

# WORKING THE CLAY

The stories behind the pieces in this exhibition have been shaped by centuries of innovations in technique and style. While there are many methods of ceramic construction, building, turning, and coiling figure particularly prominently in the making of these works.

**BUILDING:** The slab building technique has produced some of the oldest forms of ceramics. Clay is rolled into a slab on top of a piece of cloth and the slabs are then cut into shapes, scored, folded, and joined to create a range of forms.

**TURNING:** Simple potters wheels are constructed of a wooden cylinder and a flat, circular piece of wood, creating a tabletop shape that is able to rotate smoothly at varying speeds with the help of ceramic or ball bearings. Potters wheels can be manual, called kick wheels, or electric. Kick wheels allow turning to be closely controlled by the potter's foot, as seen in this picture.

**COILING:** A technique often used for large pots, coiling refers to the process of rolling out long, snake-like coils of clay that are shaped as the potter stacks them on the surface of a kick wheel. As the piece grows in height, paddles and wooden anvils may be used to flatten and mold the clay into the desired thickness and shape. The wheel is used to position the piece during shaping and to create a smooth finished surface.



**TOP:** Lee Young-Jae at the wheel.  
Photograph by Haydar Koyupinar.

**ABOVE:** Lee Kang Hyo at work on a coiled pot.  
Photograph by Burglind Jungmann.

## THREE KINGDOMS PERIOD (57 BCE–668 CE)

- While Korean ceramics date back to prehistory, this timeline begins with earthenware production in the Three Kingdoms period.



Bowl, 1st–3rd century, earthenware, UMMA, 2004/1.161. On view in open storage on Lower Level.

- The widespread use of the potter's wheel in the third century increases the rate of ceramic production and enables potters to more readily exploit various properties of clay, such as its elasticity.
- Closed-kiln design adapted from Chinese kilns allows for the firing of ceramics at higher temperatures and results in stoneware, which gradually replaces earthenware.



Round-bottomed jar with straight mouth, late 5th–early 6th century, stoneware, UMMA, 2004/1.172. On view in gallery.

- Every day pots for storing seeds, called *onggi*, begin to be used in the process of fermenting food.
- Buddhism, first transmitted to Goguryeo (Koguryō) from China in 372 CE, is adopted as the state religion in all three kingdoms by 528 and has profound religious, cultural, and political influence.

Pensive Bodhisattva, 6th–7th century, gilt bronze, National Treasure No. 78, National Museum of Korea (image from *National Museum of Korea*, Seoul: Cultural Foundation of National Museum of Korea, 2007, 182).



# TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

Since ceramic production relies on the potter's ability to control fire, innovation and experimentation in kiln design has shaped the history and development of ceramics. The adoption of a closed kiln design during the Three Kingdoms period (57 BCE–668 CE), for example, made possible firing temperatures of 1000°C (the temperature of volcanic lava) and higher, which produced the hard, dense, grey stoneware that largely replaced softer and more porous earthenware during this period. The climbing kiln, which resembles a tunnel or chimney horizontally built along sloping ground to maximize the tendency of heat to travel upward, was first adapted from the Chinese in the Three Kingdoms period; in the Goryeo (Koryŏ) period (918–1392), it became multi-chambered and longer, extending approximately sixty feet. The higher temperatures achieved in the multi-chambered climbing kiln made celadon and porcelain wares possible.

The size and cost of operating these massive structures powered by wood limited the market for high quality ceramics to the elite. The famous Bunwon (Punwŏn) kilns, just outside present-day Seoul, were established by the royal court in the 1460s to supply it with the finest porcelain and functioned continuously as the official court kilns for 400 years.



Traditional hill-climbing kiln (image from FindTarget.com).

**EARTHENWARE** is characterized by a porous body and reddish brown color achieved by firing clay containing iron in an open-air environment at temperatures below 1000°C; the interaction between the oxygen and the iron in the clay produces the distinctive color.

**STONEWARE** is made from clay containing elements that form a mineral called mullite under intense heat. When it is fired at temperatures above 1000°C, which can only be achieved in a closed kiln, the result is a hard body impervious to liquid. The grey color results from the reduction of oxygen in the firing atmosphere.

**PORCELAIN** is distinguished by its white color, which results when clay containing the mineral kaolin is fired at temperatures of 1300°C and above. The prized toughness, strength, and translucence of porcelain are due mainly to the formation of glass and mullite in the clay when fired at these high temperatures.

## UNIFIED SILLA PERIOD (668–935)

- The kingdom of Silla (57 BCE–668 CE) achieves dominance over most of the Korean peninsula by the end of the seventh century—the first time in history the peninsula comes under the rule of a single Korean government.
- Construction of the famous cave-like granite sanctuary of Seokguram (Sŏkkuram), one of the masterpieces of East Asian Buddhist art, is completed in 774.



