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FEBRUARY NEWSLETTER 2012

MEMBERSHIP FEES ARE DUE NOW! Have you forgotten to send them in or was the Christmas 'silly season' too much and it never entered into the equation? If you still want to receive the newsletter every month please send a cheque/money order to the above address complete with your name and address so your name can be kept on the list. If we don't receive it in time for the next newsletter this will definitely be your last one.

Dear Members,

Towards the end of last year I met up with some suiseki enthusiasts for a daiza workshop and one man showed me his attempts at making a daiza but in another way that does not involve power tools or wood? I was very interested to find out his technique and thought it would be another way of displaying our stones and I wanted to share this with you. The more we are armed with this additional information the more people will become interested in the art of stone collecting.

The technique involves 'felting', an art form that involves little effort, little expense and only needs a few spare minutes of your time. First of all you need to source some felting wool that is readily available at places like Lincraft, Spotlight or any good craft shop and this comes in various colours. Then you need to buy a felting needle that has very small barbs on the shaft that helps to pull the wool together so that it matts up into a solid base for your stone. This is done on a piece of sponge so that the needle does not scratch table surfaces or your fingers – it is very sharp!

You just get a wad of wool, place it on the sponge and start 'jabbing' it with the needle and what happens after a few minutes all of the fibres are brought together in a mass. You can add as many bits of wool extra to achieve the height or shape that you require. Keep placing the stone on it to get the desired shape and height. That is how simple it is to do and I was amazed at the final results.

A few years ago I saw an article in the Bonsai Europe magazine showing an artist in Europe, Yvonne Graubaek, who had created some amazing daizas made from felting. She had exhibitions and was well known for her artistic prowess. She was inspired by Willi Benz's book and wanted to work with this medium to create something unique, and they are definitely unique. She is also an avid stone collector and bonsai collector. She made her name by making felt teddy bears which are in collections all over the world.

In Yvonne's words on how to make a felt daiza – "To start a daiza, I balance the stone on a small piece of pre-shaped felt, then I take the needle with a small hook, and work in more small pieces of wool. When it is finished it must be very, very firm. I give it a soapy bath to make the good quality merino wool shrink and become even denser. I use different colours; silk is sometimes added too."

I have attached some photos so that it may help you to achieve something unique to show off that special stone.



Colours available in fine wool



The needle required for felting.



The felting technique.



The finished product although not refined.

Well I have given you another option in daiza making. Will you give it a go, if so, why don't you send me photos of your creativity and they can be published for all to see?

Happy creating,
Brenda

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH

‘Wood is not the material I want to work with, but with my new courage inspired by the book, I have just made one from felt.

Bonsai in Europe has changed over the years and has become less Japanese – very high quality, but freer in its expression. I find this good and would like the same to happen for daizas, too. Wood is beautiful, but it does not have to be the only option.’

- Yvonne Graubaek

As promised here is the last installment of Felix Rivera's article on his take of suiseki.

NOTAN

Where there are sharp edges in suiseki that also happen to consist of blacks and white, we see the play of light and dark, soft and hard, opposites in harmony, and opposites in complementary feelings. Negative space versus positive space. This concept is called Notan, or, dark-light, by the Japanese. The ancient yin/yang symbol embraces the same general idea. Some suiseki reflect the notan aesthetic quite successfully. The anthropologist Edmund Carpenter wrote that “In the West, man perceives the

objects but not the spaces between. In Japan, the spaces are perceived, named and revered as the MA, or intervening interval.” White on black or dark green suiseki help create the sense of MA and notan, where positive and negative spaces, created both by shape and colour (mineral inclusions), create a complex visual tension in the viewer. Good notan in suiseki demonstrate visual tensions, where the blacks and whites seem as if they are moving away from each other, yet are bound by the mineral’s permanence. Thus a classic tension helps to create visual complexities.

SUISEKI’S SUBJECTIVE CONTOURS

Our visual process, given incomplete information will “fill in the gaps” as we think they should appear. The human eye, according to Gestalt laws need to complete what appears to be incomplete. This is a technique used successfully in advertising; we fill in the missing words, or tunes, or symbols. Suiseki, being an abstract and “incomplete” art in the sense that many suiseki hint at or symbolize metaphorically rather than in actuality, often personify subjective contours. When one of our club members sees a turtle in a suiseki when everyone else sees a mountain, he is expressing a subjective contour assessment. Our subjective visual experience in “putting together” the sections of suiseki is an example of how we create “virtual compositions,” to use today’s parlance. These virtual compositions exist only as a personal and subjective visual effect; other viewers of the same stone may connect the contour lines quite differently. The complexity of suiseki gives something to each viewer. Perception, or seeing, is a process that allows us to create images within the already existing images inherent in suiseki, thereby bringing a sense of completeness or closure to each suiseki.

