



FIRE TURNS EARTH INTO MUSIC

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Beschreibung:

Expedition into the Realm of the Smiths FIRE TURNS EARTH INTO MUSIC In this article about the men who conquered fire and turned it to good use I will confine myself to the small area which has become my very own. As a sculptor of metal and metalworker I am familiar with handling metals. Work in the smithy and at the hearth, at the fire and with it, combines the magic of authenticity with the awareness that this work is timeless. My fascination with iron led me to occupy myself more closely with this material. In a way, this meant going on a mental expedition to the elemental forces of nature and to the men who were the first to use iron as a material and conquered the element fire. Besides the potter, the smith or metalworker was the first who could deal with the element fire and control- it - an archetype of creative man. His work was always shrouded in mystery and came close to being considered supernatural. His material, iron, was of divine origin. It was part of the numinous aspect of his trade. The first crude iron was not extracted from the earth. Small pieces of meteorites - often not bigger than a pea - which the smith picked up from the surface of the earth on his wanderings, were skilfully welded together in the fire and worked on. After this laborious work the smith forged them into blades, made ornaments or agricultural implements, thus creating objects to be used for daily survival or in religious worship. This' meteoritic iron, given to man from above - from heaven - was a link between heaven and earth. It was the smith who shared in the divine creativity. From time immemorial he was an artistic hero who passed on mythologies, rites and metallurgic mysteries. This made a great impression on people at all times. "Myths are the past which we have not yet overcome; we feel an inner need to recreate them. They are at work in our language, poetry, art and science." (Hubert Gottschalk, Lexikon der Mythologie). Do we not find in many cracks and folds of our everyday life and work memories of the dim and distant past, notions of mystical connections and deep secrets? We should heighten our sensibility to these links with the past: and that of others who are interested; in such things. It is not a question of conjuring up new myths but of experiencing the old ones afresh and linking them with the present. In this day and age, when our modern industrial culture is controlled by a technology which is not easily comprehensible, it seems worthwhile to take a look at the old images and ideas on which metalwork is founded. The smith was one of the first specialists. Often highly respected, sometimes ostracised and feared, he was -soot-blackened and dirty - always indispensable, as indispensable as his work, to which there were always two sides: "that of bread and that of war" (Fritz Kühn). Whether plough or sword - the smith created the means to preserve life and to enrich culture. His work was strange, his techniques mysterious. It was therefore only natural that he was supposed to have magical powers, and it was fascinating for me to look for traces and evidence of the original smith's art. What was the smith's social and religious position in the course of history? Which traditions and rites developed round him? The metalworker, a master of the elements, represents a higher principle of

purification and transformation. With his knowledge of alloying metals he combines traditional forms and meanings. He often stood out as a figure of integration, as for instance among the Matakam, a Cameroon tribe. He was magician, fortuneteller or master of ceremonies. But he was also prisoner of a prince, with his tendons cut - as "Wieland the Smith" - crippled and full of hatred. He used his skills to take revenge and escape. The kinship of smiths, shamans, alchemists and sorcerers can be proved from the early days of mankind up to the present. In the Germanic north it is the giants whose weapons are iron bars and in whose world the iron wood is situated. Gnomes guard the metal treasures underground and work on them. From these gnomes man learned the art of forging. Regin, Mime, Wieland - they are skilful smiths but also cunning and malicious sorcerers. Their place was later taken by the Devil, the black master in sooty hell. In numerous legends and fairytales these old conceptions live on even to this day. The smith as master of the elements and vehicle of power and culture has a strange fascination. This can be experienced time after time at the hearth and anvil. Forging - whether iron or precious metals - is a time-honoured activity, with a tradition of thousands of years, whose essential elements have remained unchanged. Besides this historico-cultural aspect of the smith's art and interrelated with it - there is the sensual experience of this kind of work. Handling the hard, unyielding material, which has passed through fire and takes shape under the smith's hands, has lost nothing of its fascination. Besides, the smith appeared to possess a divine gift for changing the original nature of a substance. He was able to transform mineral rock into artistic vessels or vibrant implements, to melt his material or make it solid, hard or malleable, any way he wanted. The title "Fire Turns Earth into Music" refers to the changing through fire of the element iron and its mechanical processing. It refers to the transformation of the material, which was extracted from the earth, into a state of highest tension which produces a vibrating sound. The sound of bells, the clanging of weapons, the whirr of a steel string or the boom of a gong - these are the sensual experiences which for the expert demonstrate the transcendence of the material. Anyone who had the opportunity to watch African smiths at work may find the connection between smiths and music natural and experience the process of forging as music: the rhythm of the bellows, the interplay of the hammers which hit the anvil in a precisely fixed order and talk to it, so to speak. It is therefore not surprising that in the Arabic language, for instance, there are analogies between the terms "forging" and "music". The rhythm of forging with the hammer turns into music. The period of time in which a red-hot iron dies out becomes the metre which determines the work. Swift and concentration blend together at the fire into a sensation of elemental, vital forces. The powerful air hammer - the simple mechanical smith of the 20th century - substituted the smith's assistant helper. Forging, therefore, became an adventure of the individual. Anyone who is aware of the various uses of iron knows that computers have only a partially determining influence on our time; iron and steel, however, pervade our life. Our iron age seems to approach its peak. Peter Schmitz

Allgemeine Hinweise zur Bestellung

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