

제2회 국제도자학술회의 자료집
The 2nd International Ceramic Symposium

CREATIVITY

흙의 창조적 가능성과 도예의 새로운 지평
INSPIRATION IN CLAY ASPIRATION IN CONTEMPORARY CERAMICS

기간 : 2003. 9. 2 - 9.3

장소 : 이천세계도자센터 대강당

Icheon World Ceramic Center, Auditorium

A Moment after “Now and Now”

Since my role at this conference has been designated as a “discussant,” I have been asked officially to explore, analyze, critique and generally raise issues that offer insight and alternative points of view to those already expressed. This is a weighty role and I feel a bit uncomfortable being given full sanction to speak my mind, but since our speakers have raised so many interesting issues for discussion...I am excited now by the prospect.

It is difficult to know where to begin. But allow me first to acknowledge that allowing discourse of this kind is rare at a conference, where so often presentations follow one after another to the point of exhaustion, with never enough time to question, think, reflect or disagree. So I must congratulate the organizers for creating a formal time slot in the program to allow reflection and counter point, and even more so at an international event, where language and translations are difficult and expensive.

It has been very interesting to hear the various speakers present their diverse historical perspectives and insights into contemporary issues - views literally from the four corners of the world. It has become obvious that our field of objects and object makers... whether functional or sculptural, has grown significantly since the Second World War, and that balancing tradition while maintaining and directing our energies toward change and creativity, has become our driving force--- as well it should be.

Whether you were exhilarated by the work selected by the curators, or merely mildly entertained, their selections represent serious endeavors to improve the quality of ceramic art, and to find, show, and discuss works that are not derivative, mundane or, to use Prof Kwon’s blunt, yet accurate characterization, not plagiarized.”

The art of selection is an arduous task. It is easy to be vulnerable and compromised by the politics within a

country, as Mr. Toru has frankly discussed, or to have obligations to employer institutions and their more conservative tastes, or simply not to be rigorous enough in one’s research. As a result, one can often pose the question: How much of what we see at any exhibition is truly independent of influence? That is always the challenge confronting any curator.

Melchert, poetically, this morning, reminded us that real Art “puts us in touch with states of mind and nuances of feeling, perceived for the first time.” In the final analysis, whether a work creates these responses must always be a personal, subjective event. One must always trust one’s judgment and understand that curators may have idiosyncratic visions bound by time and place.

I cannot comment upon the selections made by the curators - although I clearly have my favorites, and while I question the inclusion of some of the works, I know that is to be expected. What I am most concerned about is a question of ART. Is the work shown pushing the field? Is it revelational? What can we decipher and extrapolate from its use of material? Is there energy or a surge of ideas or a “wow” experience?

It boils down to this. How much do we accept and label “Art” in our field just because it is made of clay? What would Picasso, Gauguin, and even Voulkos have said if you told them that the artistic merits of their sculpture were subordinate to the material they were using?

So my comments as a discussant have to do with ideology. All of the speakers tangentially alluded to the need for greater opportunity to be more rigorous, demanding and accountable. Accountability is an issue of primary concern, particularly if one wants to keep pace with the significant changes in the world of art. How do we go about doing this?

One of the ways is to raise the level of discourse a notch above what we might find in a course called, Introduction to Ceramics. When we come to meetings like this we have gathered a group of professionals who have been in a field for 10, 20, and 30 or more years. We are artists, critics, authors, museum professionals, professors, and curators - colleagues that I have seen more this year than many members of my own family. We not only have face-to-face exchange, but through our worldwide distribution of books, and magazines, we read the same articles. Through catalogs and monologs published by museums and galleries we see the world's exhibitions, and because of the World Wide Web, we can view artists' thoughts and works right in our living rooms. Our world, like clay, is shrinking. So when we get together in a setting like this---it all becomes imperative that we not speak the old and tired clichés, or hear histories we can read in textbooks, but face issues of real concern and importance. From the experience, wisdom and insight of the speakers and their distinguished vantage points, what can be learned and extrapolated to influence and impact the future. Such thinking is required in a venue of this sort. It is clear that we have to demand more of ourselves.

Creativity has been the word designated as the overriding theme of this conference and it is a wonderful word as it conjures up what is new, different, exciting, and cutting edge. We all want to be around creativity. To create or be creative is the act of bringing into existence that which has never existed before... to make something out of nothing.

I witnessed great creativity at a Broadway theater last week when I went to see an astounding musical called "Big River" It was a musical based on the Mark Twain classic, The Adventures of Huck Finn, but the subject matter is of no importance. The production was a never-done-before large-scale musical performed by a combination of deaf and mute, as well as hearing actors. Now you might ask how is it possible to do a musical with cast members who cannot hear the music or sing a line of verse? It was done with TWO actors on stage --- a Siamese union of each performing in his own way either using Sign Language to convey words and lyrics or the voice of the hearing actor. After a while the hand movements of signing became choreography and the rhythm

of the interactions of the two actors was enriching and profoundly beautiful. What a breakthrough event to see challenged performers join the mainstream and demonstrate that certain previously ironclad boundaries could be broken.

John Cage, the gifted composer has managed a similar feat in his music by scripting silence into his compositions ---sometimes up to 4 minutes-- something essentially simple yet audaciously original. When interviewed, he said he heard silence in Beethoven's Fifth Symphony... in those opening bars...da! da da Dum,--- da, da da Dum. (I will sing it).