SUISEKI AS ILLUSIONS

The discussion above points to an interesting phenomenon in our analysis of art objects. We have a hard time seeing things separately, or independently of each other, but, instead, as logical connections. Quality suiseki are masters of illusions! Thus they are a classic “invisible art” form. Our illusions are dictated by size, length, shape, dynamic movement and textures. All these variables interact creating a visual complexity that involves multiple interpretations of the suiseki. The interpretations help in lessening the visual tensions by introducing more and more familiarity.

SUISEKI AND THE MORPHICS

A morphic means to change in form. Suiseki do not change form per se, but they do represent or suggest these different forms or shapes. A discussion of some of the most prevalent morphs present in suiseki will be helpful to us as we learn to understand what we are looking at.

Isomorphics: Isomorphics in the art of suiseki shows how objects and take on the appearance, for example, of turbulent water when all we are looking at are quartz or feldspar inclusions. Another inclusion may look like an animal, a flower, or a human being. Colours as isomorphics may remind us of faces, flowers or figures. The power of similarity of forms, colours, and textures plays a pivotal role in suiseki aesthetics. Again, the example of our club member who sees animal and human forms in many suiseki is an example of the power of isomorphics! It is easy to understand how the complexities of visualization build on each other in complex ways. Where we are in the cognitive process, as we study a suiseki, for example, is impossible to say. This helps to point out that we seem to be all over the aesthetic and interpretative canvas, and getting us together to develop a unified aesthetic ethos is a daunting, if not impossible task.

Anthropomorphics: The visual process whereby suiseki seem to take on human forms is referred to as anthropomorphism. The Christian Madonna figure is especially popular in Japanese suiseki, a conundrum at best, when we realize that Japan is not a Christian country. Cognitive psychologists have explained this by postulating that the recognition of the human face and form is not a totally learned reaction. It seems to be originating from some inborn motivation in all of us.

Zoomorphics: Suiseki zoomorphics is just what we imagine it to be, the identification of animal forms in suiseki.

SUISEKI AND OUR PERSONALITIES

Our personalities are unique. When we collect and exhibit suiseki we are collecting ourselves, our personalities. We select stones that we believe are of high quality, but, as has been already written, the definition of quality, all too often, is driven by our personalities. This is not a problem per se – on the contrary, it is what I call the suiseki artists' style. I have written in past articles that I can identify many suiseki artists' styles by the stones they exhibit. By the same token, other suiseki artists have told me that my style is obvious: large suiseki with a certain broad flair on one side of the mountain classification, define my style most of the time, and they are right. Maybe that is why the San Francisco Suiseki Kai, gave me my ceremonial name of Seki-yu, or the mystery of stones and the protector and collector of large stones! It is my style destiny.

The three most important elements that define our artistic sentiments and the way we perceive suiseki are: projection, introjection and confluence.

Projection: We reach out and project unto suiseki our feelings and thoughts. Our projections help us find the wooded areas in a stone, the coves, the glaciers when, for another viewer, these projections are absent; they have their own set of projections working for them. A rock climber friend of mine, upon seeing a particular suiseki of mine that has vertical walls, said it reminded him of the walls of El Capitan, in Yosemite Valley. He placed his finger tips on the verticalities, and “lifted” himself unto my suiseki as he “climbed” the monolith's walls. This is projection at its best. This is what makes us feel comfortable with suiseki. Projection is especially effective when used with a vigorous imagination, for it unifies all our senses, and it could also serve as a window into the inner recesses and mysteries of the art.

Introjection: Our ability to look and listen; our ability to hear what our suiseki are telling us is introjection. Are they being shy? Showing off? All my suiseki have their personalities and I have to learn to live with them. Introjection is also the process of placing our newly found stones outside, but visible, on the patio or garden. We live with them, sometimes for months, waiting for the day when the stones tell us what its front, sides, etc. are.

