

**Margaret Medley, *The Chinese Potter: A Practical History of Chinese Ceramics*. Oxford, Phaidon Press, 1976. 288 pp., illus.**

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the Jardins du Luxembourg where it found its home. The stimuli most akin visually are discerned by Geist in a group within the study for the painting by Matisse, *Music* (1907), in Gauguin's sculpture *Hina and te Fatou* (ca. 1893), and in Derain's *Crouching Figure* (1907). All three works were shown in Paris in 1906-07 in one way or another according to the evidence offered by Geist. The rich iconographic documentation might, though it need not, be extended by some small additions such as a genre group in clay, *Departure for Work*, made in Paris by Rodin's Czech pupil Josef Maratka in 1901. However, what I think is really missing are four versions of *L'Étreinte* by Josef Bernard dating back to 1906-07 and which are very pertinent to the progressive compression of the composition into the angular block; leaving aside five of the sculptor's pieces from 1898-1905 which do not relate to a kiss by their titles but do by the motif of togetherness of male and female bodies. At the conclusion of the chapter, the thematic link is established between the Craiova *Kiss* and Brancusi's earlier group entitled by Geist *The Rebuff* (lost) and its relation to Brancusi's frustrating love story in his early Parisian years is discussed.

In the chapter on 'Variations,' the motif of the kiss is investigated in a series of some fourteen of Brancusi's sculptural works including the *Column of the Kiss* (1916-18) and the *Gate of the Kiss* (1935-37) for Tirgu Jiu in Rumania, as well as in the two-dimensional sketches and a painting. Considering the Craiova *Kiss* as the point of departure, modifications of increasing lapidary robustness are studied along with the mutating meaning of the very personalized icon. Exploring the slight gestural and typological alterations, Geist reads them as being

cogently meaningful for the theme. Consistent with his earlier writing, Geist challenges Brancusi's own statement made *post factum* (1926), relying rather upon the testimony of Margit Pogany, and views *The Kiss* of Montparnasse Cemetery (1909) as far less sensual and rationalized than the one in Craiova, which he characterizes as earthly and pagan in the frankness of the representation of the sexual act. *The Boundary Marker*, which repeats in principle the compositional pattern of the Montparnasse group, is explained as displaying geometry and a mechanical quality. Geist's dating of the latter work to 1945 relies on André Salmon's testimony and is related to the artist's response to the unjust territorial arrangement of the Rumanian boundary towards the end of the war. More convincing, however, is the interpretation and dating suggested by V.G. Paleolog in a small publication of limited distribution.<sup>2</sup> He points to 1940 as the year of the drastic division of Rumania of which some results were then only confirmed before the end of the war.

In connection with the early versions of the *Kiss* and their inspiration, Geist introduces the term *Fauve sculpture*, which had not previously been used by art historiography. Referring to the sculpture of Matisse, Derain's *Crouching Figure*, Brancusi's *La Sagesse* (1908), *Caryatid* (ca. 1909) and two versions of *The Kiss* (Craiova 1907, Diamond Collection ca. 1908), Geist proposes the definition of the term, imputing bold design, freshness, and immediacy of touch to these works. Having the suggested group in mind, I am unable to see *Fauve sculpture* as a plausible working term encompassing a visually congruent body of works. That which some of Matisse's sixty sculptures such as *La Vie* (1906) or *La Serpentine* (1909) stand for in terms of the method of realization, Derain's piece or Brancusi's *Sagesse* negate. The level of explicitness of Matisse's free modelling and immediacy of rendering ('je transmettais en terre l'équivalence de ma sensation'<sup>3</sup>) clearly contrasts with all that was implied in the revolt against the *coup de pousse* and which is, among others, manifested in *Crouching Figure* as well as in Brancusi's works from 1907. Since then, 'Modelling

is not sculpture,' it is so neither for Brancusi nor for all sculptors attacking the *coup de pousse* such as Duchamp Villon (1913). If Geist wants to keep the term *Fauve Sculpture*, he undoubtedly will come back to its postulation in one of his future writings.

In the short chapter called 'In Time,' the material is comprised of exhibitions, responses, effects, and echoes of all kinds of versions of *The Kiss*. Once again, as in the previous chapter on the variants, Geist's most respectable Brancusian scholarship is displayed in a painstaking effort not to overlook any detail in the historical data collectable on the artist and his work. *The Kiss* of 1912, purchased on 1916 by John Quinn and acquired later for the Arensberg collection, is shown as the most widely known version until the first *Kiss* (in Craiova, 1907) was exhibited outside of Rumania in the 1960s. The influence of the later versions is found in Lehbruck's piece *Liebende Köpfe* (1918), in *The Kiss* (1930) by Julio Gonzalez, in William Zorach's *Embrace* (1933), and in the alabaster *Kiss* (1947) by Isamu Noguchi, one of the two sculptors who worked for a short time in Brancusi's studio.