Seated Buddha, Seokguram Cave Temple, 8th century, Gyeongju (image from *National Museum of Korea Magazine*, October 2005, 36).

- The Unified Silla court maintains close relations with Tang China through trade and diplomatic exchanges. Korea also continues to play a crucial role in the transmission of technology and ideas to Japan.

# HEAVENLY HUES

## Goryeo Celadons

Responding to the elegant taste of the royal court, the nobility, and Buddhist monks, Korean potters in the Goryeo (Koryŏ) period (918–1392) perfected the art of celadon ware, a blue-green glazed ware first invented in China. Goryeo celadons came in

innumerable delicate hues, luxuriously decorated with techniques such as incising, molding, painting, and inlay, and were highly sought-after. The Goryeo period scholar-official Yi Gyu-bo (1168–1241) described the astonishing pace and extent of the production of celadon ware and praised its beauty in a poem:

*The felling of trees left Mount Namsan bare and the smoke from the fires obscured the sun.*

*The wares produced were celadon bowls: out of every ten, one was selected—for it had the bluish green luster of jade.*

*It was clear and bright as crystal, it was hard as rock.*

*With what skill did the potters work—it seemed as if they borrowed the secret from Heaven!*

A popular type of Goryeo celadon was the distinctive bowl used for offering and drinking tea. The soft blue-green glaze was considered perfect for showing off the color of red brick tea, favored at the time in China and Korea.

Quotation from Beth McKillop, *Korean Art and Design: The Samsung Gallery of Korean Art*. London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1992, 40.



Shallow bowl with litchi and chrysanthemum designs, late 12th–early 13th century, Goryeo Period (918–1392), stoneware with inlaid decoration under celadon glaze, UMMA, 2004/1.244. On view in gallery.

## GORYEO PERIOD (918–1392)

- Early 11th century Buddhist painting, known in Korea as *taenghwa* (*t'aenghwa*; hanging painting), achieves extraordinary artistic and religious importance. State and private religious activities ensure a constant demand for images to serve as objects of worship.
- Inspired by Chinese Yue wares, a special bluish-green color becomes the trademark of Goryeo (Koryŏ) celadon. Twelfth-century documents by Chinese officials describe the hue as “the best under heaven.”



Stirrup cup with *sgraffito* (incised) design, 13th century, stoneware with inlaid decoration under celadon glaze, UMMA, 2004/1.230. On view in gallery.

- Korean potters start to decorate their ceramics with fine inlays in black and white, a luxurious technique exclusive to Goryeo (Koryŏ) celadons that appeals to the royal court, the nobility, and the Buddhist clergy.

- Movable type is known in Korea in the early decades of the thirteenth century, some two centuries before Gutenberg's invention of movable type in Europe. It is used to facilitate the distribution of Buddhist and Confucian texts.



Shallow bowl with peony design, second half of 13th century, stoneware with inlaid design under celadon glaze, UMMA, 2004/1.233. On view in gallery.

# PURITY AND FRUGALITY

## The New Aesthetics of the Joseon Period

The newly established Joseon (Chosŏn) period's ruling class blamed the moral decline of its predecessors on the nobility's decadent lifestyle and embraced Neo-Confucianism, an ideology developed by Chinese scholars that emphasized proper personal conduct and social harmony. With this the luxurious taste characteristic of the Goryeo (Koryŏ) period was rejected in favor of a simple, austere and pragmatic aesthetic. To the Joseon period rulers white porcelains symbolized the Confucian virtues of purity, modesty, honesty, and frugality. The beauty of Korean white porcelain impressed even the wealthy and sophisticated Chinese court, whose envoys repeatedly made requests for these Joseon wares.

During the first part of the Joseon period, undecorated white porcelain was used as daily ware at the royal court, while buncheong (punch'ŏng) ware, gray stoneware with simple slip decoration, was used by the ruling class, merchants, artisans and farmers. Though initially restricted to the royal court and upper and middle class households, by the sixteenth century the demand for and consumption of white porcelain became widespread and contributed to the eventual decline of buncheong ware. At the same time, porcelain with cobalt blue decoration—so-called blue and white ware—and porcelain with brown iron underglaze became popular with all classes.

**BELOW:** Wine bottle with symbols of longevity design, 19th century, Joseon Period (1392–1910), porcelain with cobalt pigment under colorless glaze, UMMA, 2004/1.281. **On view in gallery.**



## JOSEON PERIOD (1392–1910)

- Using the same clays, slips, and glazes as their Goryeo (Koryŏ) predecessors, Joseon (Chosŏn) potters create a new kind of ceramic, known as buncheong (punch'ŏng), a grayish-blue stoneware with slip (diluted white clay) decoration.