Confluence: Confluence suggests a deep commitment to what is being collected. It helps develop a love, a bond, between us and the stones. The union created gives our suiseki life. There are some suiseki that are my family, and I will never part with them. Interestingly, my wife, who is not a collector but appreciates the art, also has her favourites. She too has experienced the confluence between herself and some of my suiseki. She has told me in no uncertain terms that there are some suiseki that I will never get rid of because they are “her” suiseki. So be it.

CONCLUSIONS

All too often our suiseki take on a familiar tone; we take them for granted, we do not dust them, we put them in a corner, ignored. This is wrong. I hope that by introducing some of the processes that go into “seeing” our suiseki, we will be better able to appreciate them, evaluate them, and look at them as the things that they are – powerful objects of meditation, joy, and love. We need to establish pure relationships with our suiseki.

D. H. Lawrence wrote “.....our life consists in.....achieving of a pure relationship between ourselves and the living universe about us. This is how I ‘save my soul’ by accomplishing a pure relationship

between me and another person, me and other people, me and a nation, me and a race of men, me and the animals, me and the trees or flowers, me and the earth, me and the skies and sun and stars, me and the moon: an infinity of pure relations, big, and little.” I believe our suiseki fit into Lawrence’s sentiments quite comfortably.

Fritjof Capra, the author of *The Tao of Physics*, wrote “The experience of oneness with the surrounding environment is the main characteristic of the meditative state. It is a state of consciousness where every form of fragmentation has ceased, fading away into undifferentiated unity.” We need to maintain a passionate relationship with our suiseki so as to preserve the “undifferentiated unity” they give us.

Vale Willi Benz

It is with great sadness to inform you of the passing of Willi Benz. I had to great pleasure of meeting Willi and Gudrun when they came to Sydney a few years ago. His knowledge of suiseki and bonsai were unsurpassed and his wife Gudrun was also very knowledgeable on Kusamono (or displaying accent plants with our bonsai).

Curriculum Vitae

Willi Benz * 15th February 1931 † 9th December 2010

Mr. Willi Benz was born 1931 in Heidelberg/Germany. When he was young, he learned all the methods of fruit growing and horticulture from his father who was a passionate gardener. In his capacity as a qualified engineer (energy technology and electronics/telecommunications), he first worked as a scientist and then mainly in the field of adult education as head of a college for medical technology.

He first encountered bonsai in 1968. Since then, he has been intensively studying the art of bonsai. Fascinated by the traditional Asian art forms, especially by the art of Penjing/Bonsai, Kusamono and Suiseki/Shangshi he travelled several times to China, Korea and Japan for extended periods with the intention of studying these subjects more intensively.

He has written several technical books and one about Penjing (Chinese Bonsai), published in 1991, one about suiseki, published in 1995 and one about the display of Bonsai, Kusamono (accent plants) and Suiseki in 2002, a catalogue of his private stone collection in 2003 and a brochure about Wild bonsai – Kusamono .

He has also written innumerable articles and has lectured and conducted workshops on the subject of bonsai, kusamono and suiseki in different countries in Europe, Asia, South Africa, Australia, USA. In 1998 the BCI Writers and Photographers Award was presented to Mr. Willi Benz.

Together with friends, he founded the Bonsai Club Germany in 1978 and the German Suiseki Society in 1993.

He was President of the European Suiseki Association (ESA) until 2009 and since then Chairman of ESA, 2th Vice President of Bonsai Clubs International BCI, contributing editor of BCI and chairman of the BCI Suiseki committee until 2010, President of the German Suiseki Society, Honorary Counsellor of the Bonsai Club Germany, Vice President of the International Rock Collection Association, member of the committee of judgement of the Bonsai Club Germany, member of a committee of judgement for suiseki in Asia and Europe, member of the committee of judgement for Shangshi at the 8th Asia Pacific Penjing & Shangshi (Bonsai & Suiseki) Convention & Exhibition in Beijing 2005, member of shangshi judgement of the “2006 China (Chencun) International Penjing & Shangshi Expo”. In his capacity as President/Chairman of ESA and as ambassador for Asia of the Bonsai Club Germany, he aimed at the establishment of friendly contacts and a fruitful co-operation with bonsai and suiseki organizations.

As chairman of the BCI Suiseki committee Mr. Willi Benz promoted the development of stone appreciation worldwide. He was convinced that stone culture should be open to all, not only to an elite few and should not be confined

to

a

special

nation.

