



CHINESE CLAYART NEWSLETTER

November - December 2001, Vol. 24

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CHINESE CLAYART

" Chinese Clayart" is a newsletter emailed monthly to professional ceramic artists who want to know about ceramic art in China and things related. This newsletter will be a bridge between China and Western countries for the ceramic arts. Comments and suggestions are very welcome. (Copyright 2000, The Chinese Ceramic Art Council, USA. All rights reserved)

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FEATURE ARTICLE

New Patented Clay Tool-Plastic Texture Mat

Patent #01210116.8 P.R. China, Pending International Patent. © 2001, The Chinese Ceramic Art Council, USA, All Rights Reserved. Plastic Texture Mat - Bricks. 11 3/4" x 7 3/4". Plastic Texture Mat is a new patented clay tool for making textures on the surface of wet clay. Artist or student can use the textured clay to build many architecture forms. The textures are including "Bricks", "Rocks", "Fish Scales", or "Wood", etc. Plastic Texture Mat - Bricks.

1. Roll out a slab of clay, place on the top of Texture Mat, pound the clay evenly, and let the texture impress into the clay surface.
2. Peel off the clay from the Texture Mat, the texture will show out all over the clay surface. Then, cut the clay into shapes as you desired, build them into castle, house, or other kind of architecture. This product will be available in the US with 60 days.

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FEATURE ARTICLE 2

Chenlu Adventures

Chen-Lu Town, Shaan'xi Province

It is called "Town," but actually it is an ancient ceramic village in the mountainous area of Shaan'xi Province, between the Guan-Zhong Flatlands and the North Shaan'xi Plateau.

Chen-Lu is approximately 20 kilometers (about 11 miles) southeast of Tongchuan, and about two hours' driving from Xi'an. In Chinese, Chen means display, and Lu means oven or kiln. So, the town is a kiln-displaying village. The kiln sites have been laid one after another since the Song Dynasty.

The living houses are unique in this part of China. The style is called Yao-Dong. Yao means kiln, Dong means cave. The brick-built houses usually are built half way into the hillside. The ceilings are usually curved like an arch. This design is cooler in summer and warmer in winter. The bed the residents use is called Kang, which is a brick-built bed with a fireplace underneath. The walls around the yards are usually made out of broken jars or pots.

Chenlu Adventures - Annie Schliffer

(From the Editor Guangzhen Po Zhou: Annie Schliffer is the head of the Rochester Folk Art Guild Pottery Studio in Middlesex, New York. She was one of the members of the American Delegation on the China trip in June 2001. She decided to spend two weeks in Chenlu. I received this letter from Annie, and titled it. Let us share her experiences.

Annie left us in Xi'an, and I felt very nervous. What is going to happen to her? I told her when our bus was going to leave, "It is still okay if you decided Not to stay here, and you may just come with us.")

On that muddy overcast afternoon when your bus drove off, my heart sank, what have I gotten myself into? Which part of me wanted to have this experience? And did that part understand the immensity of the cultural and language gap, the squalor of the privies, the dirt, mosquitoes and flies that bred from who knows what water? An interpreter who spoke only intermediate English, and not another westerner for over 100 miles. What have I done to myself?

Well, yes, I got sick a few times and yes, at times I felt lonely and isolated, even in the worst moments indulged in self-pity, but the main, strongest and most lasting impressions are of the incredible warmth, love, and humor and the wonderful family that we stayed and worked with - their kindness, generosity and mastery of clay work in the Song dynasty style. We were quickly moved from the dirt and noise of the "hotel" room to an extra room of Dama's - Mr.Li's mother - who is a wonderful eighty-six year old woman. She was up gardening, sweeping, cleaning in her quiet way every morning at 5. The room was the traditional housing - an old kiln, naturally air-conditioned, very cool and a little damp. Our bathroom facilities consisted of a fairly clean firebrick outhouse and a little bucket with rainwater from which we would take our "bath" twice a day and then rinse some laundry. So this was our quiet refuge, and we became fast friends with Dama, who, within a week of our stay was showing my pictures to all her friends and relatives (she has 50 great-grandchildren) and telling them all about my life in America! A great lady with a wonderful sense of humor. My interpreter and I became good friends, able to laugh uproariously at the various ridiculous and difficult aspects of our life there. It was perhaps even harder for her in Chenlu than me, being used to a city, lots of activities, and running water!

The learning and study were intense and relentless, and very thorough. It was not just pottery, but everyday events such as how to hold chopsticks correctly, how to make their Jiaozi (Chinese dumpling), which paths lead where in the meandering maze of footpaths through the town, and how to become good friends with the shy 5 and 9 year old granddaughters without a common language. By the end of our visit the 9 year old led me all through town, up the mountain on precarious dirt paths, including me in her child's world.

