
Friendship Through Art—— Dialogues that Traverse Frontiers

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Ceramics is among the most widespread medium employed by contemporary artists. It is a persistent method to transmit the symbols of modern culture. Discussions and research on contemporary ceramic art focus on the creative expressions of forms, glaze, themes and patterns. Relevant elements are the creative impetus, viewer's critiques, structure of the contemporary culture, socio-economic backgrounds and the zeitgeist of the era. Contemporary ceramic art thus expresses the artist's personal style and the works' values. It also conveys the cultural significance of the symbols and provides the viewers with considerations and thoughts about spirituality, regional culture, values of the time and cultural features.

The years of Taipei Ceramics Awards bear witness to the development of contemporary art in Taiwan. The Awards are meant to encourage creativity in ceramic art. In its call for entries, it states that the Creativity Award "to reward innovative techniques and designs that fully explore the potentials of ceramics and accentuate the energy and ingenuity of ceramic art." The three key points are techniques, innovative materials and creativity. It encourages more multi-faceted, diverse and refined contemporary works of ceramics.

The solicitation and judging processes during the 6th Taipei Ceramics Awards gave us a chance to closely observe the capabilities of the artists. There are 57 pieces of works this year. The panel of jurors consisted of five members and after two stages of deliberation, 2 award winners and 14 finalists were selected from the 57 works. These works focus the plasticity of ceramics and the three-dimensional quality of the sculptures. For instance, Wu Mon-xi's "Rhythm of Contrast series", Huang Chi-cheng's "Time", Chou Yu-mei's "Feeling Lonliness" and Hsieh Chia-heng's "Arise" are inspired by natural patterns in their positive and negative spaces and their lines and contours. Furthermore, the materials (such as clay and glaze) and methods (such as firing) can also vary to express limitless number of styles. These are all areas that the artists paid much attention. Li Kuo-wei's "Impaled Memories" combine printing with ceramics to create a trompe-l'oeil illusion. Through his work "How to Store Memories", Wang Huei-jen explores the true meanings of the mediums: What is ceramics? What does firing mean? What do I have to do with clay?

This year's works also show the diversity of contemporary ceramic works in terms of subject choice and artistic style. Through their works, the artists convey rich messages to the viewers. Some of the works question the human existence, such as the award-winning "Flower" by Shih Hui-yin that depicts a way of life. Li Pei-rong's "A Different Horizon IV" is a feminist self-examination. There are also works that reflect on societal issues and give art a social context, such as the other award-winning work, "The Marine Death Belt: Taiwan" by Chang Shan. Similarly, Hsu Hsu-lun's "Destroyer & Savior" expresses the anxiety of changes. In addition to the diverse themes, the works also are concerned with the space and the milieu. The ways the works are exhibited are also important

to the viewers. The difference between modern and traditional arts is the transcendence of the exposition. Beyond the exhibition space, modern artists need to take into account the space and milieu. Therefore, works that are serialized or that are elements belonging into a greater whole need to be arranged in a way that is esthetic to the viewers as to engage them in a deeper perspective of observation and discussion.

The Taipei Ceramics Awards serve as an indicator to the growth of contemporary ceramic art in Taiwan every two years. Since its second session, there have been the categories of Achievement, Creativity and Theme. They pay homage to those who have contributed much to the field, recognize to the research and advances made and encourage ambitious undertakings by ceramic artists. In addition to the Taipei Ceramics Awards, the Museum also set up *Taiwan Ceramics Gold Awards* to encourage beautiful designs in practical work and the *A Selected Exhibition of New Ceramic Works* to raise the quality of the designs. Furthermore, the Taiwan Ceramics Biennale devotes in the international art creation exchange. These four categories of prizes to promote a professional outlook in the industry and also present the museum's attempt to develop ceramic art. We wish that ceramic art from Taiwan would have a future based on solid research. We have set up forum for dialogues and to encourage research in the field. We wish to promote a comprehensive development of contemporary ceramic art and to instigate the potential of having dialogues regarding these subjects.

Traditionally ceramics has been a warm, affectionate and humble medium for artists. It has always been a favorite for collectors and museum attendees. Contemporary ceramics carries on the heritage of the past and infuses it with modern elements to pave a path for an even more diverse future. I hope that Taiwanese contemporary artists continue their endeavors in all these areas, spearhead a unique art movement and befriend artists from other countries to discuss art and culture from a global perspective.

References:

1. Hsiao Hsuan and Li Hsing-hua (2007), *Innovations in Research Methodology and Techniques on Contemporary Chinese Art* (Issue # 10)
2. *Autobiographies of award winners from the 6th Taipei Ceramics Awards.*