

# Residency report at Association Artbellwald



Ever since I learnt I was going to spend three months in the Alps mountains in the Artbellwald residency a distinct thought formed in my mind: the desire to return to sculpture. I decided I would put fashion on hold for three months and make something with my hands. I had been feeling the urge to work and experiment with materials and textures for a long time. This creative residency came at the right time.

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I started the Swiss journey with no other plans, prepared to be inspired by whatever I would find there. I was enchanted with the village, happy with my studio and especially mesmerized by the austere beauty of the landscape. I began exploring, walking endlessly, soaking in the breathtaking mountainous scenery.

Thinking back, I identify three events that influenced how the concept of the sculpture came about. One was an exhibition on photography about the Swiss glaciers that presented a gloomy survey of the last 100 years, cautioning about global warming. The second was a Skype conversation I had with a friend in Singapore and my curiosity glancing at a colorful altar he had in the house. And last but not least, my visits in the typical baroque churches of the area, where I was totally taken aback by the gruesome agony and suffering portrayed in every single image of Jesus – tormented and in pain, blood stained – an image nowadays one would rather associate with a still from a horror movie.

Surrounded by the majestic quietness of the landscape around the village and by so many representations of faith, I kept wondering whether anyone was thinking about the glaciers. Did the faithful pray against their melting away? The thought of dedicating a deity for the glaciers came all naturally. A god of the mountains, a totem – something very serene, very white (like the snow around), very pure. Small, so you can take it with you. With a blank face, maybe because there were too many faces staring down at you in churches. Something with soul. In the same spirit, and somehow triggered by the deer head hung on the wall of my studio – always watching me, no matter the angle – I also decided to make a mythological animal that would accompany the deity.



I have always been interested in working with found material and how residues can be turned into something else. The stuff people throw away fascinates me. And almost by miracle the useless and the ugly and the unwanted become beautiful and desirable and meaningful. During my walks around the village, I gathered various building residues: concrete slabs, bricks, etc. as well as rocks, earth, logs and branches. The studio became a sort of laboratory, a place for experiments. Anything was a potential sculpture material: porcelain powder, glue, water, flour, plaster, stucco powder, papier mache found in the garbage, hay, earth, boiled rice, used tea bags for the colour. Experiments began with mixing these elements. I used as a mould an enamel pot I found in the studio. Hence the series of circles I made, trying out various mixtures and colours. Although I was tempted to use blue for the sculptures (a blue that I saw in the village church and that I dubbed "Christmas blue") I decided eventually for the white instead – it was light, neutral, positive, a non-colour. In all the drawings I use the "Christmas blue". For the legs of the glacier god I used a technical element that I loved ever since my first day in the village – the round flat stone at the top of the pillars on which traditional wooden houses were mounted on.

The three month residency in Bellwald, Switzerland was an amazingly productive period of time, a perfect, sheltered retreat where the beauty and serenity of the scenery triggered my imagination and creativity. My intention is to continue with a series of sculptures – deities and to further explore experimenting with materials.

Oláh Gyárfás  
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