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In This Issue

From the editor Guangzhen Zhou

The Unsolved Mysterious of Sanxingdui Culture

The New Feature of Black Pottery in Jinzhong, Shanxi Province

Rongchang International Ceramic Design and Seminar

The Largest Dragon Kiln in the World, Jianshui, Yunnan Province

"Autumn Leaf", the installation by Jacques Kaufmann



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"CHINESE CLAY ART" is a newsletter emailed to professional artists, curators, collectors, writers, experts, educators and students in the ceramic field, who want to know about ceramic art in China and things related.

This newsletter will be a bridge between Eastern and Western countries for the ceramic arts.

Comments and suggestions are very welcome.

An earlier newsletter is on the Web
at: <http://www.chineseclayart.com>
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From the editor Guangzhen Zhou

Happy Lunar New Year of Sheep! The Lunar New Year's Day was February 19th this year. It is family reunion time in the Chinese tradition and it results in the biggest migration of people in the world. Many of them would like to go back to their hometown, and I also left Shanghai to return to San Francisco on February 12, right before the traffic jam started. So, I am able to sit in my home right now and write something down for the newsletter.



NCECA:

Professor Zheng Ning with a group of 12 from Tsinghua University will come to Providence in March. I had a plan to bring another group but decided to cancel. The groups from school usually have some students who can speak perfect English and they will be able to travel on their own, but the others may require a lot of assistance. I am getting old, it is hard to keep being the babysitter. The Chinese group will join the Friday night dance party. See you all in NCECA (Chinese Clay Art Booth Number #422).

It is said that there are four famous Pottery (Stoneware) Capitals in China. They are Yixing Pottery in Jiangsu Province, Rongchang Pottery in Chongqing city, Jianshui Pottery in Yunnan Province, and Nixing Pottery in Qinzhou, Guangxi Province. This is just one of the ways to describe Chinese ceramics today. Actually, there are hundreds of ceramic kilns, villages and towns in remote areas. These days, people want to excavate and explore their local culture and history in order to join in the creative cultural business and promote local economy, as a result some fake historical sites have emerged; on the other hand, a lot of other valuable historical sites have been destroyed due to large-scale construction of new residential and commercial developments.

After returning from Dublin, General Assembly of International Academy of Ceramics September 2014, I spent three months in China. I participated in the Jingdezhen International Ceramic Expo, the 5th Chinese Ceramic Art Summit hosted by Ceramic Art and Science Magazine and sponsored by Xianglong Black Pottery Company, as well as Jinzhong, Shanxi Province, Rongchang International Ceramic Design and Seminar, Chongqing, the 9th Chinese Youth Contemporary Ceramic Artists Exhibition and the International Ceramic Exhibition, in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, Chengdu Normal University (I was invited for a lecture presentation), Sichuan Province, and the annual conference hosted by Ceramic Art Illustrated Magazine, at Jianshui, Yunnan Province, and visited some other places for lectures. I left Shanghai for California on Dec. 22, right before Christmas.

Over the past 20 years, I have visited many places of significances in ceramics in China, but there are still some ceramic related localities or cities I have not been to yet. I would like to learn more about these ceramic historical areas, and to meet more of the artists. As a council member of IAC, one of my responsibilities is to balance the representation of each area within IAC.

The Unsolved Mysterious of Sanxingdui Culture



Ceramic vessel forms are greatly influenced by the shapes, forms and the philosophic meaning of historical Chinese bronze wares.

Sanxingdui Museum is an on-site excavation museum which was opened to the public in October 1997. The museum is in Guanghan City, by the bank of Duck's River, right at the beginning of Yangze River, and it is about 38 kilometers from northern Chengdu, at the center of Sichuan Province.

The Sanxingdui bronzes were discovered for the first time in 1933, and were not excavated until the early 1980's. At the site, they excavated over 1000 objects of bronzes,

about 70 pieces of potteries, and over ten thousands sharps, and some jade, gold and stone pieces, three city walls, and some other works of architecture.

According to the experts, these historical relics have been around for 4500 years. Seven symbols were found on one of the bronze pieces. There was not any written information related to Chinese history, and none of these bronze sculptures or vases could be matched to the other types of bronzes, whether in the shape or the decoration. Nothing could be correlated to the Central Plains where Chinese culture originated. There are many alien-like masks with big eyes popping out. Where did Sanxingdui culture come from and where did these people go? These mysteries still remain today. Somehow it seems to resemble the Mayan Culture in Mexico where my family and I visited at the end of 2014.

Bronze figures (2.62 meters in height), bronze tree (3.95 meters in height), Bronze mask (1.38 meters width). Three sides of city walls.

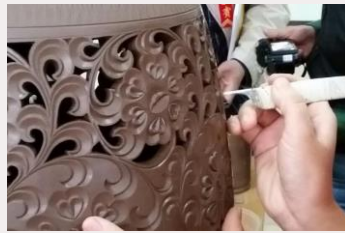
The New Feature of Black Pottery in Jinzhong, Shannxi Province

On Oct. 23rd, I was invited to the 5th Summit of Chinese Ceramic Art, hosted by Ceramic Science and Art magazine, and Xianglong Black Pottery Company, Jinzhong, Shannxi Province. The black (smoke fired) pottery decorated with hollowed-out patterns is one of the traditional types of ceramics that can be traced all the way back to Neolithic times in central China and it has become popular over the last two decades.



