



# LIFE in Ceramics

FIVE  
CONTEMPORARY  
KOREAN  
ARTISTS

BURGLIND JUNGMANN

FOWLER MUSEUM AT UCLA LOS ANGELES

# Life in Ceramics | Ceramics in Life

BURGLIND JUNGSMANN

## CERAMICS IN LIFE

The fascination of ceramics stems at least in part from their elemental character. Their main “ingredients” are earth and fire. These basic natural elements, however, require the forming hands of the potter and the skill to control fire. One of the most basic ceramic forms is the bowl, and its hemispherical shape resembles the gesture of our two hands brought together to cup water and drink. In many cultures ceramics have been among the earliest formed containers, the earliest objects for daily use, and the earliest objects employed in rituals. Within the scope of art history—both Western and Eastern—however, the question persists as to whether we should view ceramic objects as the “works” of an artist or as “things” created by a craftsman?

The Western distinction between art and craft, made in Europe during the Renaissance, has prevailed. Martin Heidegger emphasized it in the twentieth century by distinguishing between “work” and “thing.” Ceramics, however, often defy such a facile distinction. They seem instead to take on a “hybrid” character, often being both “art” and “craft” at once. The potter is at the same time an artist who creates ceramics for aesthetic appreciation and an artisan who produces pots for practical use. But doesn't this hybridity also apply to the recipients, to those of us who use and appreciate ceramics? Don't we want to handle beautiful things that we can enjoy looking at and using at the same time? Aren't ceramics then, rather than taking on a hybrid character, firmly positioned at the juncture of art and craft, changing their appeal and character in a fluid manner, depending on how they are used or displayed?

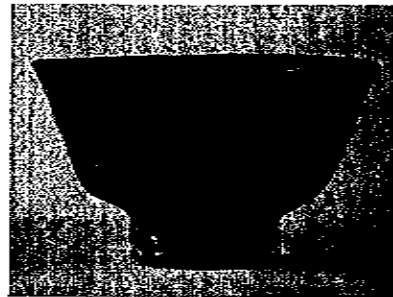
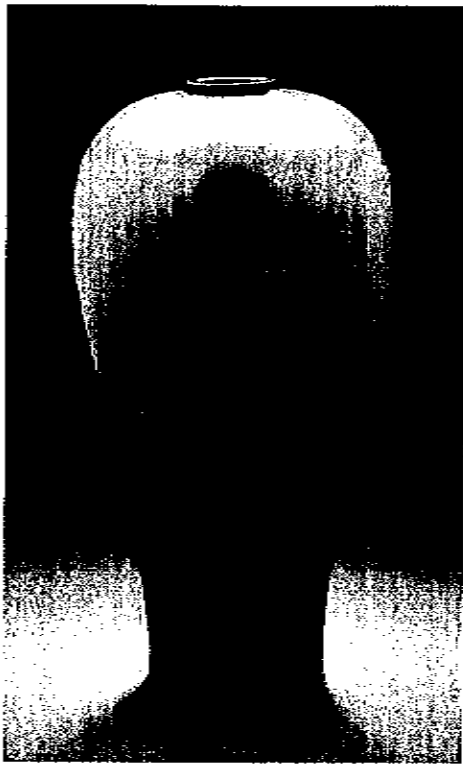
The present exhibition emphasizes the fluid character of ceramics. All the exhibited objects can be used—as containers, vases, bowls, chairs, and so forth. Yet they are also works of contemporary art. Kim Yikyung presents six pentagon-shaped objects that are assembled to form a sculpture, yet they can also function as garden chairs. Lee Young-Jae's installation of 111 bowls may be called a meditation on the variety, uniqueness, and simplicity of one of the most basic ceramic shapes, yet every single bowl can be used for drinking or offering a drink. Yoon Kwang-cho's vessels transgress the boundaries of pottery, sculpture, text, and painting—inscribed with his *Mountain Dreams* and the *Heart Sutra*. Lee Kang Hyo's plates and bottles are canvases on which to experiment with color and abstract design. Lee In Chin's plates, bowls, and vases take on a new identity in their staggered installation, transforming single shapes into a variety of undulating lines, while simultaneously recalling a kitchen cabinet. In order to emphasize the strong relationship of our five artists' work to “life,” we have also included sets of their ceramic wares specifically intended for daily use.

