

Tobias Hammer Technical Museum

Ohrdruf is a small town in Thuringia about 30 km. south-west of Erfurt where ironworking was an important part of the economy for five centuries. A forge powered by the waters of the River Ohra was established there in 1482. In 1592 the works was purchased by Tobias Albrecht, and it was subsequently called the Tobiashammer. The Albrecht family continued to own it until 1816. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the principal products were scythes, sickles, ploughshares and weapons, made from wrought iron and in some cases having steel edges. Later copper-working was introduced, and products made from sheet copper included pots, jugs, wash tubs and tuns for brewing beer. In the mid-nineteenth century the works was expanded with a rolling mill for iron plate, and a second hammer shop.

The forge was declared a technical monument in 1983. Visitors can now see five large tilt hammers, the nineteenth century rolling mill, and various machine tools, all worked by four waterwheels. There are demonstrations of iron-working with water-powered hammers. The museum hosts an annual forging symposium which attracts many artist blacksmiths, whose works are displayed in a nearby sculpture park. Since 1988 the museum has also displayed a very large steam engine, a twin tandem engine generating 12,000 h.p. which was installed in 1920 at the Maxhütte Unterwellenborn, also in Thuringia.

-Text from The European Route of Industrial Heritage.

The annual event that has taken place since the museum's opening in 1983 is the Blacksmiths' Symposium (*Schmiede-Symposium*). In 2009 it was entitled "*Tribute to Fritz Kühn*" and brought together ornamental metalsmiths from three continents. Over the years many well-known metalsmiths and metal sculptors have created artwork here. Many still grace the outer areas of the museum site as part of its sculpture park, such as the gigantic, forged water lily by Alfred Habermann and *Das Gesicht* by Rüdiger Roehl.

“Shovelspade” Ohrdruf, Germany.

When I got the invitation to participate as one of five international makers at the 2018 event, I almost declined their generous offer. I am a trained Blacksmith but I have worked mostly with Hollowear (Vessels) fabricated sculptures and custom Jewelry for almost twenty years. Do accept this offer meant that I had to reemerge myself totally in the world of the Blacksmiths which was far away from my comfort zone. After a week of agonizing about it I brushed up my German skills and accepted.

I decided to continue on with my “Toolness of Things” project this time under the name “Shovelspade”, “Tobias Hammer was after all a Technical Museum the perfect place to listen to Damian Skinners words.

“Art and craft start with tradition and material. They can be mined by the contemporary maker to answer why, what, how and for whom.”

I contacted Damian Skinner my sounding board and dialogue partner during “The Toolness of Things” project. Damian was far from enthusiastic about the fact that I had accepted and now needed to produce something for Tobiashammer, he was worried,

“What is your intention? Everyone should be forced to ask themselves this question, especially people who are going to make giant metal objects that the rest of us have to deal with.”

I wanted to interact directly with the Museum, the Tool collection and Machinery rather than producing something huge for their Sculpture park. Tool like objects in a larger scale was my answer. The Museum bought my end result but I decided where the public Art piece was supposed to end up so my Idea of working with the Museum seemed possible.

I sent over my technical drawings to Germany to have them precut in 16mm Mild Steel. I knew that the factory had produced farming equipment a long time ago and wanted to work with the Spade or Shovel form, with a generic Swedish wooden handle and a forged Tool like “Blade”. Damian and I was now in agreement and I forgot about it until the Spring.

Early Spring came and I travelled to the Eastern parts of Germany where the pre-Cold War thinking was still very present, it felt to me like I was travelling back in time as well as Space. I arrived early before the other four participants had arrived, just to find that they had taken upon themselves to enlarge my pieces before they had them laser cut. Now they were so heavy that I almost couldn't lift them from the ground when Cold. After a slight panic attack I adjusted my thinking and just went with it. The four other makers turned out to be fantastic human beings without the “macho” working ethic I remembered and was worried about. We helped each other and got our pieces done.

During my stay at Tobiashammer I got interviewed for national and local Tv as well as for Radio. The Editor of the German, International MetalArt publication, Hephaistos, came in person and wrote a spread for the Magazine. The local newspapers covered the event as well, all in all 2018 was a good year for Tobiashammer media wise and it felt great to give that to them.

The public interest in this event was huge, hundreds of visitors came through every day and we were dragged off to City events and honorary presentations so it wasn't easy to focus but once it was done and I had placed my three pieces it was clear that “Shovelspade” has found a great Home.