

# “Fire is not my opponent, it is my partner”

VON FRANCISKA NOWEL CAMINO · VERÖFFENTLICHT 17/10/2019 · AKTUALISIERT 20/10/2019

## Part 3/3: A Conversation with the Peruvian Artist Carlos Runcie Tanaka

### **FNC: Why is it that hard for you to be honest with yourself?**

CRT: I am like a sponge that absorbs everything that happens around it. This makes me vulnerable. I'm breaking the rules, I'm not following them. I didn't finish my studies, I have only played music by ear, by intuition my whole life. That is difficult because you do not represent a standard, you don't fit in categories. This year I felt this difficulty in the art fair ARCOMadrid 2019. I felt that I was out of place, that somehow my work did not adjust well in the context of the art fair. You cannot place those horizontal sculptures that I produce and call *Progresión Orgánica / Organic Progression* on a white cube and expect to capture someone's attention. The people there are searching for strong colors and images and all I was giving them was organic clay and brown earth tones.



*Carlos Runcie Tanaka: Progresión Orgánica (Organic Progression), 1989, Art is Integration: Exhibition Celebrating the 90th Anniversary of Japanese Immigration to Peru, Museo de Arte, Lima, Peru, Photograph: Carlos Velásquez Collection of the Museum of Fine Arts Houston, USA.*

I think my work departs a bit from the trends of contemporary art and design, maybe the objects I produce could adjust better in the natural history museum next to fossils and other organic creatures, next to stones and rocks. In the artworld is really hard to keep on with your own thoughts and convictions. To be honest, there are many distractions in this world and also, the ideas and thoughts are continuously changing... but this is how life is. Sometimes it is difficult to adjust to new currents of thoughts. But here we are still pursuing dreams and projects, still believing in life.

**FNC: There is an aspect in the creation of your artwork that involves burning it with fire. You once said that fire makes no excuses or fire makes no concessions. How do you feel when a piece of yours cannot stand the heat and breaks in the kiln?**

CRT: Yes, fire makes no concessions, fire destroys, but it also gives and creates life. That is the wonderful beauty of fire and life. Fire is inside this earth; the earth's center must be like a giant ball of fire which forms mountains and landscapes after long-term processes of millions of years. In my working process, I always feel that I produce fossils and rocks in eight to twelve hours in the kiln. Clay's weathering is done by the agents of nature and the fine powder we get is mixed with water. We wedge and model the clay, then we dry the object to the sun and with the fire in the kiln and high temperatures we help clay become stone again. It is a miracle – a very ancient cycle of nature. So, no matter what happens inside the kiln and the firing process, I feel blessed.

When I open the kiln and the pot is broken, I say, "Ok, not this time. Maybe next time." And then I fix this pot. I can restore it and give it a second or even a third chance. It is like not letting someone go. We have to try to preserve life, you cannot discard someone so easily, you have to accompany him or her until the end, you have to try to understand what's going on, how to help them. So, this is why I will always respect what comes out from the firing and the kiln, there is always an opportunity to keep the pot alive.

Also, what is bad for someone's eyes can be good for others. While the ceramic industry normally has the intention to clean everything, to have a smooth process with almost no errors, I'm the bad kid doing the contrary. I am letting the clay follow its own rules. I don't like it so clean. I need to feel and see the creases, the texture, the shades, the tan and natural colours, the surface, the wrinkles, the crust and, the firing process helps. Fire is not my opponent, it's my partner. And so, we are together in this



*Carlos Runcie Tanaka's Carlos Runcie Tanaka's studio and garden, 2019, Photograph: Frank Sotomayor.*

fight, it is like working in a team.

### **FNC: What projects do you have in mind for the future?**

CRT: I will have an exhibition next year in Florence commissioned by the Centro Studi Eielson, where I will try to establish a dialogue with Jorge Eduardo Eielson creating visual poetry in the space. Some of our works will be exhibited together creating a dialogue and I think there will also be an audio piece where I read some of his poems and verses. It's going to be the dialogue we could not have. We first met almost 32 years ago and we had talks on the telephone from time to time reflecting on art and life, but he passed away in 2004. My work has grown and expanded since we first met so this will be an opportunity to continue our talks, our concerns about life and art. I think he would have enjoyed to see all this process and I'm sure I would have enjoyed his comments.

There is also a project with my mother that involves textiles and poetry. It is about the women in my family and their hands. I have told many stories about my grandfathers, and now it's time to talk about my grandmothers' stories and specially my mother who always supported me together with my father. The women who were always left



*Carlos Runcie Tanaka and his mother Elsa Tanaka de Runcie in his exhibition: Into White / Hacia el Blanco, 2010, Instituto Cultural Peruano Norteamericano, Lima, Peru, , Photographs: Claudia Uccelli, Herman Schwarz.*

behind in the history of art. At a point of her life my mother wanted to be an artist but her mother did not allow her to do so, I really think she has been living and producing art through me. She is the artist in me and finally we will join efforts in a very special project.

*Das Interview führte Franciska Nowel Camino im August 2019.*

*Vielen Dank an Carlos Runcie Tanak für das persönliche Gespräch und an Frank Sotomayor für die Hilfe im Hintergrund.*

**Read the first part of the interview now:**

“ *In August, We Sat Down to Talk About Music, the Past, the Present, and the Future*

