

The modern world with its secular leanings may well mock religion and its validity as a positive factor in human development. But it is true to say that religion does institutionalise in people a special brand and hierarchy of respect of a kind that is not to be found in other areas of human activities. Of course, this religious brand of respect affects those adepts of the religion broadly considered as being believers. Respect of repulsion for categories of people, places or phenomena varies according to each religion. Thus we find Hindus harbouring special respect for cows, Muslim lack of respect for pigs and dogs, Buddhists' veneration for remote and wild places. Since the so-called "enlightenment" Judeo-Christians' respect has been focussed on "science" and "reason" in slavish unison with secularists, while respect for other phenomena and features of creation is often discarded as superstition.

In the Muslim hierarchy of revelation (i.e. spiritual development) the first tradition (sunnah) is that of Adam. The sunnah of Adam is common to all three of the monotheist traditions, and has similar manifestations in other religions. Thus sunnah or tradition is variously referred to as the knowledge of right and wrong. It can be said that the tradition of the right hand and the left hand is of the sunnah of Adam. Modern man in common with people of all religions as well as with indigenous peoples offers the right hand in greeting rather than the left hand. This is no modern convention or mere etiquette, exclusive to "civilized" or "developed" peoples but dates common tradition of Adam and a primordial part of a man's psyche. But it is without doubt the Muslims who are most meticulous in keeping to its strictures. The reasons are not only a question of ritual honour but also concern the more practical considerations of hygiene. Even the well known biblical exhortation "let not the right hand know what the left hand does" tends to have lost its precise and practical meaning for Christians, whereas it is strictly adhered to by Muslims and daily ritualized in the obligatory act of ablution. It is well known to Muslims that without ablution the obligatory five prayers are deemed invalid.

Part of the perceived function of (any) religion is to relate man to his own destiny and to the cosmos from the beginning of creation to its end transcending the scope of his own individual life span. It is true that since some five centuries mankind has by science and reason vastly increased his knowledge of the Cosmos and indeed of many of the functions of life in its multifarious forms on the planet. But it seems to be endemic that as functional knowledge of the creation has increased, respect for it has diminished. Perhaps, as a well-known saying implies, familiarity with its intimate workings has bred contempt. Indeed often "scientific" knowledge of the functions of life forms and natural phenomena has only served to intensify their exploitation. By the time the scientific community has realised the damage done to the environment, the processes of exploitation have advanced too far to a point where conservation or readjusting the balance has become difficult if not impossible.

Such is public confidence in scientific solutions for all matters that, inevitably, to correct matters yet more scientific remedies are investigated and deployed and the cycle is perpetuated. Environmental balance has by now been so shattered until the entire world with its resources and bounties spiral out of control as species are lost, entire landscapes destroyed, climates irreparably altered and sustainable human life itself is threatened in so many places all over the planet. Wars between nations with ever more destructive weapons have added to the devastation caused by man's war against the environment. With global warming and other symptoms of environmental balance it is the very survival of the planet and life on it that is in question.

Islam and the Muslims have their share and duty towards mankind as a whole for the protection of the environment, and to draw attention towards the dangers caused by its destruction. Indeed, Islam has as re indeed therein ways and means whereby in a last hope for humanity we may well discover just in time the wherewithal of revival and survival of the planet and its multifarious species. Before the public and managerial applications of Islam are destroyed together with the environment by the dominant secular world and to regain the esteem of humanity. For the world now gasps desperately for solutions to the imbalances in the environment caused by centuries of abuse and tyranny. Clear guidance and unequivocal

action is indeed the true nature of Khilafah. To remind humanity of the Unity (and interconnectability) of Allah's creation is of the veritable essence of Tawhid.

The continued destruction of nature is a mirror image of man's moral and spiritual degradation. The conservation of Nature is a matter of spiritual reconstruction for mankind. Continued insouciance of this awareness will result in the destruction not only of man's environment but also of man himself. As the destruction continues it is high time that we remembered the Original Garden, hopefully before it is too late. Thus the intentions and the method must be founded on a spiritual bedrock of certainty. As Sayyed Hossain Nasr says, "It is nature as Allah's primordial creation that will have the final environment but also of man himself. As the destruction continues it is high time that we remembered the Original Garden, hopefully before it is too late. Thus the intentions and the method must be founded on a spiritual bedrock of certainty. As Sayyed.

I regard clay as a vehicle for communication between religion, people and across cultures. For me, it provides a means for evaluating our place in our time'.

...To further understand the layers and complexities in the work of Umibaizurah Mahir, we need to consider its presentation. For her shoes and boots she has turned to the semiotics of the museum case as a vehicle for displaying ethnographic or precious objects. Part human, part synthetic, each shoe is individual and rarified and, yet, they work against the convention of the perfect specimen as flawed hybrids. Presented in odd pairs, Umi's footwear sits on velvet platforms with ornate gilded frames. Their status is immediately elevated - valued. It is a curious parallel to the elevation of the store display and its fabrication of desire in Western constructs of consumer society. In Umibaizurah's second series we witness the same desire to charge the object with meaning through its physical elevation. The repetition of the object is in sync with the premise of mass production, and its towering glory is an affirmation of consumer desire. To echo Foucault's quote, our understanding of the modern experience is a reflection on its very transformation, its very mode of being. In this context I find Umi's totem

particularly interesting as a form. The totem pole is synonymous with indigenous cultures. It has a racial ethnic expression that monumentalizes the existence of a people's culture within a particular place. By titling her column after the subdivision where the two artists live, Puncak Alam Totem Pole (2010) it is an adroit reading of that re-engineered landscape; the quintessential 'mixing pot' of past foresters, new settlers different cultures and religions abutted side-by-side. Furthermore, Umi has returned to toys to build her totem: the toy a symbol for the child, and the child a symbol for the future It goes full circle. Tiang Sen, as we have discussed, is the support column of a traditional kampong home. Umi usurps that role with her strange hybrids as a symbol of hope for the future For her these pieces are about renewal - stepping forward -reaching higher. And to underscore the sentiment, her Totem is displayed upon a concrete platform. It is emphatic in its statement.

*(Extract from interview by GINA FAIRLEY - Freelance writer Regional Contributing Editor, Asian Art News+World Sculpture News SEA Contributor, Art Monthly Australia Ernst & Young Asean Art Outreach : Tiang Seri. Ernst & Young Solutions LLP, Singapore. 2010.) Park, Namhee (Chief Curator): "Contemporary Craft, NOW & HERE", essay for the Cheongju International Craft Biennale 2011.*