#### LIFE IN CERAMICS

In East Asian aesthetic tradition there exists a distinction between art and craft similar to that in the West. Beginning in the Six Dynasties period (222–589 CE), Chinese calligraphers were regarded as artists and their works collected. Art theories and histories were written, first on the art of calligraphy and then on painting.<sup>1</sup> While in Europe architecture was considered the most important of the arts, in East Asia the art of writing held this position. Both art forms, as different as they may be, have one thing in common: they embrace other art forms. Architecture creates a space that encloses sculpture and painting, and calligraphy is intimately related to text, literature, philosophy, religion, and—through the use of the same materials and brush techniques—to ink painting. Interestingly, architecture is not regarded as art in the traditional [Eastern system of art categories, and calligraphy does not have a place in the traditional Western system. Ceramics were not considered “art” in either of these systems until the sixteenth century. The recognition of ceramics as an art form emerged within the context of the tea ceremony in Japan, and from the beginning Korean ceramics were at the core of this aesthetic appreciation.<sup>2</sup>

While the development of other Korean art forms—whether calligraphy, painting, architecture, or sculpture—is strongly linked with that of neighboring China, Korean ceramics stand out as highly individual and largely independent of such intercultural exchanges. Or to put it differently, if we think of the work of an artist as stemming from his own cultural context, his creativity, and the inspiration that he receives from outside sources, the factor of individual creativity appears to be, as we shall see, the most important in Korean ceramics. It is therefore of little wonder that the uniqueness, beauty, and creativity of Korean ceramics found foreign admirers early on. Xu Jing, a Chinese envoy who visited Korea in 1123, for instance, praised the special “kingfisher color” of celadons (fig. 1) of the Koryŏ period (918–1392).<sup>3</sup> In the sixteenth century the Japanese tea master Sen no Rikyū (1522–1591) admired the simplicity and naturalness of Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910) *punchŏng* ware and made it a core ingredient of the tea ceremony, and in the early twentieth century Yanagi Sōetsu (1889–1961) discovered the unpretentious beauty of Chosŏn dynasty white ware while developing his theory of “folk art.”<sup>4</sup>

Apart from the basic aspect of “life” that applies to ceramics through their potential for everyday use, Korean ceramics relate to life in two more significant ways. First, they naturally reflect and correspond to the “life” of the potter, his surroundings, living circumstances, and experience—as does any work of art or craft that has not been industrially produced. This biographical aspect is perhaps most obvious in Yoon Kwang-cho’s vessels. On his piece *Windy Valley*, made in 2003 (cat. no. 9), he drew a sketch of mountains, a field, and clouds that recalls the landscape where he lives and works, near the ancient capital of Kyŏngju. He himself refers to this area as the “windy valley.” The text of the *Heart Sutra* on two other pieces (cat. nos. 7, 13) relates to his devotion to Buddhism.<sup>5</sup> Yet, one can find the biographical aspect in the other artists’ works as well. Lee Young-Jae’s bowls, for instance, recall the shape of those that were used for religious offerings in Korea during her youth. They also incorporate the strict



tectonic simplicity of the Bauhaus movement, which she experienced during her studies in Germany, and by taking the form of an installation of 111 bowls, they also reveal her present-dialogue with contemporary art.

Perhaps the most important aspect of "life" in Korean ceramics, however, is their inherent spontaneity. Even historical ceramics, especially the *punchŏng* and white wares of the Chosŏn period (see figs. 2, 3), give an impression of liveliness; they are often uneven in their shapes and playful in their designs. Spontaneity, however, in the East Asian understanding of the arts means more than an act born out of a moment. The artist's ability to finish a work in an instant is based on a long period of trial, repetition, and experience, as well as a rigid selection process. Long periods of training and exercise finally result in that one moment when the artist connects to the forces of nature and divine spirits (*chŏngi*, "heavenly inspiration") that enter his body and guide his hands.

Consequently, imperfection—a characteristic that strongly distinguishes Korean ceramics from Chinese—is not only tolerated but accepted and respected as naturally given and as enhancing the beauty and individuality of a piece. A *punchŏng* tea bowl of the sixteenth century (fig. 2) and a white "Moon Jar" of the late sixteenth to seventeenth century (fig. 3) illustrate the Korean sense of beauty and individuality born out of imperfection. The term *punchŏng* is an abbreviation of *punjang haechŏng sagi*, or "grayish blue stoneware with slip decoration." When *punchŏng* stoneware began to be produced in the early Chosŏn period, potters employed the same materials and decorative techniques that had been used for the famed inlaid celadons of the Koryŏ period. They gradually abandoned the greenish color, however, in favor of

**FIGURE 1**

*Jar with Cranes and Clouds*  
Koryŏ period, thirteenth  
to fourteenth century  
Stoneware with incised and slip-  
filled decoration and green glaze  
H. 17.3 cm

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**FIGURE 2**

*Tea Bowl*  
Chosŏn period, sixteenth century  
Stoneware with slip decoration  
and clear glaze  
Diam.: 17.3 cm

PRIVATE COLLECTION, JAPAN  
REPRODUCED FROM GORO AKABOSHI  
AND HEIICHIRO NAKAMARU, *FIVE  
CENTURIES OF KOREAN CERAMICS*  
(NEW YORK: WEATHERHILL, 1975).  
ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED AS *CHOSŎN  
NO KAKIMOTO: RICHŌ* (TOKYO:  
TANKOSHA, 1965).