By an exchange of information and knowledge at exhibitions, seminars, meetings and by publications, an international standardisation of terminology and stone evaluation should be reached. By improving the display at exhibitions, the artistic and aesthetic value of stone culture can be enhanced. Mr. Willi Benz was convinced that despite of multiple approaches to stone appreciation and existing differences between the Oriental and Occidental cultures an international harmonious "stone community" could be established that could draw its energy for dealing with all day's demands from their admiration for the wonderful creations of nature.

In recognition of his merits Willi Benz was awarded with the "Order of Rising Sun, Gold and Silver Rays" by His Majesty the Emperor of Japan in 2007 and with "the Order of Merits" by the State President of Germany in 2009.



Translation of a report at the regional newspaper of **July 21, 2007** with some alterations and additional remarks:

The expert Willi Benz (76) was awarded with the highest Japanese order which can be presented to a foreigner.

The "Order of Rising Sun, Golden and Silver Rays" is the highest award which the Japanese emperor can present to a foreigner. During a ceremony at the Landesbank Baden-Württemberg in Mannheim the (Japanese) General Consul Shigeharu Maruyama honoured Willi Benz from Ketsch with this order for his long year's efforts to mediate traditional Japanese culture, especially bonsai and suiseki in Germany and Europe.

Furthermore Maruyama San pointed out the involvement in the field of Germano-Japanese Exchange of the 76 year's old graduated engineer.

The order, in imitation of the rising (red) sun of the Japanese National flag, was created in 1875. Since then, award recipients were under others academicians, diplomats and politicians who made an outstanding contribution to the promotion of Japanese culture and society. Until 2003, only men were awarded with this order.

Following the eulogy of Mr. Maruyama, the name of the new award winner Willi Benzi is inseparable related to the development of bonsai and suiseki in Germany and Europe. Born in Heidelberg he intensively studied Asian arts and culture since 1960, especially bonsai. Later he came in contact with suiseki and the presentation of these beautiful stones only shaped by natural forces. In 1978 Benz was a co-founder of "Bonsai Club Germany" and was the initiator of the "German Suiseki Society" in 1993. As president of the European Suiseki Association, vice president of Bonsai Clubs International (BCI), honorary member of several national and international organizations Mr. Benz continue to be active worldwide in promoting bonsai and suiseki.

But also as author Willi Benz has an excellent reputation. His books on bonsai/penjing (1991) and suiseki (1995) as well as on "Bonsai, Kusamono, Suiseki – A Practical Guide for Organizing Displays with Plants and Stones" (German and English edition published in 2002) are highly appreciated by

bonsai and suiseki lovers as well as by experts. Over years and also today, Willi Benz is active round the globe giving lectures on bonsai and Shinseki.

NEXT MEETING

Our first meeting for 2012 will be held on Wednesday the 15th of February at 7.30 pm.

Some of our lucky members who went to Japan for the ASPAC Convention will be showing us their photos and maybe some purchases made there. Looking forward to that!

At this meeting we will also be organizing the dates for our daiza workshops at Nesci's nursery.

Don't forget for others to bring in any stones that they may have collected over the holidays.

Unfortunately, the very wet weather that Sydney has experienced in the last month or so has made it difficult to organize a group outing. Maybe when autumn arrives there may be a chance to go out stone collecting?

See you all then.

Found these incredible photos of rock formations and I think you will find them fascinating!



Wonder how many reservations they get at this restaurant?????? Maybe only at low tide!
(Rock Restaurant – East coast of Zanzibar).



Lena Pillars on the Lena River in Russia.

Attached are two extra articles – one from Lindsay Bebb on his recent trip to Japan and notification of a new suiseki website available to all of us. Please visit the site and have a look.

I have included a few photos in the **Picture Gallery** for your enjoyment. The first one is a collection of suiseki purchased in Japan by one of our members.

The next photo is of my son sitting underneath a unique wind-blown rock in the Blue Mountains during the Christmas holidays.



The next few photos are of the great fun we had at our 2011 Christmas party when we decorated our stones in the Christmas spirit. They were all very well thought out.



'Rockin' around the Christmas Tree!

Santa's helpers?



Yummy! Christmas pudding.

Japanese village complete with snow.



'Jingle Bell Rock!'

Nativity scene complete with 'camel' suiseki.