



CHINESE CLAYART NEWSLETTER

November - December 2002, Vol. 30

FEATURE ARTICLES

[Report on Foshan Expo](#)

PROFILE

[Master Chinese Potter "Gu Mei-qun"](#)

TRAVEL

[Next China Ceramic Trip - May/June 2003](#)

EXHIBITION

[Yixing Ceramic Art Traveling Exhibition, USA-2003](#)

ACTIVITY

[GU MEI-QUN, Yixing Style-Workshop, and Exhibition](#)

NEW BOOK

[A Dictionary of Chinese Ceramics](#)

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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[TOP](#)

FEATURE ARTICLE

REPORT ON FOSHAN, CHINA EPOSITION

China, from a Potter's Perspective
by -- Dave Finkelnburg

I have been back from China for a week now, and I'm still trying to make sense of my visit there. Funny, but visiting China doesn't seem like a big deal, now. A month ago, though, the thought was gut-wrenching. There was no good reason it should have been. I had been in the third world

before, been in countries where I didn't speak the language, been in countries where I didn't know the culture. It was just the totality of the unknowns that had me seriously anxious. Well, I grossly underestimated the unknowns. First, though, the logistics. Early this year I saw a ClayArt posting from Guangzhen "Po" Zhou. He was leading a tour of China in October. It included a ceramics conference in a city called Foshan. I procrastinated, thought, reconsidered when I saw a second posting for a shorter, two-week tour, checked out some references, and wildly signed up! Eight others did likewise. We were to visit Shanghai, Hangzhou, Xi'an and Beijing, also.

We flew into Guangzhou (used to be called Canton), thirty minutes from Foshan, and landed in the lap of a serious clay conference. Big name clay artists from the U.S., Europe and the Orient were there. We saw ceramic art exhibit openings, a tile and whiteware trade show, listened to international clay artists give prepared talks with slides, all the while bombarded by the sights, sounds and smells of the Pearl River delta city that is Foshan. Conference sessions made me feel like I was at the United Nations. We listened on headphones to English and Chinese speakers' words translated simultaneously to the other's Language.

Everywhere were potteries, tile factories, clay work in progress from studio to industrial scale.

Two evenings we sat around restaurant tables in a courtyard beside a several-hundred year-old wood-fired climbing kiln, eating and drinking beer and tea and water and talking till after midnight. In that group, with people from both Chinas, Korea, Australia, Canada, Mexico, Norway, Denmark, Spain, Greece, Germany...where the common language was art and clay...then I felt in totally familiar surroundings.

During my visit to China I began to absorb what must be learned by most beginning art students, that what we usually see as Chinese art is work made for a succession of emperors over the last 2,200 years. As in Korea and Japan, conformance and following tradition are highly valued in China. This was summed up for me by an older Chinese student who commented in one conference session, "It is easier for you to make original art in the West. You do not have the cultural burden we have in China." For the record, I saw highly original, exceptionally good, ceramic art in China. For being in a country of 1.3-billion people, though, such art was hard to find. Current ceramic art duplicating the work of Imperial artists of the last two millenia is much more in evidence.

I could go on about the details of our tour, but I'll be kind and spare you. Suffice it to say: all Chinese cities are a combination of the first, second and third world rolled into one; Shanghai is being transformed by an incredible building program; Beijing is a modern city without Shanghai's glitz; the Shanghai museum is THE place to see a complete exhibit of Chinese pottery; the Forbidden City in Beijing is number two on that list besides being a day's worth of things to look at by itself; Chinese expressways are thoroughly modern, and Chinese airlines and airports are, too; eating in China is familiar and easy, only exotic if you choose, but you'll be more comfortable if you learn to use chop sticks; the Great Wall looks fine in pictures but you'll never truly appreciate it until you feel it by walking on it yourself; and the terra cotta warriors and horses in the Emperor Qin's army, excavated and on display near Xi'an, are so impressive they can move you to tears...at least they did me.

So what do I remember most about China? The people. The eight others I traveled with, Stan Welsh, Tom and Geri Kerrigan, Dennis and Greg Parks, John Fahnstock and Sandro and Daniela Lorenzini were great. They were at times helpful, cheerful, insightful. My trip was much richer for them! Our guide, Guangzhen Zhou, aka "Po," was unflappably patient, and constantly caring, diligent and cheerful. Above all, the Chinese people, wherever we were, treated us with warmth and kindness. The China I saw is certainly not America. It's unlike any place I've ever been. Its people, though, made me want to return.