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KIDO USHIO AND  
MATSUICHIHI SAZAKIOTO.

**FIGURE 3**

*Moon Jar*  
Chosŏn period, late sixteenth  
to seventeenth century  
White stoneware with clear glaze  
Height: 34.3 cm

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**FIGURE 4**

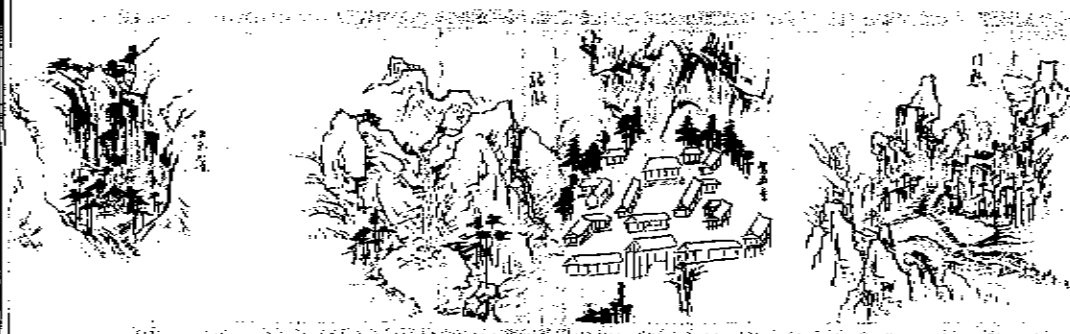
Lee Young-Jae  
*Spindle Vase*, 1994  
Gray clay, wheel-thrown,  
petalite oak ash glaze  
Height: 35.5 cm

G. AND F. JAHN COLLECTION, MUNICH



a transparent glaze that brought out the nuances of gray, beige, white, and black in the gray stoneware body and white slip. While celadon ceramics, which were mainly produced for the royal court and court-sponsored Buddhist monasteries during the Koryö period, are elegantly shaped, range in colors from bluish green to a warm jade tone, and often reveal intricate inlay decoration (see fig. 1), *punchöng* ware had a more rustic, down-to-earth appeal.

A significant factor in bringing about this radical change was the emergence of a new state ideology. Neo-Confucianism was declared the official philosophical and ethical basis of the new dynasty, and favoring simplicity over luxury and naturalness over the arbitrary demonstration of technical skills, it radically altered the cultural environment as much as the taste of artists and consumers. Yet, if we look at the Koryö jar of the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century (see fig. 1), we see cranes fly lightly and naturally between the clouds, reminding us that playfulness and liveliness were also important ingredients in the appeal of ceramics even then. In the sixteenth century *punchöng* potters started to use the white slip that was initially used for inlay in new, freer ways, applying it with a brush (*kwiyal punchöng*) or coating the whole ceramic with slip (*paektö punchöng*). Irregularities, not only in the shape, but also in the slip and the glaze, often deriving from the coarse clay body underneath, were appreciated, and as in the case of the tea bowl in figure 2, the dark trace of the potter's finger in the white slip was not regarded as an accident but as a mark heightening the individuality of the piece and letting the personality of its maker shine through. Even though the potter who created it remains unknown, we still seem to feel his presence when we look at the bowl.



此卷繪於乾隆二十一年... 畫中景物... 遠山如畫... 近水如鏡... 亭台樓閣... 點綴其中... 氣韻生動... 筆墨淋漓... 誠為山水畫中之極品也。

As already mentioned, such simple, unpretentious, natural, and individual *punchŏng* bowls were much admired by Japanese tea aficionados. The late sixteenth-century invasions of Korea by Japanese troops under the command of Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1536–1598) are in fact often blamed for erasing *punchŏng* production in Korea. This is because Sen no Rikyū, Hideyoshi’s influential tea master, so loved Korean ceramics that this prompted Japanese warlords to abduct Korean potters and take them to Japan to work in their domains. The Imjin War (also known as the Hideyoshi Invasions, 1592–1598) is sometimes even called the “pottery war.” While it is undoubtedly true that it was destructive beyond imagination and that abducted Korean potters were instrumental in revolutionizing ceramic production in Japan, Korean ceramic experts today acknowledge that *punchŏng* was actually abandoned on the Korean Peninsula because porcelain began to be produced in larger quantities and became more affordable for a wider range of people.<sup>7</sup> In fact, the *punchŏng* technique of covering the gray stone body with white slip can also be seen as an imitation of porcelain.

