were "hässlich und gefährlich" (ugly and dangerous). He thought they would not sell, yet the Mephisto sculptural works ended up selling the most of this series. His Gretchen works were created in a similar way as the fists: Klimbacher made a nude photograph of a woman (Tina, his wife and muse), and created variations of photomontages and sculptures.

The fictional Mephisto led him to thoughts about the legend of the Minotaur from classical Antiquity to the work of Pablo Picasso (another artist whose approach and interaction with material have strong parallels with those of Klimbacher). Both the Faust and the Minotaur narrative are highly emotional, fraught with danger for the protagonist. They relate how a person must go to the depths of their experience, even at the risk of losing their life or soul. These queries are part of Andres Klimbacher's key investigation: how to find the inner life of the material: wood, metal, stone or whatever he lays his hands on. What is the message of the material, the innermost content of the sculpture?

Each material that Klimbacher works with presents its own challenge, and he is an artist who constantly pushes himself and his artistic boundaries. Klimbacher's oeuvre is a continuing exploration of materiality and a testing of possibilities. His cube sculpture with sphere inside presented an especially delicate technical challenge to make the sand negative. The sand form had to be destroyed at the end in order to liberate the sculpture, making that work then a unique object. He also has worked with wood, but wood gets cracks and fissures. It has the limited size of the diameter of the tree trunk. Klimbacher knows that one cubic meter of stone weighs 3,5 tons, meaning that an outdoor exhibition space or an extremely large gallery would be necessary for displaying a major

sculpture in stone. With sheet metal, the creative process is bound and limited to the thinness of the metal. After many years of experimentation, Klimbacher works now primarily with aluminum casts. He says that aluminum casts are perhaps the most permissive material to work with (“Aluguß lässt an meisten zu”). He feels that he has no limits (“keine Begrenzung”) using aluminum because he can pour the liquid metal into any form he wants – round or angular. Currently that gives him the most artistic satisfaction.

One especially interesting phase of Klimbacher’s artistic development involved using a chainsaw, as he says, “letting the chainsaw talk” (lasst die Motorsäge sprechen). He refined the technique of sculpting with a chainsaw to the point that he speaks of making wooden sculptures where “die Schnitte sich berührten” (the cuts touched each other). Once again the interior life of the sculpture was revealed. His work in this area got him invited to Finland to make chainsaw performances. Klimbacher worked so quickly and masterfully that he could finish an entire medium-sized sculpture in just one and a half hours. His goal was to apply the chainsaw to the wood as if he was making a quick sketch on paper.

When Andres Klimbacher uses the chainsaw on wood or the angle grinder on metal, he is making a lot of noise. He continually creates (as the 2011 Krastal Sculpture Symposium was called) the “sound of sculpture.” Klimbacher tells that his entire life he has always liked to make a lot of noise. This is an enlightening statement, because in appearance and way of interaction, Klimbacher is gentle and soft-spoken. The acoustic element of creating his sculptures, which as a finished result are completely still, is part of his profound enjoyment of the work process.

Impressive as well is that Andres Klimbacher is an accomplished musician who plays regularly in two completely different formations. It is not a surprise that his instrument is the drums. One band is a rock ensemble with a lead singer, called Lazy Bones. They play hard and heavy party music that makes one want to dance and have a good time. The second band is a jazz combo (*ARGE Töne*) that specializes in improvisational music. The abstract music, which is created spontaneously and ephemerally each time they play together, is diametrically opposed to the sounds of the rock group, which functions so well because of many years of practice. His musical activities provide us with more insight into his sculptural work. Andres Klimbacher is very sophisticated, able to move along a scale of nuances from the lightest to the heaviest, from the softest whisper to the loudest scream.

Klimbacher is not only an artist and a musician, he is also an organizer and enabler in the arts. He has been active since decades at the sculpture

symposia in Maria Saal and in Krastal. Klimbacher is tireless in his efforts to encourage young artists, to stimulate established artists to try new things, and to create possibilities for artistic exchange and communication by helping international artists come to Carinthia to stay, work and exhibit. Together with Astrid Panger, he runs the Herzogburg Gallery, an exciting multifunction space for exhibitions and performances located in a medieval castle. Klimbacher is an active member of the art association Kunstverein Kärnten, and recently joined the board of directors. All of these activities point to his highly developed social conscience, and is especially praiseworthy and notable in the contemporary climate of market forces and personal profit that dominates the art world. Klimbacher is a professional artist, but that does not limit him from continually engaging himself on the level of cultural policy for the benefit of the artistic community in Austria.

These seeming contradictions are what make Andres Klimbacher a fascinating artist to watch. On the one hand he is a complete pioneer and a self-reliant person. He lives and works in the deep countryside, and is in the process of steadily renovating his workshop so that he can do all of the sculptural processes himself, including foundry work. This will free him to be even more creatively independent, and independence is one of his most highly prized values. Perhaps this elemental need for self-sufficiency stems partially from his cultural background. Klimbacher was born in Basel, Switzerland and raised in Carinthia. His love of nature and frontier spirit is intrinsic.

On the other hand, at the same time that Klimbacher is expanding his personal atelier possibilities, he is also working on a project for the community at large. There is a footpath through the woods adjoining his property, and a clear open space between two sections of forest. Klimbacher arranged with the owner of the land to realize an ambitious project. He is planning and executing an open-air sculpture park of his work. When people walking through the landscape come to this part of the path, they will be greeted by Klimbacher's massive or delicate, playful or somber, sculptures in a variety of materials, before continuing on through the forest. In this intermezzo, Klimbacher wants to provide for those who come along a moment of wonder and pleasure, free under the sky and free of charge. His sculptures, placed in this setting, will remind the viewer that there is no contradiction between art and nature. They are parts of a whole; the creations of humans do not have to be destructive to the Earth. Klimbacher's sculpture garden is a gift that he is making to society and to future generations.

As a visual artist, as a musician, as cultural enabler: Andres Klimbacher is a person who wants to embolden the people who interact with him and his artistic production. He is just as interested in making long-term interventions

that will resonate over time, as in the exquisiteness of the present moment that is the essence of the live music he plays. Andres Klimbacher journeys through this world discovering the beauty and possibilities in materials, the beauty and possibilities in music, and the beauty and possibilities that come from working together with other artists in situations of exchange and creativity. A Renaissance man, Andres Klimbacher shares his discoveries with us, a grateful audience, and we are very much enriched by being in contact with him and his art.

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