- In the 1460s the royal court helps establish the Bunwon (Punwŏn) kilns, which function as the official kilns supplying the highest quality porcelain wares to the court. Porcelain replaces buncheong (punch'ŏng) as official imperial ware by the fifteenth century.



Deep bowl, 15th century, porcelain with colorless glaze, UMMA, 2004/1.265. **On view in gallery.**

- Confucian ideas of frugality, purity, and naturalness are embraced and profoundly affect aesthetics and art production. Undecorated, simple, elegant forms associated with these values are preferred during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.
- The Japanese invasion of Korea in 1592–98, sometimes called the “pottery war,” devastates pottery production. Korean potters who go to Japan as a consequence of the war bring with them their ceramic traditions.

# BUNCHEONG WARE

Buncheong (Punch'ŏng) ware, named for its pale gray-green glaze, is typified by a coarse stoneware body brushed with white slip (diluted white clay). The extensive use of white slip gave buncheong an appearance closely resembling that of prized and expensive porcelain, which replaced it at court as the official ceramic style by the fifteenth century.

Many different techniques are used to decorate the clay bodies of buncheong ware. Bakji (pakchi) buncheong uses a *sgraffito* technique, in which the body is coated in white slip and then incised with designs that reveal the faint grey-blue glaze beneath. Gwiyal (kwiyal) involves the application of slip in a way that leaves visible traces of energetic brushstrokes, suggesting the presence of the potter.

In the late sixteenth century Japanese troops invaded Korea, one consequence of which was the devastation of the domestic ceramic industry and the near-loss of the buncheong tradition. So important were ceramics in this war that the conflict came to be known by many as the “pottery war”: in its wake the Japanese acquired Korean pottery, techniques, and even potters. Although buncheong (punch'ŏng) fell out of favor in Korea, these wares continued to be valued in Japan, especially in the highly refined tea ceremony. In Japan the buncheong tradition continued to develop and from there it eventually returned to Korea as a valued technique that still inspires the work of contemporary potters.



Wine bottle with *sgraffito* (incised) foliage design, 15th century, Joseon Period (1392–1910), stoneware with carved and incised decoration in brushed white slip under colorless glaze, UMMA, 2004/1.264. On view in gallery.



Large ovoid jar, late 19th century, porcelain with colorless glaze, UMMA, 2004/1.288. On view in gallery.

- Precious and rare, porcelain, or white ware, is restricted to the royal household in the early Joseon (Chosŏn) period. During the seventeenth century it becomes more affordable and its use more widespread.

- A greater variety of shapes, decoration, and subject matter, such as dragon motifs previously restricted to the royal court, becomes more widespread beginning in the mid-seventeenth century. Underglaze decoration in iron-brown is a particularly popular alternative to the more expensive cobalt blue.



Jar with abstract dragon design, 17th century, porcelain with iron pigment under colorless glaze, Museum purchase for the James Marshall Plumer Memorial Collection, UMMA, 1961/2.88. On view in gallery.

# ONGGI

## Breathing Vessels

*Onggi*, an earthenware known for being both porous and rot-proof, is a ceramic tradition that is thousands of years old. Originally used for the storage of seeds, today onggi jars are commonly used in the fermentation and storage of foods such as kimchi (spicy preserved vegetables). Onggi are called breathing vessels because their microporous surface allows toxins to escape during the fermentation of food; this results in a sticky residue that must be wiped off the exterior of the jar to allow it to continue to breathe. Onggi are often kept outdoors and may be seen dotting the countryside as well as in many contemporary Korean homes.