Porcelain, or white ware (*paekcha*) of the Chosŏn period comes in all shapes: bowls, bottles, plates, vases, brush holders, water droppers for the scholar’s studio, and so forth. The most extraordinary shape and, it seems, the shape most inspirational for contemporary ceramic artists, is the so-called “Moon Jar.” In fact, Moon Jars belong to the repertoires of Kim Yikyung, Lee Kang Hyo, and Lee In Chin, while Lee Young-Jae developed her spindle vases (fig. 4) out of the Moon Jar shape. If fully illuminated, the shape and pale color of a Chosŏn Moon Jar (see fig. 3) recall the image of the full moon, and if light is cast on the jar from only one side, it resembles the waxing or waning moon. Because Moon Jars are thrown in two pieces—resembling two round, wide-mouthed bowls—which are then joined together, all Chosŏn-period examples have an uneven shape. Blemishes in the glaze give them a “personal identity,” so that ceramic experts can distinguish every jar despite their overall conformity and simplicity.

A clue as to how such irregular, individual shapes were produced was given by a close friend of Yanagi Sōetsu, the Japanese potter and admirer of Chosŏn ceramics, Hamada Shōji (1887–1979), who in the 1920s and 1930s traveled the Korean Peninsula—then under Japanese colonial rule—and observed potters at local kilns: “When the Koreans make pots, they take the pot off the wheel at a different time than we do. They throw from a lump of very soft clay. The clay is so soft and the throwing so fast that the bowl is actually held up by the centrifugal force of the wheel. They must cut it off very quickly, otherwise it would deform and collapse.”<sup>8</sup> Hamada also commented

FIGURE 5  
Kang Schwang (1713–1792)  
Scenes of Puan Prefecture, details  
of handscroll, circa 1770

Ink on paper  
25.4 × 267.3 cm

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on the distinction between Chinese, Korean, and Japanese ceramics in a letter to his friend the British potter Bernard Leach (1887–1979) in 1922: “I think there are hardly any pots in the world through which a people’s life breathes as directly as Korean ones, especially Yi dynasty wares. Between pots and life, Japanese ones have ‘taste,’ Toft wares have ‘enjoyment,’ even the Sung pots have ‘beauty,’ and so on. But the Yi dynasty pots have nothing in between; peoples’ lives are directly behind the pots.”<sup>9</sup> The spontaneity of the process of creation, as described by Hamada, is still visible in the completed work, as if “frozen,” and this produces the impression of liveliness. The close connection between the spontaneous—one is tempted to say “performance-like”—creation and the end product gives the viewer a chance to look backward in time and visualize the process.

The factor of time and the sensation of movement are central to East Asian aesthetic theory, predominantly in the discussion of the “high art” of calligraphy.<sup>10</sup> The travel diary, for instance, of Kang Sehwan (1713–1792) a prominent eighteenth-century painter, written during a visit to Mount Pyön in North Chölla Province around 1770 (fig. 5), displays the writer’s spontaneous wielding of the brush, including his errors.<sup>11</sup> An informed observer can not only retrace the way each character was written, following the order of brushstrokes and observing how the brush moved from one character to the next, but can also determine when Kang dipped his brush into the ink and how he “wrote it out” by watching how the dark saturated strokes become gradually thinner and lighter and recognizing the sudden change to dark ink that marks the moment when the author again dipped the brush into the ink. Moreover, the spontaneous manner of composing the text while writing manifests itself in Kang’s casual corrections where he erased characters or wrote between the lines.<sup>12</sup> Visualization of the process of creation thus links the viewer to the artist and thereby creates a dialogue that defies time and space. The same can be said about the *punchöng* tea bowl (see fig. 2) and the trace of the potter’s finger.

While the five artists chosen for this exhibition all take inspiration from the legacy of Korean ceramic history, their works not merely continue a great tradition, they are innovative, contemporary pieces of art. As the individual examinations of their work that follow will reveal, they may be regarded as conducting simultaneous dialogues with the contemporary art scene and with the potters of the Silla, Koryö, and Chosön periods. Both interchanges are complex, and perspectives on the past and the present differ fundamentally from one artist to another.

## KIM YIKYUNG | COURTLY ELEGANCE

Many of Kim Yikyung's works are inspired by the elegance of the white ware used by the court and for Confucian rituals during the Chosŏn, Korea's last dynastic period. In contrast to the rounded cups and plates used for tableware, ritual ware for ancestor worship included rectangular dishes. Kim Yikyung's *Ritual Plate* (fig. 6), for instance, shares with a ritual dish from the eighteenth century (fig. 7) a wide rectangular shape on a faceted foot. The slight upward curve of both dishes toward their outer edges, an indication that they were initially thrown on a wheel before being cut into shape, not only allows them to conveniently hold and display a food offering but also lends them a definite elegance.<sup>13</sup> Kim Yikyung's pentagons, on the other hand (cat. no. 1), take inspiration from secular life. Drum-shaped ceramics used as garden chairs were popular both in China and Korea, as shown in an album leaf by sixteenth-century painter Yi Kyŏngyun (1545–1611) that depicts a scholar and his servant in an outdoor setting (fig. 9). Kim Yikyung, however, turns such chairs into modern sculptures by altering the shape of initially wheel-thrown cylinders into pentagons of uneven height and width and by flattening and texturing their surfaces. Texture and glaze give them a warm and natural feeling despite their powerful rock-like appearance.

