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Zoltan Borberekí

Borberekí came to South Africa from Hungary in 1949. Over the last twenty-five years, therefore, we have become familiar with his sculpted torso and abstract forms. These have been worked in a staggering range of materials — ivory, various woods and semi-precious stones, stainless steel and latterly, fibre-glass and perspex.

Last year Borberekí won the conjoint Southern Cross Stainless Steel and Transvaal House Sculpture Competition. His simple design in stainless steel will soar an impressive seven metres from the lower retail level of Transvaal House in Pretoria. The three-man judging panel for the competition was Mr. James Fitzsimmons, Editor of Art International, Professor Fabio Barraclough and Mr. Don Maxwell who participated in the capacity of technical consultant for Southern Cross.

Many of Borberekí's sculptures are large pieces of semi-precious stone worked into rounded, polished abstract forms. Of all stone he finds marble the easiest to work: "I can carve marble like butter," the sculptor avers with a determined twinkle. The most difficult stone is crystal: "You can't carve it because it cracks; you hit it, it shatters." One piece, in rose quartz, was fashioned by polishing — slowly, laboriously.

Borberekí has recently completed a torso — squat, female and youthful in line. Made out of tambouti, she gleams a rich red/brown, and sports a golden patch — part of the grain — on one thigh. Like his other sinuous female forms in wood, the surface is smoothly worked and brought up to a high shine; but her squatness is atypical, as her 'sisters' tend toward slender attenuation.

In order to use wood as a sculptural medium, a full knowledge of its nature is necessary. 'The older the better' is a cardinal rule in selecting appropriate pieces for carving. Borberekí has a huge log of tambouti from Rhodesia 'so big not even ten people can lift it up!' For best results it should lie in the sun and rain for ten years or more — as many other logs already carved.

The climate in Johannesburg is devastating for wood carvings. Sculptures that have survived for up to a hundred years in Europe are brought out here and crack — sometimes right through. This happens because of the

frequent swings from dry heat to prolonged humidity, and back again. By contrast, stone that is durable here will not survive the severity of a Hungarian winter. Water seeps into cracks in the stone; with the freezing temperatures at night, it turns to ice, expands, and cracks the sculpture.

Perspex is the material used for several recent works. One, combined with rock crystal, an open butterfly form, is exciting and large, being 84 cm across. The Johannesburg Art Gallery has purchased an ivory and perspex work which rotates to present fascinating effects of light and reflection through the clear perspex, in contrast to the solid, ivory core.

Borberekí explained the challenge of this demanding material. Perspex is available in this country only in sheets. These have then to be laminated in order to produce a block from which to work. At first this is a difficult operation, as bubbles tend to become trapped with inexpert handling: 'I can now make this perfect — but it took much experimental work — takes much time and material — very slow work'

The tools for fashioning different materials presented problems. On certain stone, the customary diamond drill was virtually ineffective, so existing tools had to be adapted. Perspex, too, necessitated specialised equipment. Once laminated into a block it is

theoretically worked as wood — but wood-carving tools do not stand up to the resistance of the perspex, so Borberekí devised his own methods.

Large firms in Europe own Borberekí works. Mercedes-Benz, Stuttgart purchased a verdite piece entitled 'Growth', which is now housed in their collection. The Deutsche Bank, Frankfurt and Pierre Cardin, Paris both own verdite abstract sculptures — rounded, beautifully finished and satisfying forms.

A family group show is planned for April/May in Paris. Zoltan and his son Daniel, a fine sculptor in his own right, will exhibit their work, and paintings by Elizabeth, Zoltan's wife, will also be shown. A parallel of artistic ability within one family may perhaps be found among the Menuhins in the world of music.

Borberekí's sculptures are pleasing when viewed from any angle — giving credence to the term 'in the round.' Their balance, line and meticulous finish are features common to works in all the different materials. While certain works retain a classical simplicity, many are wholly contemporary in design — a two-metre high perspex 'Mother and Child' being one of them. Zoltan Borberekí treats his medium and his forms with respect. Out of this come works of aesthetic appeal and integrity. □

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