Since my geographic area of greatest involvement is North America, and since I was asked to specifically reflect upon this perspective, I will focus on Matthew Kangas' remarks. My first is his comment that American ceramic sculpture was or is currently at a crossroad or in a state of crisis. I was a speaker at the same Shigaraki conference when he made that statement 12 years ago and I disagreed with it then as I do today. There is no competition between sculpture and Art Pottery in the museums or galleries or among collectors. There are no struggles with the "burden of art history."

In fact, there has never been greater diversity of expression, achievement in the field, and a flow of ideas and I see it growing stronger. Kimpei Nakamura is quite correct when he states that artists who are astutely sensitive to the socio-historical conditions of their times are the creative innovators. It is those artists who are aware of their times; sensitive to their circumstances, that bring fresh insights into the mundane, and who, like Voukos, are not afraid to break rules - that will be the inheritors of the next generation of ceramic art.

As I stated in my catalog essay for the exhibition, "Confrontational Clay" these artists are willing to confront complacency. They use parody, humor, violence, exaggeration, obscenity, the grotesque, introspection, dream imagery, and conscious and unconscious feelings to convey what is in their souls. Howard Kottler did it, Jun Kaneko too and Léopould Foulem is making his mark in Canada. And there are amazingly more out there - a younger, exciting population...a new breed. Some of them are indeed represented in the exuberant exhibitions we have seen at these curated shows. In addition, the collecting base is getting stronger, with museums

solely devoted to the medium opening throughout the world.

Art pottery too is at a high level of achievement, with more studios, renewed interest in wood firing, revival of old majestic glazes like shino, time-saving computer kilns, more suppliers offering innovative and fast use materials diminishing the labor intensity of the field, and generally more venues for sales. Artists with little or no experience in clay are invited, even welcomed, to places like the European Work center or to Watershed in Maine to experience the material first hand. This brings vitality and cross-fertilization.

Innovative research into new variants, such as paper clay, have revolutionized construction techniques, and computer programs that enable three-dimensional objects to be designed and fabricated, untouched by human hands, are bringing a level of innovation to large-scale sculpture that has never been known before.

Previous issues of vessels verses sculpture, function verses non-function, East Coast vs. West Coast are as tired and meaningless as the Art/Craft controversy---these debates have persisted in our field far too long, at the expense of focusing on serious issues. There are no combat lines between art pottery and sculpture, and to suggest this to appear controversial simply wastes our time. By the way, unlike Kangas would have you believe, there are many wonderful ceramic artists who have emerged from the East coast. And also, beyond political correctness, Kangas should know that North America extends to our southern neighbors as well, and there are powerful artists there whose work should have been recognized and included.

My last comment is to turn our attention to the issue of ceramic education, which was appropriately touched upon by the speakers. While Kangas especially names schools the artists in his exhibition attended, he does not really pin point the significant role the university has played in shaping the most innovative ceramics of our time. Voulkos' training and those of his generation took place in newly established departments of art modeled largely after the Bauhaus - departments which divided study into areas based on materials and techniques. There were the painting, sculpture, or printmaking departments, and separated just like the others, clay departments. But now there has been a shift in structure

and, more importantly, in the thinking about how artists are to be educated. Today the medium and the tools of artistic expression are de-emphasized and students are encouraged to think of tools as secondary to serving their themes and ideas. Multi-media expression, aided by exponentially growing technologies serves as background to artistic expression. The university is a place where artists mix talent, opportunity, exposure and media into a special form of art education. Photography and painting merge to assist gender studies, social issues and critical theory. Computers become the starting point for many two-dimensional as well as three-dimensional ideas. These changes have been gathering momentum at art schools around the United States and I am sure around the world, as institutions re-define the place of materiality in a dematerialized cultural world of art production. While this is not the time to discuss the education of artists, we are here to discuss what artists are producing and what work is being offered to galleries and exhibition arenas. One cannot talk about current trends however, without acknowledging the changes taking place in the education of the artist.

Also, many of the new generation of artists do not come from formal clay teaching environments. Their multi-dimensional training enabled them to pick up clay and its technology solely for the implementation of their concepts.

Technology permeates the work. One example would be Xerox images (iron oxide used in the ink) that can be applied to glazed surfaces and fired in a modern version of the decal process. Fusing photo images onto clay allow endless narrative possibilities.

The innovation and widespread use of Paper Clay has facilitated the making of large scale work as well as work that is forgiving of faulty craft practice. Advances from industrial research are infiltrating studio practice, so that new equipment has changed fabrication. One example would be the use of non-water based clay ram-pressed into molds allowing the making and firing to cone 10 in a matter of a few hours.

Clay has been moved to a point where it is used for content and acknowledged for the issues it can convey. Major themes are reflective of post-modern themes in art ---generally: gender and identity issues, design, narrative issues, environmental and social concerns, war,

politics and the human condition, popular and material culture.

There are strong tendencies to dovetail issues-- art and life, high and low art, the incorporation of craft practice into the fine arts, and the participation of the viewer in interactive work.

So what is new fresh and exciting in ceramics in North America? Last summer at the International Academy of Ceramics meeting in Athens I presented a paper on the next generation of ceramics from America. The lecture was published in the Greek publication *Keramos* and it is uncanny how close Kangas' s areas of interest are similar to the ones I identified. I am delighted with his reaffirmation of my ideas.

While we may not agree on specific artists, I think we would both agree with the poet, songwriter Arlo Guthrie who stated that real art does not reflect society but subverts it. I wish there was a bit more subversion going on.