Recently, Kim Yikyung has experimented further with taller angular shapes and created crystalloid column forms that complement the pentagon sculpture ensemble. If the pentagons can be used as "garden chairs," the crystalloid columns with their small apertures allowing light to shine through can serve as "garden lamps" (cat. no. 2). In conversation, the artist explained that for her next project she will explore such tall angular forms further to create an abstract sculptural representation of a mountain scene, alluding to the Diamond Mountains (Kŭmgangsan). The innumerable granite peaks of this famous mountain range, located in the central part of the peninsula, have been an inspiration for painters and poets for centuries. Kim Yikyung, however, wants to re-create the feeling of nature, to represent the essence, the power of these mountains rather than their outer form. In fact, art critics have suggested that her ceramics carry *ki*, the inner power of nature, a power that is especially strong in the mountains. When asked what aspect of Korean ceramic tradition has most inspired her, she mentions Moon Jars (see fig. 3). In addition to their shape, she appreciates the way the processes and reactions that take place during the firing manifest themselves in these jars, giving them a natural quality. More than in any other ceramic shape, she states, the process of the creation is embedded in the somewhat distorted and therefore highly individual forms of the Moon Jar.

### CAT. NO. 1

#### *Pentagon Forms (Garden Stools)*

2009

Porcelain with grog, wheel thrown, altered, and textured; ash glaze

Height (of tallest): 53 cm

COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST

### FIGURE 6

Kim Yikyung

*Ritual Plate*, 1980

Porcelain, clear glaze, wheel-thrown and cut into square

9.7 x 39.5 x 28.5 cm

PHOTOGRAPH ©2008 KIM YIKYUNG

### FIGURE 7

*Ritual Dish*

Chosŏn period, eighteenth century

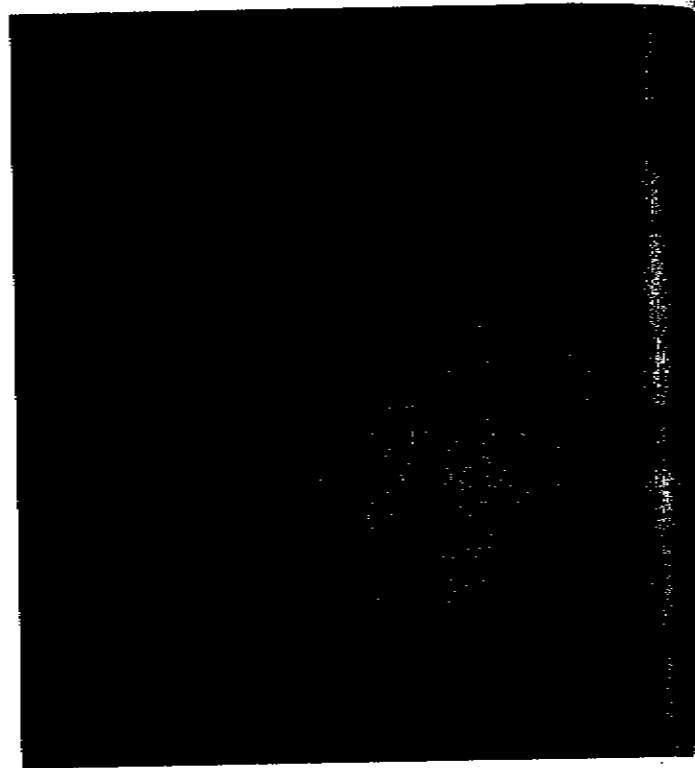
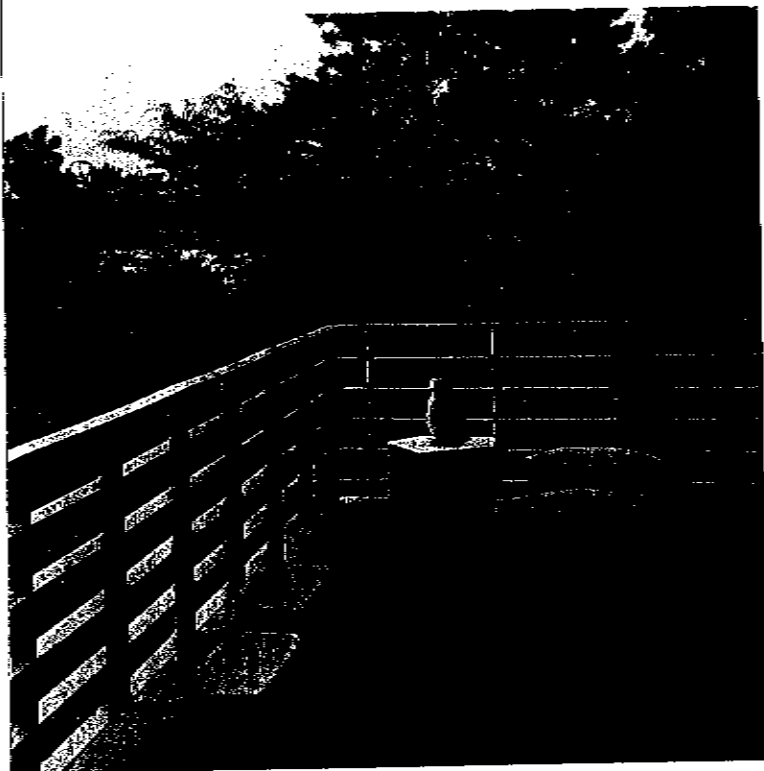
Porcelain with underglaze cobalt-blue inscription

