

TOBEL

REFLECTIONS IN STONE *- from the inside out*

By CHRISTIANE AHLHELM

A DICTUM SAYS: "STONE IS THE COMPILED HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSE". TOBEL'S WORLD IS THIS DENSE FORM OF ENERGY TO BE FOUND IN THE HUGE BLOCKS OF STONE HE WORKS WITH. HIS PIECES OF ART ARE IN CONTRAST TO WHAT WE NORMALLY UNDERSTAND BY A SCULPTURE.

As a contemporary artist, he is opposed to the spirit of time. His works differ fundamentally from the traditional and industrial stone carvings. TOBEL does not change the outer aspect of the stone, but starts changing the monolithic stone from the inside.

TOBEL was born in 1968 in the City of Munich into a family with a long standing tradition for art. His great-grandfather was a sculptor in Munich, and his mother Lotte Koch is well-known for her paintings and drawings.

At a young age, TOBEL challenged himself by climbing in the Rocky Mountains of America and the high peaks of the Himalayas. The physical strength he gained made his biceps grow but also helped him for today's work as a sculptor. Nature, and in particular stones and rocks, have always fascinated TOBEL; and he is constantly looking for stones which inspire

new sculptures. He finds them in quarries, river beds, and in the mountains, and his choice is determined by what he expects to find underneath the surface.

TOBEL's search for elementary forms has its origin in the unhewn block of stone. This rough block of stone determines the size, proportions and the character of his sculptures. His sculptures are created to represent the interior life of a stone block. Several hundred millions of years - the history of the stone - are made visible.

In his workshop he creates sculptures which reveal the inner soul of the stone. To hew the stone is a very hard job, but nothing is as sensitive as stone, one false hit, a crack and a fracture, and the whole concept is destroyed.

A lot of pain and attention has to be given to the preparatory work before starting to apply the heavy tools. As mentioned before, sculptors in general convert the outside of the stone. TOBEL is different; he is more fascinated by the interior life of the stone. TOBEL transforms the stone by excavations in form of caves, spirals, passages and tubes. His preferred



TOBEL, Whirl, Austria



TOBEL, Light, Bahrain



material is granite, since it is homogenous and free of cracks and veins. He proceeds slowly, centimeter by centimeter, with the help of diamond saws and pneumatic drills, hammers and chisels. One design he often uses is the spiral – round, oval, large and small, with single or multiple curves.

TOBEL's decision to use three dimensional spirals stems from the counter-flow of the opposing directions in the spirals, which open up countless opportunities. The spiral is a geometrical figure which is unusual and yet mathematical. It occurs in nature: in a whirlpool, in a snail shell, in the artifice of a spider's web, or in a tornado.

If we pursue the tracks of the spiral we can understand that this form is present on every scale. From every cell of our body, in the double helix of the DNA, through the gigantic eddy of the spiral nebula, to the milky way itself, where our own solar system spirals around the constellation Hercules. Since the dawn of history, through all times and eras, this elementary form has never ceased to amaze, in the realm of plants or engineering, in art or religion.

The vacuum, devoid of material, becomes the focal point, and the age of the stone – several hundred millions of years – becomes visible. We imagine the

spiral to continue its endless movement beyond the stone. It draws us into the center and origin of the world in ever decreasing circles. The outward movement describes ever increasing circles which eventually encompass the universe and puts it under its spell. The huge block of stone is only a tiny part of this infinite spiral.

The spiral respects the personality of the stone, and through the curls and curves the contemplator perceives another aspect. Spirals carved in stone become very interesting when they break through on the other side of the sculpture, thus capturing the light. Inspired by this light scheme TOBEL is now working more with forms which allow him to capture the light, and just calls these sculptures "Light".

It is impossible to make a stone lighter in weight, and it is not easily conceivable to make a stone shine and glow. And still TOBEL has succeeded to capture



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the light from the opening at the top of the stone. And as the light intensity changes during the course of the day, as well as during the seasons, these changes are reflected inside of TOBEL's sculpture. This "sundial" does not intend to make precise indications, it only wishes to seduce the contemplator to relax and be absorbed and attracted by the light. It provides the possibility to observe changes of the inner form without actually changing the form of the sculpture - a metaphor for body and spirit.

TOBEL's strength as a sculptor is to be found in his talent to make the stone speak to us. He succeeds to give the natural stone a voice and to encourage it to dialogue in its own way. When TOBEL's hammer hits the stone he can tell if the stone has a resonance and responds to him. Then a slow dialogue starts between the colossus of stone and the sculptor. The sculpture represents infinity, and so do the designs which TOBEL has created: ancient, archaic motifs such as spirals, cells, circles, triangles or quadrangles.

Enterprises, communities and municipals are his main clients. They are mainly located in Asia, and in particular Korea and Taiwan. TOBEL's works can also be seen in Europe, Bahrain, and Turkey. This autumn he won the biennial prize in Argentina.

All those who are looking for stability and admire art which provides strength and peacefulness will love TOBEL'S contemporary witnesses of stone.

More sculptures, descriptions about his projects, and some videos can be seen on TOBEL's homepage: www.tobel.org

