

For “Space, Image, Game”

Satoru Hoshino / Ceramicist

At the beginning of February this year, I had the opportunity to work at the Tainan National University of the Arts and exhibit at the Yingge Ceramics Museum, therefore, the Museum requested me to write an article regarding the artists for this particular exhibition. Although information is limited, but I've carefully observed, and would like to describe through a Japanese ceramicist's point of view.

Looking back into the history of ceramics, the ancient people were allegedly inspired by stepping on the ground to create a puddle, and the mud solidified after a fire, and thus they created greenware. The ancient people entrusted malleability of mud, through solidification by fire, the mud hardens and invented 'greenware'. The invention of greenware enables mankind to store and cook foods, which improved their lives extensively. Then, humans built 'anagama' on the hillside, high temperature kiln produces rigid ceramics, and realized that the fallen dust and feldspar from the mud together makes unglazed pottery. Also, mixing ash and feldspar creates 'glaze', using the improved 'climbing kiln' at high temperature, they were able to create beautiful glass-like glazing. By adding iron and copper, they created the blue for celadon the bluish purple from Ju ware. Later, they made porcelain, they were even capable of 'painting' pictures called blue-and-white by adding cobalt on the unglazed ceramics. Finally, they developed coloring and created well decorated ceramics for ornamentation.

As technology progresses, a broader and splendid world has been created. In modern era, mass production of ornamental vases and plates with drawings were on exhibitions. After WWII, ceramics departed from just being containers, and begin to explore free-style artworks suitable for admiration.

Where do ceramics stand now?

Pragmatic ceramics, ornamental ceramics, and ceramic art as known in Japan, ceramic sculpture as known in the U.S. are free-style arts. Although ornamental ceramics derived from pragmatic ceramics, ceramic art and ceramic sculpture derived from ornamental ceramics, but as society progresses, they are all in production now. This is where ceramics stands now; I believe consensus is among education circle, museums, galleries, artists, and collectors.

Let's see through the artworks by the 8 artists of “Space, Image, Game” to further understand 'ceramics at the present days.'

Hu Hui-chin proposed a hypothesis installation where she locates various ceramic planks in the room. Visitors sometimes have to squad, sometimes they have to move to different places to observe and experience the exhibits. The exhibits can also be examined in groups as reading short novels. The major difference with appreciating art pieces is to experience with eyes and body through spaces. Almost all the artworks are made with thin clay, even enclosed box types can be easily understood to be hollow from the curved shapes. The softness of the clay and the asymmetry made by burning has undoubtedly showcased the characteristic of ceramics.

Chu Fang-yi also placed several hollow objects with openings or holes in the same space, including artworks with double structure combining a tray and a frame, but each artwork impartially spread on the same surface. They can be understood in a catalogue manner. Each object has similar value, even with similar form, they seem to reject any association with neighboring object. Each object seem to be in the form of distorted trumpet or funnel, or the shape of combination of the smallest atoms, or even using shapes of known desserts making the artworks look delicious. These artworks also take the shape reflecting what's unique to ceramics by keeping all the cavities, this is different from sculptures.

Chang Ho-min's artworks is a game of image using nearly rough yet gorgeous colors. Although color is one of ceramics' characteristics, but it is profane to the traditional aesthetics. This artwork doesn't specifically express any image, but rather a handmade collection of randomly attached shapes. Snakes peeking out from bull's eye socket taking a bite of the paper chariot; or treelike hands holding a small bowl with birds inside swimming. This artwork provides a surprising, joyous yet sarcastic effect that anyone could easily understand format, something visitors can easily relate to.

Tang Hsuan also takes advantage of the malleability of clay to hand shape images. However, she especially emphasizes on creating characters. The two attached characters, one without a head, and the other without foot. The rather schizophrenia or obsessive image brings visitors a sense of convulsion. It is as if to express the two-sidedness of mankind, and directly impacts visitors' nerves with its strange image manipulation. It is an artwork with psychological implications, far different from the beauty of the Tang earthen figures.

Chang Shan's iron-rust color artwork expresses surrealism style. The rust-made but almost lifelike fish is actually made of ceramics. This is a recombination of fish image and iron rust. Deep sea fishes and squid were highly skillfully created, it is very touching to see.

Pragmatic ceramics has its essentiality, and are still produced and widely used in our daily lives. But, which pragmatic ceramic containers have made modern lives better? Here's an artist that realizes the beauty of modern lives. As a Japanese ceramicist, Taiwanese tea set amazes me the most. Taiwanese tea-drinking culture is far more popular than Japanese tea ceremony, wherever I go, people would offer me tea. I think tea set is still a pivot to Taiwan's unique ceramic culture.

When Fang Po-ching's tea set is not in use, tea cups can be lodged into a sail like object and hung on the wall. Tea pot and tea cups are like merchandises placed on the tray, floating on the table, and decorate a corner of the room in a hypothetical installation. Use them when you want to make tea, this is a playful tea set, placed in a narrative spatial layout. The partialness of throwing and the pure beauty of blue and white glaze remind me of the blue sky on a light breeze day, brownish tray reminds me of a ship or a part of earth. The natural forms of earth and fire relaxes viewers in a poetic way.

Cho Ming-shun presents us with a brand new style tea set. He carefully created a closet-like artwork for tea sets. When not in use, they could serve as interior decorations; when you want to make tea, just open the closet-like drawers and take out the tea cups and pot. I think everyone can understand the excitement that comes with expectation when opening small drawers! This artwork combines stage prop and artwork; it is very interesting to see those gadgets, and it takes traditional tea set making techniques to modern artworks.

Samuel Shih, just as Cho Ming-shun exquisitely creates a shape usually made of wood. This artwork is not tea set, but musical instrument. Although you can play some sounds with it, but it doesn't really have the functions of musical instrument. This is artwork, an instrument for ornamentation. The thick and sturdiness of the object brings about a sense of Taiwan locals. I could almost hear the music played by aborigines.

The already splendid ceramics world is even more spectacular as introduced with the above artworks. As ceramics diversifies, will we forget the unique power and beauty of ceramics? Now is the time to re-think the conditions and possibilities of ceramics. Especially, when ceramics rips off the form of being containers and have become ornamental artworks, the boundaries between ceramics, painting and sculptures may be blurry and easily confused. Now, people expect ceramics not to follow techniques and deliberation of sculpture and painting, best draw a clear line, not to be effected and transformed, to continue developing the unique techniques and deliberations of ceramics. It is with this intent that ceramics can guarantee to exist in free form, and to stand up as rivalry to other aspects of artistic performances. For example, softness of clay, hollow structure, or altering shape and form through burning, these aspects are unique to ceramics. Taking the limitations of a specific material and turn it into new possibilities, it is absolutely substantial to keep this reversal notion in mind. This is also the notion that will open up a brand new boulevard for the future of ceramics.

Satoru Hoshino

1945 Born in Niigata, Japan
1971 Graduated from Ritsumeikan University, Japan
1971-73 Studied Ceramics at Fujihira Ceramics Studio
1979 The Minister Prize, Japan Ceramic Art Exhibition V
1974-80 A member of Sodeisha Group
1989 Move to Kitahama, Shiga
1991-98 Associate professor at Environmental Design Department of Osaka Sangyo University, Japan
2002 Retrospective Exhibition "Appeared Figure" at The Museum of Modern Art, Shiga, Japan

Collections : The National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, Japan
Faenza National Pottery Museum, Faenza, Italy
Victoria & Albert Museum, London, UK