22.2 cm

REPRODUCED FROM CHUNG YANG-MO ET AL., *ARTS OF KOREA*, EDITED BY JUDITH G. SMITH (NEW YORK: THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, 1995), PLATE 34

PHOTOGRAPH BY HAN SEOK-HONG, HAN'S PHOTO STUDIO, SEOUL





An experience during the course of her studies at Alfred University in New York State in the 1970s directed Kim Yikyung's attention to Chosŏn porcelain. It was there that she met Bernard Leach, the famous British ceramic artist who had lived in Japan and explored Chosŏn ceramics together with his friends Yanagi Sōetsu and Hamada Shōji. Leach came to lecture at Alfred on a regular basis and encouraged students, among them Kim Yikyung, to study Korean ceramics. She later spent a year studying in Kyoto where she was able to concentrate further on her own work and started to incorporate aspects of traditional Chosŏn ceremonial porcelain. Meetings with American artists at annual InSEA (International Society for Education through the Arts) conferences were equally important to her artistic development, however, because they introduced her to new ways of handling clay, experimenting with shapes, and cutting and patching abstract forms. These experiences helped her to find her individual style by integrating abstract and sculptural elements into her ceramic work.

**FIGURE 8**

An assortment of Kim Yikyung's ceramic stools appears on her balcony.

PHOTOGRAPH BY BURGIND JUNGMAHN,  
KYŒNGGI PROVINCE, 2009.

**FIGURE 9**

Yi Kyōngyun (1545–1611)  
*Scholar and Servant  
in a Garden*, 1598  
From *Album of Figures  
and Landscapes*

Ink on hemp  
12.5 x 23 cm

HORIM ART MUSEUM, SEOUL

## YOON KWANG-CHO | MOUNTAIN RECLUSE

The titles of Yoon Kwang-cho's ceramics *Meditation* (cat. nos. 4, 5), *Windy Valley* (cat. nos. 6, 9), *Mountain Dreams* (cat. nos. 10, 11, 12), and *Heart Sutra* (cat. nos. 7, 13) refer directly to the landscape and aura of the place where he has chosen to live and work, a studio nestled deep in the mountains near Kyōngju, the ancient capital of the Silla Kingdom (ca. 3rd century–935 CE). The mountains around Kyōngju are scattered with large Buddhist monasteries and the archaeological remains of smaller temples: pagodas as well as Buddhist icons sculpted and carved into the rocks. It is a landscape that is as spiritual as it is gentle and beautiful. Yoon Kwang-cho's window opens onto this landscape, an unceasing source of meditation and of inspiration for sketches, shapes, and designs.<sup>14</sup> To live close to nature and to concentrate on his work are so dear to him that on the narrow road to his studio, Yoon joyfully remarks on entering the realm where cell phones are unable to receive a signal. Reclusion, however, does not mean refusal to cope with the outside world. The artist's studio combines a traditional-style Korean house and garden with modern kiln technology.

Yoon Kwang-cho builds on the *punchōng* tradition using coarse clay and white slip. He boldly applies abstract designs with a brush or employs the slip as canvas for his free, playful sketches and inscriptions of the *Heart Sutra* (cat. nos. 7, 13).<sup>15</sup> He inscribes the complete text of his favorite sutra with a nail—a technique that does not allow for any error, as a wrong character cannot be erased from the soft clay. Furthermore, since for the Buddhist devotee the copying of a sutra is a means to gain merit for a future life and a form of meditation in the present, mistakes cannot be tolerated.