Sidney Geist's new book is, indeed, a further substantial contribution to the bibliography of the 'sculptor of tomorrow' (Paul Morand), of 'a man who saved sculpture by having carved in stone' (Etienne Hadju), and one whose studio 'exhaled a magic feeling of eternity mixed with the beloved stone and stone dust' (Barbara Hepworth).<sup>4</sup>

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MARGARET MEDLEY *The Chinese Potter: A Practical History of Chinese Ceramics*. Oxford, Phaidon Press, 1976. 288 pp., illus.

The teaching of the history of Chinese ceramics has long been handicapped by the lack of a suitable text, since most comprehensive works on Chinese pottery date to the early twentieth century, the latest being published in 1945. Beginning students had to resort to

<sup>2</sup> V.G. Paleolog, 'Piatra di Hotar,' *despre un inedit iconografie din opera lui C. Brancusi* (Craiova, 1965).

<sup>3</sup> André Verdet, *Prestiges de Matisse* (Paris, 1952), 30.

<sup>4</sup> *Brancusi* (Exhibition, Brummer Gallery, New York, 17 Nov.-15 Dec. 1926), introduction by Paul Morand; Etienne Hadju, *Cahiers d'art*, xxx (1955), 214; Barbara Hepworth, *Carvings and Drawings* (London: Lund Humphries, 1952), 2.

the better catalogue introductions, to the always interesting but not always accurate and somewhat dated sections of Cox's *Pottery and Porcelain*, and to specialized volumes such as Gompertz's *Chinese Celadon Wares*. It is therefore with relief and pleasure that I can report that Medley's *The Chinese Potter* eminently satisfies this long-felt need.

The author is unquestionably qualified for the task, being curator of the Percival David Foundation of Chinese Art (London), one of the finest Chinese ceramic collections in the world (nearly half the pieces illustrated from the tenth century onward come from this collection). Her background as a potter has influenced her approach in that she has discarded the framework of connoisseurship, concerned with matching extant pieces to traditional appellations and descriptions, but rather writes with an interest in technological and artistic development. In addition, Medley discusses the various transitions within economic and political contexts. This approach helps to clarify some obvious but poorly understood developments: for example, the reasons for the sudden interest in underglaze blue and subsequent decline of traditional wares during the Yüan dynasty.

Following an introduction in which Medley discusses and defines the terms she will use to describe Chinese pottery, superior to most in that she loosely follows the simpler Chinese distinctions, the work is divided into three parts of several

chapters each. In Part I, 'The Basic Technology,' the sweep of early Chinese pottery from the fifth millennium B.C. to the sixth century A.D. is discussed with a clarity that enables the non-potter to follow the discussion with ease. In this and following sections, Medley incorporates with a critical eye the published material from a massive amount of archaeological work done in China during the last three decades.

Part II, 'The Period of Discovery and Innovation,' covers the T'ang, Sung, and Yüing dynasties and is appropriately twice the length of the other sections. Because of the large number of wares that develop in the Sung period, selection in an introductory work is necessary, and, of course, one's favorites may be missed. Limiting herself to the 'classic' wares, the discussion is perhaps too economical. For example, only two and one-half pages of text are devoted to Northern Celadon, leaving no space to discuss the relationship with Yüeh ware, covered twenty pages earlier, save that 'there is remote dependence on Yüeh' (p. 115). Since some early pieces are intermediary between the two, for example, the ewer in the Brundage collection (d'Argence, *Avery Brundage Collection of Chinese Ceramics*, pl. xxxic), an explanation of the degrees of dependence and remoteness would have been both interesting and useful. In discussion of the Tz'u-chou wares, Medley discusses the various decorated wares, but not the pure white that may have been popular

versions of Ting ware, especially the so called Chü-lu Hsien wares. However, the section includes an excellent summary of contemporary theories of Sung wares based on archaeological evidence where available.

Part III, 'Development and Variations,' covers the Ming and Ch'ing dynasties. Medley shifts from Chinese terminology to European for the late Ming period and thereafter, not without reason. Until recently, Chinese and Japanese connoisseurs were primarily interested in Sung wares, while European interest focused on the wares known to them since trade began again at the beginning of the seventeenth century. The book ends with illustrations of Ming and Ch'ing reign marks, a very useful glossary, a bibliography, and an index.

*The Chinese Potter* is printed on heavy stock allowing relatively good reproductions of the 215 black-and-white illustrations; the eight colour plates are printed on glossy stock. The work is lucid and concise, and only rarely are there editorial lapses (e.g., 'Chang sha' instead of 'Ch'ang sha' in the map on p. 30). One only hopes that following the first hardbound edition there will be a softback printing on less costly paper to enable students to purchase the work. Certainly, the book will be the standard general work on Chinese ceramics for years to come.

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