Dave Finkelburg, on a sunny-crisp fall day here, trying to make Idaho pots while visions of China race through my head.

-- By Guangzhen Zhou

The five days (Oct. 18-22) Foshan Ceramic Exposition is over. There were four exhibitions: International Exhibition of International Ceramics, Exhibition of Building Ceramics, Exhibition of Chinese Contemporary Ceramics, and Exhibition of Foshan Ceramics. There were also two simultaneous sessions, one on Ceramic Art, the other on Building Ceramics. While such categories are necessarily arbitrary and inexact, the former session was devoted mainly to issues affecting artists making small scale sculptural and functional ceramics, and the latter to artists producing tile and large scale ceramic sculpture.

The opening ceremony on Oct. 18 was wonderful.

On that morning police cars escorted our caravan of bus-loads of conference attendees all the way from our hotel to the site of an ancient climbing kiln, where participants walked down a long red carpet, welcomed by students who lined the street, singing a welcome and waving flowers. Lion dancing, speeches, banquets and endless toasts highlighted the conference. The local government must have spent a large sum money to make this possible.

Many international VIPs attended, including: President of the International Academy of Ceramics, Tony Franks (England); Vice-President of the International Academy of Ceramics, Les Manning (Canada); President of NCECA, Elaine Henry (USA); Editor of "Ceramics Monthly" ,Ruth Butler (USA); Publisher of the ceramics magazine "Neue Keramik, Bernd Pfannkuche (Germany); Publisher/Editor of "Ceramics Art and Perception" Janet Mansfield (Australia); and Gerry Williams (USA), editor of "Studio Potter." Among the many ceramic artists from China and foreign countries attending were tile artist Ole Lislrud (Norway), and sculptor, Bjorn Noergaard (Denmark), architectural ceramist Kimpei Nakamura (Japan), architect and sculptor Enrique Mestre (Spain), sculptor Lu Pin Chang (Beijing) and-well, the list could go on and on.

A delegation of international ceramic artists Organized by the Chinese Ceramic Art Council, USA, participated in the Foshan Ceramic Exposition. The delegation members were, The well-known ceramic artist Dennis Parks and his son Greg Parks, (Dennis was on his fourth visit to China and his third visit to China with me-from the editor); professor of University of Minnesota-Duluth, Tom Kerrigan and his wife Geraldine Kerrigan; professor of San Jose State University, California, Stan Welsh; Ceramic artist John Fahnstock; functional potter Dave Finkelnburg from Idaho; and Italian sculptor Sandro Lorenzini and his wife, Daniela.

It was fun to meet old friends and make new friends from Western or Eastern countries in China. After the Foshan Ceramic Exposition, the International Ceramic Artists Delegation traveled in China for 10 days, going from Guangdong Province to Beijing. Cities visited included Shanghai, Hangzhou, Yixing, Xi'an, and Beijing. Due to our flight being cancelled, we didn't go to Longquan, but went to the Nan-Song Imperial Kiln Site and the Ancient Yue Kiln Site of Shanglin Lake instead. The Yue Kiln Site of Shanglin Lake is on the National Protective Relics Registry, and located about 3 hours east of Hangzhou, and is the location where the first Celadon was produced. The kiln site may also be considered as the birthplace of porcelain ware. The kiln site is on a steep hillside and facing a lake. You must take a ferry to get the entrance, since there is no road access to the kiln location. The dragon kiln site is surrounded by a lot of Tang Dynasty shards.

Also, on the way, we visited the Academy of China Fine Arts-Hangzhou, the Central Academy of Fine Arts-Beijing and Hap Pottery, also in Beijing. It was a great trip and a real adventure for everyone.

[TOP](#)

TRAVEL OPPORTUNITY

CHINA CERAMIC CULTURAL AND EXCHANGE, 2003

May 25 - June 13 (20 days)

The cities included are: Shanghai, Yixing, Jingdezhen, Xi'an and Beijing.

We will visit art museums, schools, antique markets and private studios.