An element that strongly distinguishes Yoon's vessels from traditional *punchōng* ware is their monumental sculptural appearance. Each piece is built by Yoon, working without assistants, from slabs, and these irregular, edgy shapes, built upon a triangular or ovoid base, recall rock formations. Yet, most of them end at the lip in gentle, wavy lines that recall mountain contours. After exploring the potential of *punchōng* ware in the 1970s and 1980s—at a time when the re-creation of the elegant Koryō celadon rather than the rustic *punchōng* was en vogue in Korea—Yoon Kwang-cho abandoned the use of the potter's wheel in the late 1980s. Tradition, he says, is something one should not adopt but use as a basis for new creation. Tradition, however, for Yoon does not just mean ceramic tradition. Widely read in East Asian literature and art history, he points to Kang Sehwang's ten poems on "pleasures of living in the country" as a source of inspiration, and Yoon Kwang-cho's sketches remind us of the unpretentious works of Kang Sehwang and other eighteenth-century literati painters (see fig. 5).<sup>16</sup> An artist, according to Yoon's understanding, has his head in the clouds but his feet deeply buried in the ground. He is earthbound, yet in his thoughts he likes to soar skyward.

### CAT. NO. 4

#### *Meditation*

1994

Red clay, slab built; white slip brushed on and incised; clear glaze

Height: 39 cm

COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST

PHOTOGRAPH BY OH IN-KYU

### CAT. NO. 5

#### *Meditation*

1997

Red clay, slab built, coiling; white slip brushed on and incised; clear glaze

Height: 34 cm

COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST

PHOTOGRAPH BY OH IN-KYU

### CAT. NO. 6

#### *Windy Valley*

1998

Red clay, slab built; white slip brushed on and dripped; clear glaze

Height: 40 cm

COLLECTION OF THE ARTIST

PHOTOGRAPH BY OH IN-KYU

## LEE KANG HYO | PLAYFULNESS

Although they build on the same *punchŏng* tradition as Yoon Kwang-cho's, Lee Kang Hyo's ceramics are calm and playful, where Yoon's are expressive and powerful. Lee's small bottles (cat. nos. 15, 18–25) show subtle color variations ranging from milky white to a spectrum of grays and beiges, to pink and rusty red, to an earthy dark brown. He achieves such subtlety by firing his ceramics in a kiln he built himself in 1992 in the traditional manner, using lumps of clay rather than bricks. His designs dwell in the realm between abstract and concrete, deriving from themes of nature—trees, grass, clouds, mountains—and they amalgamate with the coarse structure of the clay underneath the white slip. To select his clay, he travels the Korean Peninsula testing and trying to find what suits his ideas best. His box decorated with broad peony flowers (cat. no. 17) uses the *sgraffito* technique of traditional *punchŏng* ware (*pakchi punchŏng*): the clay body is covered with white slip, which is then partly scratched away in order to let the decoration appear in white on a dark ground. In his round box (cat. no. 16), he mixes this technique with *kwiyal*, slip decoration applied with a brush, in an organic way. Like many of his ceramics, both boxes, despite their geometric shapes, seem to have grown, rather than being thrown, formed, and shaped. Lee Kang Hyo achieves this earthy, natural character partly through his selection of clays and partly through the manner in which he builds his ceramics.

After finishing his college education, Lee decided to explore Korean ceramic traditions and techniques beyond the art forms he had already studied. A graduate of Hongik University, the most prestigious Korean art school (Yoon Kwang-cho and Lee In Chin also received their training there), he left the capital to complete a three-year apprenticeship learning how to make *onggi* pottery in a remote area of South Kyŏngsang Province. *Onggi* ware is a dark stoneware made for kitchen use. *Onggi* pots are especially employed for the storage of ingredients like homemade soy sauce and *kimchi*, the fermented vegetables that are indispensable to any Korean meal. Since these pots can be as large as a man, they are built from coils and then shaped into their round forms and sparsely decorated using the potter's wheel.<sup>17</sup> Lee Kang Hyo was fascinated by the simple shapes and grand scale of *onggi* pottery. He still gives workshops demonstrating how to make large *onggi*, but now he applies the technique to his small pieces, giving them a more natural, asymmetric profile, a thicker body, and an irregular, gentle shape, as well as enhancing the natural characteristics of the clay and slip. Devotion to ceramics has at times become almost an obsession with Lee, and when asked his thoughts on "ceramics and life," he responded, "ceramics is [my] life." The opportunity to step back and reflect upon his life and his ceramics came for Lee during his travels abroad and meetings with foreign potters, especially during workshops in Wales. These encounters gave him a more relaxed attitude, new inspiration, and the freedom to devote himself to small things, to detail, and to play.

