

# Seeing Life in Ceramics

## Curator's Statement: Utensil and Innovative Artworks

Chuang Hsiu-ling, Chief of the Collection and Exhibition Department of Taipei County Yingge Ceramics Museum

Innovative artworks and utensils are among the milestones of contemporary Taiwanese ceramics. These also demonstrate the new trends at the core of this exhibition.

The first hint of modern ceramics began in the 1960s. After the pioneering period in the 70s, a gathering of forces in the 80s, the 90s were a time of expression and the ceramic community flourished. However, after the mid-90s, following the overall economic development in Taiwan, the ceramic scene became stagnant. For a time Taiwanese art was influenced by Western art. Ceramics were no exception. However, ceramics is a traditional art form, thus traditions remain more or less influential to the development of ceramics in Taiwan. Taiwanese ceramics incorporate diverse elements from the Aboriginal, Chinese, and foreign cultures. But there are full of contradictions between traditions and modernity, so what becomes the basis of creativity for ceramists? Do Taiwanese ceramics have a distinctive style? If so, what is it? Without clear answers to those questions, Taiwanese ceramists were long perplexed.

During its dormancy into a new century, a new trend slowly emerges. The current trend can be seen by the innovative and utensil artworks. "Innovative artworks" refers to ceramic works that have broken away from traditional colors and forms that are focused on the expression of personal feelings and styles. "Utensil artworks" refers to household items that integrate practical functions with the artists' own styles. In both types of art, one can see that Taiwanese ceramists are inspired by their own lives and experience. This exhibition features sixteen accomplished ceramists and seventy works that should elucidate the potentials of contemporary Taiwanese ceramics.

### **Innovative Artworks**

"Innovative artworks" refers to creations made for the sake of art. Ceramic art is not like painting and sculpting, also it has an intrinsic character. Contemporary Taiwanese ceramics have broken away from the influence of traditions. They focus on the quality of clay itself and their personal styles. In the past Taiwanese ceramists did not have such

a consensus, but they are increasingly reaching the same conclusion. This section features twelve artists (five women and seven men) with works ranging from the 1940s to the 1970s, with the themes of "Nature," "People!," "Enamored," and "Fantasy." Because of the multi-faceted culture and liberal creativity, the artists actually represent twelve distinctive styles.

### *Nature*

Nature has long been the best inspiration for artists. Lu Shu-chen's works are about the countryside, expressing her connection with nature. Judith Hsu views remote villages and forests from a poetic perspective and with a sensitive mind. Shen Tong-ning embraces nature's power to change. Chang Shan reflects on the relationship between humanity and nature and discusses what humans have done to nature.

### *People!*

Since antiquity, human physique has been a favorite subject for artists. Shih Hui-yin sculpts semi-abstract shapes to express the quiet gestures and instants of permanence. Yu Cheng-chung deals with humanity and technology to convey the negative impacts of over-dependence on technology. Chang Ho-min analyzes the human mentality in legends and myths. Such a method of depiction really touches the viewer.

### *Enamored*

The material world is a realm that people can't help obsessing over because that sweet and wonderful atmosphere does not dissipate so easily. Ah Leon's Railroad Tie Teapot and Tofu series are the best of realistic works. His precise techniques depict the simplicity of the olden days in Taiwan. Deng Hui-fen expresses what home feels like: something on its own but deeply connected. She uses simple hues that are colorful and splendid. Chu Fang-yi approaches from a playful perspective and creates abstract works, where each "object" becomes a shelter for the human spirit.

### *Fantasy*



It is alluring to take wild rides of imagination. Samuel Shih re-packages ancient images an unbelievably grandiose format, as if they actually existed and occupied the minds of the modern people. In a beautiful and dreamy way, Hu Hui-chin uses her works to let people go into her fantastic world and into the minds of the youths.

### Utensil Artworks

“Utensil Artworks” refers to an integration between functions and art, or artistic concepts infused into household items. In recent years, Taiwanese ceramists are making not just containers, but they are also exploring the beauty of glaze and techniques of firing. It is an expression of their artistic concepts and cultural upbringing. Ceramists care more than just beauty in life; they care about instill a sense of affection and enlightenment into their works. Like holding a jar of water, it is not about the volume, speed, or precision, but it is about how one moves with the jar and looks inside oneself and outward at the world.

This section features four artists: Chivy Chen, Cho Ming-shun, Fang Po-ching, and Wu Wei-cheng. They instill some richness and emotions into the household items by stimulating the viewers and the users of those works. They are also conveying their personal artistic values. Chen’s works are mostly multi-functional, being at once a lamp, a teapot, and a fountain. He incorporates landscape and astronomical objects into the works. Fang primarily makes tea sets, combining the natural and industrial sceneries. His works are grand and self-reflective. Cho integrates the abilities to function and receive with the appearance. The boat-shaped dining ware and clock-and-calendar are examples of his thoughtfulness. Wu’s flower vases feature the fun of wood-firing, the temperament of ink wash painting, and the coexistence of nature and culture.

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Art should naturally be a part of life, awaiting people to discover, display, and appreciate it. As D.H. Lawrence

pointed out, art does not have traceable rules. It is an expression of spontaneous emotions. When artists feel strongly about things and make a connection, they start to truly live and become motivated to create art.

Since the 1970s, people have worked hard to achieve much in the field of ceramic art in Taiwan. Ceramics nowadays has broken away from the confines of traditions and are delving into the innate characters of ceramics. The ceramists have only reached a consensus recently. Creativity in ceramics is derived from profound experience in life. This is merely the first step. How we move from this foundation and climb a new height is our next challenge.