

Map Code

Considering map coding as the topic of my lecture, I would like to introduce my very recent work, called *Somorgraphy*, that was exhibited in April, 2019 at the Šamorín's synagogue.

Šamorín is a small town close to my home and its synagogue is run by a Jewish-Canadian couple. Csaba, a local man, grew up in the synagogue's shade and Suzanne had married there. They reconstructed and in fact saved the building, developing a unique cultural space with a significant name, *At Home Gallery*. There have been over 20 years of fine art, music and other cultural activities taking place there.

In 2000, they invited the Dalai Lama of Tibet for his very first visit to Slovakia. An event of creating a big colourful sand mandala by Tibetan monks was visited by hundreds of people who created an unprecedented queue to be part of it. At the end, the mandala was washed away by waters from the Danube.

In preparation for my solo show in the synagogue, my first suggestion was to create a six metres tall replica of a water tower, one of those often seen at the South Slovakian-Hungarian borders that feeds water to the surrounding area.

A second proposal, which won, was a 3D map of the town centre made of naturally fired ceramics. I started working on the map last summer, enlarging it to 6×1.5 metres in size.

The use of Google Earth compared daily with the reality of Šamorín's streets, churches and buildings made me a specialist for all vistas of the town, from the point of the water tower on one edge, to the Chapel of the Queen Anne on the other. Since last October, I have been kneeling on the floor above the map to create 40 reliefs, using four hundred kilos of clay, sculpting one building after another following a bird's eye perspective. The modelling period took six months with a speed of one relief per week. Every month I transported what I had created 200 km from my home to Banská Bystrica to bisque fire the pieces. At the beginning of February, precisely by Murphy's law, all the pieces started to blow in the kiln for no obvious reason. I lost 7 kiln-loads and had to repeat ten slabs.

After reading every article of ceramic technology I could find, I concluded that sudden changes of temperature from minus five and residual water caused the disaster. Desperate and running out of time I decided to switch to more resistant stoneware clay, although different in structure and colour. This clay allowed me, at least partially, to fire in my dream wooden kiln. I was instructed and warned by strangers and enthusiastic ceramists I found on the internet that such big size of a slab is very risky to fire and unpredictable when woodfiring, though I just had to try. With the help of the especially influential Kiln Gods the firing turned out well. I did soda firing by adding soda into the kiln at 1100°C and it worked surprisingly well. Over thirty slabs I fired in a less dangerous sawdust kiln. I constructed experimental wooden and sawdust kilns just for this occasion, using what I had learned from previous natural firings.

Some parts of the installation were processed in raku firing, with temperatures around 1000°C.

At the end of March, the beautiful space of the synagogue welcomed me, though it was very cold after the winter period. I installed the small Šamorín on a styrofoam pedestal with sand covered sides.

Acknowledging a specific feature of the building, which is turned to the Southeast instead of the East, as given in Jewish liturgical law, I turned my small synagogue to the East according to the magnetic compass. I felt like a giant playing with Lego buildings.

After five days of installation I displayed my ceramic topography and offered it to the people of Šamorín.

I love watching how a piece of art takes on a life of its own when confronted by visitors. People smiled when pointing to the places that they recognized, used to walk by, or live in. I will never forget the gallerist's boyish smile when I first uncovered the reliefs and he noticed his favourite pub.

Referring to the exterior and the interior, I saw clearly, that people are both the place and the site. They create it by living, by their political and environmental decisions, and by their everyday emotions and relationships.

In decoding a map what we do is take the reality of the exterior environment into our minds so it becomes interiorized as our own; our responsibility in the widest sense.

My great thanks to the keepers of *At Home Gallery*, Suzanne and Csaba Kiss.

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