First-class train, three-stars hotel, and professional tour guides.

For detail information, please check our next issue of Chinese Clayart Newsletter.

[Email](#) Mailing List

[TOP](#)

ACTIVITIES

GU MEI-QUN, Yixing Style-Workshop, and Exhibition

Hosted by the Chinese Ceramic Art Council, USA and the Clayground, San Jose, California.

Sunday afternoon, Oct. 13, 2002

There were over 20 teapots exhibited. Gu Mei-Qun had a slide talk first, than made a teapot within two and half hours. There was an unexpected crowd from the area.

[TOP](#)

PROFILE

GU MEI-QUN,

1966 Born in Yixing, Jiangsu Province, China.

1981 Apprenticed with Man Jiang.

1988 Admitted to the Purple Sand Clay Factory #5.

1989 Graduated from the city commissioned "the Technology Specialized Class."

1993 Visited Japan representing the Fifth Purple Sand Clay Handicraft Factory.

1994 "Yi pian qing xin pot" placed third in the Fifth National Ceramic Design Competition.

1995 Awarded the first class prize in the Factory sponsored competition. Apprenticed with, among others, Shaopei Gu and Xiutang Xu. Diligent in learning. All of her work has a delicate and refined quality, all highly praised. Mei-Chun Ku is as well a teacher.

Gu Mei-qun, Special Technical Group Leader, Graphic artist.

The ceramic culture since its discovery at the dawn of the civilization has witnessed several thousand years of history. Yixing provided a safe ground for the purple sand clay pottery art culture to flourish. It became the capital of this art form for a thousand years. It allows even today the ancient art to maintain its place among highly developed modern technologies. It permits us as well to continue enjoying a piece of peace, a spirit of relaxation, and a scent of nature. Growing up in this environment, she learned by the total immersion of experiences. Inspired to do something great in the arena of purple sand clay art, she was determined to impose upon herself a strict discipline, which included working hard from the start, seeking guidance from the learned forerunners and communicating with her peers. It meant sweat and the freezing of the hands. She was the only one who knew what kind of hardships she had gone through. Much as if a phoenix must be going through trials and tribulations before its rebirth.

Through all the research and the hard work, she was able to partake in a taste of success. Her initial accomplishment did not perhaps account for anything great, but it did pave the way for a solid foundation. In an ever changing world, she realized that staying in one place meant being left behind. That is why she was never satisfied with what she did. She always strives forward, pursuing the higher and the better. In 1993 she was the first to visit Japan as an exchanged artist representing the Fifth Purple Sand Clay Handicraft Factory. In 1994, "Yi pian qing xin pot" placed third in the Fifth National Ceramic Design Competition. In 1995 her work "Wordless" was awarded the first class prize within her Factory. In 1997 her name was included in the "Who Is Who in China and Abroad".

[TOP](#)

EXHIBITION

Yixing Ceramic Art Traveling Exhibition, USA-2003 (Curators Needed)

The Chinese Ceramic Art Council, USA and the Ceramic Art Branch of the Arts and Crafts Association of Jiangsu Province, China are working together to host "Yixing Ceramic Art Traveling Exhibition, USA-2003." The contents of the show will be about 50 pieces of smaller sizes done by the most talented, well-known Chinese clay artists, and most of the art works will be Zisha (un-glazed brownish stoneware) teapots.

We are looking for some art galleries and museums to work together to display this exhibition in different areas in the United States.

For more information, please contact:

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[TOP](#)

NEW BOOK

"A Dictionary of Chinese Ceramics" written by Wang Qingzheng, the director of Shanghai Museum, and published by Oriental Art Publications. The book's contents include brief introductions and maps. Chapter 1 covers Shapes and Forms; Chapter 2, Ceramic Materials and Manufacture; Chapter 3, Kiln Sites, Factories, Guilds and Wares; Chapter 4, Decoration Methods, Glazes and Colors; Chapter 5, Motifs; Chapter 6, Marks and Inscriptions; Chapter 7, Potters and Books on Ceramics.

It is hard cover, 367 pages contains over 1,000 full colored pictures, and weighs five lbs. The price is \$250 each, plus \$6.00 S&H fee.

For details, please contact:

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[TOP](#)