I worked every day, beginning with throwing tea bowls, moving to vases (all off the hump) and finally large vases. Then trimming them all, using his superb system of chucks of just the right size and consistency and collection of trimming tools, each one for a different part and function. Then I attempted their Song dynasty style of carving, both into the wet leather hard clay, and through the black slip glaze that the pots are raw glazed with. Intricate peony patterns, simple lines and curves that took me so many attempts to imitate. Afternoons of sheer frustration when I couldn't come

close at all to the simple, vigorous, and clear lines of this direct style of carving. No fussing with it afterwards. Sometimes I felt anger and frustration with my inability to learn. Always in these moments I could take a break, have some jasmine tea and watermelon, or go wander around town a bit and come back with a fresh resolve to try again. But this direct, clean way of working was so elusive. Every time I tried it seemed that I was doing it backwards or upside down. For example, the lines that they band the pots with freehand seem simple - yes, on the wheel, but freehand? Oh, you're doing it backwards is no easier!

One Saturday afternoon many relatives had gathered and were moving in and out of the throwing room where I was working. The older men were amazed that I, a western woman, could throw large forms. Mr. Li's niece brought me watermelon which she insisted on feeding me in the pauses while I was throwing. Imagine an eleven year old girl feeding you as you work! By the close of the two weeks I produced 3 small vases and 3 tea bowls. A few had exploded in the fast firing they did for me in the end. The mornings before work gave ample time for writing, exercise, and sitting quietly while the strange sounding passenger pigeons whirred around the mountainside and children canted monotone praises to China in their early morning school. There was an incredible view from Dama's house - down the entire valley. Wonderful evening sunsets. Some evenings Mr. Li walked us around town, explaining its history, telling stories, stopping for tea at neighbors and friends. One night he took us up the big mountain just at the time that a lightning storm broke out right in front of us on an empty ridge. The goats, cows, and the 3 of us all went running down. Oh, what a funny scene! Other nights, craving solitude, I'd go for long walks up the road to where they were harvesting and thrashing wheat, all by hand. Usually I was accompanied or followed, like a pied piper, by dozens of children, all shouting hello, hello, etc.

We journeyed down to Tongchuan together where Mr. Li's daughter Jiuling, her husband, and children have bought a large house and are in the process of moving and setting up a pottery factory. Mr. Li and his wife wonder if they should join them, leaving the beauty and community of Chenlu for a more comfortable life in the city. He doesn't wish the life of a potter for any of his sons - it's too difficult and the work is too hard. So his daughter and son-in-law will carry on the pottery, but the son-in-law is not a master thrower. Perhaps it will be more mold work, with the fine carving. It's sad to see that Mr. Li's fine throwing tradition - his mastery of the "Big Pots" will die out.

I collected enough Chenlu pottery to make an exhibition which I will mount with photographs, perhaps next spring in our gallery. My friends suggested I pick it out and carry it all back. What a load going in and out of trains, buses, and taxis! They accompanied us to Xi'an where I got the necessary funds to pay everyone.

In Beijing, I visited the HAP studios where Ishi and a visiting Hawaiian potter were firing the Anagama kiln for the first time.

I'm very happy to be home, healthy and safe with only a minor skin allergy lingering from China. The wild cherry crop has never been so abundant, and it's wonderful to be out walking in the quiet green countryside. We had a successful opening of our pottery show. If only there had been time to make some Chinese inspired pots! Next time.

I love meeting everyone and spending time with all of you. Let's try to resume our friendships whenever time and space permits.

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PROFILES

Pinchang Lu, a well-known Chinese artist, will visit the U.S. in the spring of 2002.

Pinchang Lu's web site: www.lpcart.com

Mr. Lu is a professor of art, and vice director of the sculpture department at the Central Academy of Fine Art, Beijing, China. His works are mainly figurative, in either realistic or abstract depictions. These works are in ceramic and other mediums, and he has exhibited and has work in collections throughout the world. During the past ten years he has been invited by many schools to do

workshops, and during these travels he has visited Japan, Korea, Australia, Italy, Russia, and other European countries.

Lu Pinchang is also a renowned author who has published many articles in art magazines, and has recently published books entitled "Chinese Contemporary Ceramic Art" and "Modern International Sculpture."

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NOTICE

Letter from the editor Guangzhen "Po" Zhou -To a Seattle collector.
Since my computer had problems and was repaired last September, I lost some files including many emails.
I remember that: A collector who lives in the SEATTLE area, had a vase broken that was bought in Shanghai. Now, I have the replacement for you. Please contact me ASAP. Po's

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TRAVEL OPPORTUNITY

China Ceramic Cultural Travel and Exchange 2002

May 25 - June 14, (21 days).

The information for the Chinese Ceramic Cultural Travel Tour in 2002 is now on the web:
www.chineseclayart.com If you interested in this trip, please print out and fill in the application form, then mail it to us.

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