Under direction by the National Ceramic Art Master Mr. Zhang Furong, black pottery has been developed into a new stage with perfectly decorated patterns in the ceramic studio titled Xianglong Black Pottery Factory. There are many well-trained craftswomen in the factory and they would like to promote their art to other parts of the world.

Fig. Black Pottery, Xianglong Pottery Museum, Jinzhong, Shannxi Province



Rongchang International Ceramic Design and Seminar



Rongchang Pottery, one of the four pottery capitals, is located in Chongqing, west of China. On Oct. 25-28, 2014, Rongchang International Ceramic Design and Seminar was hosted by the local government and the Art College of Chongqing University. I have met some artists from other countries, and we had lectures, hands-on-workshops, and went sightseeing. I was very excited to see an old dragon kiln over 90 meters long, also to meet many friends from other countries, such as Ole Lislerud from Oslo National Academy of the Arts, Norway, Fumio Shimada from Tokyo University of Arts, Japan.

The Largest Dragon Kiln in the World, Jianshui, Yunnan Province

It was nice to take a flight from the cold city of Shanghai and arrive at the sunny area of Yunnan Province in winter season. The event was hosted by both the Jianshui government and the Ceramic Art Illustrated Magazine. We discussed how to improve the quality of the magazine and related subjects. There were no ceramic magazines in mainland China until the 21st century. But today, there are about ten ceramic magazines there. I believe this magazine is one of the best ceramic magazines in China. Another high-quality Chinese language ceramic magazine is "Ceramic Art," based in Taiwan.



I was really shocked as I stood next to the largest dragon kiln in the world which is 132 meters in length. There are a lot of treasures hiding in that mountain area!

"Autumn Leaf", the installation by Jacques Kaufmann





This installation was made of bamboo and ceramic tiles. It was part of the Contemporary Art of Biennale Shanghai 2014.

Spending about ten days with three workers and two assistants in early December, French artist and professor Kaufmann has the huge "leaf" built by a lake, next to Xintiandi shopping center in Shanghai.

The size of the leaf was about 25 meters in length, 10 meters in width and 2.5 meters in height. Three tons of roof tiles and thousands of full size bamboo trunks were used. Each bamboo trunk was about 3 or 4 meters in length. On top of the bamboo structure, the roof tiles from old houses were well-arranged to imitate the texture of a leaf. The traditional architectural material of China has been used for contemporary artwork under western concepts in the center of Shanghai, the largest city of China.

It was nice to see the process of the installation and to learn more about his artworks and his sense of aesthetics through his lectures. I acted as the interpreter when he was presenting his slides talk at Shanghai Institute of Visual Arts. I tried to capture his key words from the lecture. He used words with contrary meanings many times: Spiritual and material, ordinary and special, traditional and contemporary, moving and static, light and heavy, light and dark, fire and water, space and energy, nature and culture, etc.

It reminded me of the concepts of Chinese traditional philosophy of Yin-Yang, or Yin and Yang. In the terms of Yin-Yang, Yin represents female, moon, downside; Yang represents male, sun, upside, so on and so forth.

These two opposite or contrary forces are interconnected, interdependent, and interactive. Their existence relies upon each other and complements each other. So the meaning of Ying-Yang is "unity of two opposites", or "harmony of two opposite forces". The philosophy is one of the principles of Chinese Taoism, and it has been dominant in Chinese medicine, science, martial arts, and many other fields.

Also, Kaufmann talked about his impressions of China. He used two pictures to illustrate his views, and one was an overloaded vehicle. It was not only vehicles, but also human bodies, from little children to young students, from construction workers to office managers, that were overloaded, indicating the greediness of China today. The second picture was of an old man writing Chinese calligraphy on the ground by using water in Beijing, which represents the traditional and contemporary at the same time. Kaufmann precisely captured these phenomena in China.

When we met in Dublin last September Kaufmann was very excited about his project; he talked about his idea, saying, "if the leaf curve ups, it means received or taken, if the leaf curves down, it could mean delivery or given".

The artwork represents the concepts of energy, volume, space, and the contrasts in sizes of leaves and people. When facing the huge leaf on the ground, suddenly all of the humans in the audience seem to have become as small as ants. According to my observation, it seems that most of the Chinese audience is able to accept the work of "Autumn Leaf".

Most installation artworks are temporary only, and this huge leaf will be kept for a few months. Some Chinese artists feel this is too impractical: you spend so much time and money, but keep nothing after two months. They believe that artwork should be functional, or to be collectible, or able to be sold on the art market.

One of my friends said: "You have to translate this for me: his artwork is great! But as a temporary artwork, it is too luxurious, it wastes money. We would like to invite him to come back next year, to use permanent materials to make a new piece. The new one should be strong enough to be permanent and functional, able to be used as a tea pavilion during the hot summer."

Photographer Bao Lei, (these pictures were taken from the air with a drone).
Photographer Guangzhen Zhou (these pictures were taken on the ground).

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