## LEE YOUNG-JAE | A EUROPEAN-KOREAN PERSPECTIVE

Lee Young-Jae's bowls are simple yet elegant in their shape; splendid yet calm in their color; repetitive yet individual in their form. In East Asia bowls are as central to social interaction as they are to communication with the spiritual world. A visitor who is offered a bowl of tea by a host with both hands receives it with both hands. Joining the hands tightly around the body of the bowl, feeling its shape and texture, and concentrating on its contents, smell, and color constitute the elementary gesture of "offering." Bowls or cups of wine are used for offerings in most religious ceremonies; they appear in shamanist rituals and Confucian ancestor rites in Korea, just as they do in Catholic Masses in Europe, America, and elsewhere. This ritual context provides the basis for Lee Young-Jae's installation of 111 bowls. The project began with a commission for communion cups from the Jesuit church of Saint Peter in Cologne, Germany, and it took its most impressive form in the installation of 1,111 bowls in the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich in 2006.<sup>18</sup> The title of the Munich exhibition, if read "one thousand one hundred eleven," represents an enormous quantity, yet read "one, one, one, one," it respects the individuality of each bowl, its shape, its color, its texture. While Lee Young-Jae is aware of the ritual context of "offerings"—in both Korea, her birthplace, and in Germany, her country of residence for almost forty years—in creating such a large number of bowls, she has extended the idea of ritual to the process of throwing ceramics itself. Performing it again and again, the process becomes a ritual repetition, driven by the "constant search for the extraordinary in the multitude, the unique quality, result of the artistic as much as the mystical experience."<sup>19</sup> Leaving Korea for Germany after receiving a degree from the Sudo Women's College of Education in Seoul, Lee concentrated on the technical side of pottery during internships with German potters and her studies at the University of Applied Sciences of Wiesbaden. Even though she firmly restricts her work to ceramics for use, rather than sculptural ceramics, she engages in an ongoing dialogue with modern and contemporary art. In addition to deriving inspiration from Korean tradition, she has been influenced by Bauhaus ideas of the connection between art and daily life, of craft as an important part of artistic production, and of the aesthetic exploration of everyday items. In her "daily ware" line, produced according to her designs by potters at her studio Keramische Werkstatt Margarethenhöhe in Essen, the strict tectonic forms of the Bauhaus meet the naturalness, calm, and balance of traditional Korean ceramics.

### FIGURES 12-24

Figures 12-21 and 23 were taken in preparation for the installation of Lee Young-Jae's 1,111 bowls at the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich in 2006. The artist will create a new installation of this nature for the exhibition at the Fowler Museum. Figures 22 and 24 were taken in Young-Jae's studio.

ALL PHOTOGRAPHS BY HAYDAR KOYUCUNAR

## LEE IN CHIN | AN AMERICAN-KOREAN PERSPECTIVE

Lee In Chin's career path has led him in a direction opposite that of Lee Young-Jae. He was born in Seoul but moved to Orange County and received his early art education at California State University, Fullerton. He then moved to Korea seeking more training in ceramics, received his bachelor and masters degrees from Hongik University, and eventually became a professor at the same institution. While deeply engaging in a dialogue with traditional Korean ceramics—he states that Chosŏn ceramics are an unceasing source of ideas for him and a tradition he cannot surpass—he has also continued to receive inspiration from outside Korea.

He studied in Bizen, one of Japan's most renowned ceramic centers, for two years where he found himself abandoning glazes and colors in favor of concentrating on the consistency of the clay and the firing process. Recently he started to work at a studio in the Chinese porcelain center of Jingdezhen and began to create white ware. Moreover, he takes his graduate students to the United States every summer to conduct workshops with American colleagues and their students. Exposure to these various locales suits his desire to experiment. Yet he says the same shapes keep coming back to him, as if rotating, and with each turn they become better. Lee In Chin's installation of jars, plates, vessels, and bowls is testimony to his interest in the variety of colors and textures of clay that emerge from fire—a spectrum of colors ranging from yellow to bright orange, red-brown to almost black. Some pots are reminiscent of the Moon Jar; others, due to their earthy color recall the bold round jars of the Silla period. Arranged as if stacked in a kitchen cabinet, Lee In Chin's ceramics point to the basic character of pots used for daily life. The artist firmly insists that function is the most important aspect of ceramics and that therein lies their beauty. On the other hand, the installation carefully displays the variety of basic shapes that ceramics used in daily life can offer, and it presents itself as a sculptural play of form and lines.

### FIGURES 25-27

These photographs of Lee In Chin's installation were taken at the 4th Ceramic Biennale held at the Incheon World Ceramic Center in 2007. The artist will create a new installation of this nature for the exhibition at the Fowler Museum.