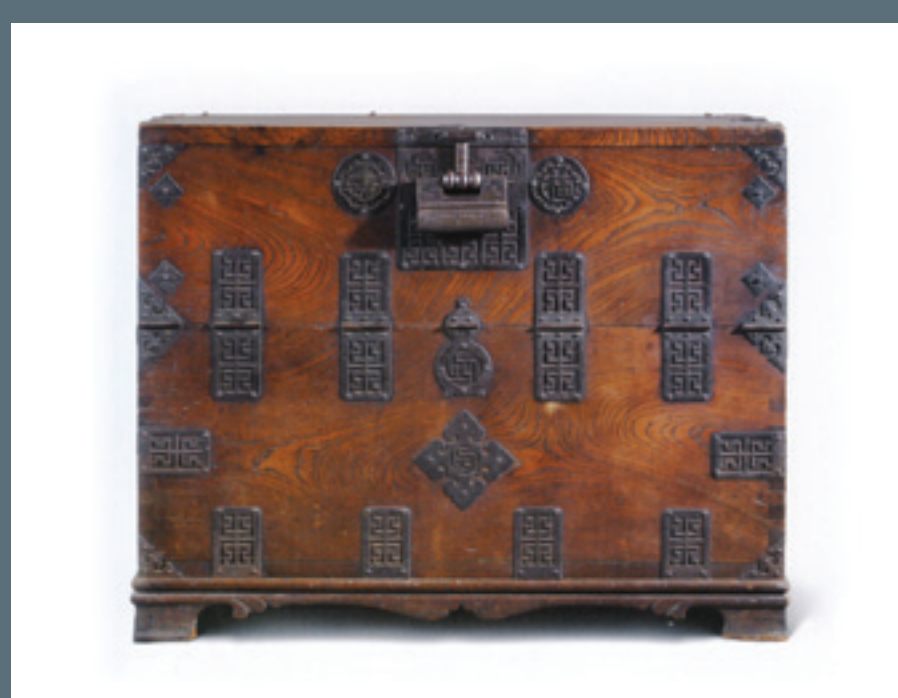
The potter's bare hands are the most important tools in the production of onggi. Indeed, it is said that the hands of onggi potters are distinctive because they are in turn shaped by the pots they make. Massive onggi jars are typically coil built on kick-wheels, which allows the potter to carefully build and turn the work. Characterized by their simple yet brilliant range of earthy hues, the exteriors of onggi are often decorated with quick brushes of the potter's thumbs in the wet glaze. Because of the unique impact that the hands of each potter have on the feel of his or her work, there is a Korean saying that, "the tips of the fingers create the flavor."



Lidded storage jars (onggi) in use outside a traditional Korean building (image from Jane Portal, *British Museum: Korea: Art and Archeology*. New York: The British Museum Press and Thames & Hudson, 2000, 161).

## JAPANESE COLONIAL PERIOD (1910–45)

- Korea is annexed by Japan in 1910, beginning 35 years of colonial rule.
  - On March 1, 1919 more than a million Koreans take to the streets demanding independence, forcing the colonial administrators in Seoul to shift from a policy of brutal coercion to a more conciliatory stance known as the Cultural Policy.
  - The Korean Folk Crafts Museum is established in 1924 on the site of the present National Folk Museum
- of Korea by Japanese enthusiasts of Korean art and culture Yanagi Soetsu, Noritaka Asakawa, and Takumi Asakawa.
- Japanese colonial rule comes to an end on August 15, 1945.



Chest (*Bandaji*), late Joseon period, wood and iron fittings, National Folk Museum of Korea (image from Jong-soo Chang, *The Collection of the National Folk Museum of Korea*. Seoul: National Folk Museum of Korea, 2007, 39).

## AMERICAN AND SOVIET OCCUPATION (1945–48)

- At the end of World War II the Korean peninsula is divided in two, with the north under Soviet control and the south under American control.
- In 1945 the Museum of the Government-General of Korea established under Japanese colonial rule reopens as the National Museum of Korea.

# RECONNECTING WITH KOREA'S CULTURAL LEGACY IN CERAMICS

In 1910 Korea was annexed by Japan and following World War II the country was divided into South Korea, controlled by American forces, and North Korea, controlled by Soviet forces. One of the many effects of this long and difficult period of occupation was the severe disruption of the continuity of Korean cultural traditions. With the Armistice Agreement of 1953 that ended the Korean War, South Korea entered a period of active nation-building that included creating new cultural institutions and an emphasis on reviving and honoring traditional arts.

A number of new museums were founded and departments of fine arts established in the nation's universities. With a heightened focus on native arts and cultures, a movement to recognize the traditional arts of the country and their long and illustrious heritage gained momentum. As Koreans realized the need to rebuild connections to the past, a Cultural Protection Act was passed in 1962 to preserve and protect native arts and cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible. The potters in this exhibition whose innovative works draw on the past are evidence that a dynamic connection to the great legacy of Korean ceramics still exists today.



National Museum of Korea.  
Photograph by Natsu Oyobe.

## NORTH KOREA AND SOUTH KOREA (1948–PRESENT)

- Two separate states—the Republic of Korea in the south and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the north—are formally proclaimed.
- Several leading universities in Korea establish fine arts departments between 1945 and 1950. Ceramics becomes an area of study in the next decade.



- The Korean War begins on June 25, 1950. A truce is signed at Panmunjeom at the 38th parallel in 1953, beginning a period of nation-building that includes an emphasis on reviving and honoring traditional arts.

ABOVE: Interior of National Museum of Korea (image from National Museum of Korea Quarterly Magazine, Autumn 2010, 14).

LEFT: Ehwa Womans University, established 1946 (image from ask.com/wiki/Ewha\_Woman%27s\_University).

- The Cultural Protection Act is passed in 1962 to preserve important native arts and culture. Korea's folk art, such as *onggi* ware, is recognized along with its tradition of stoneware and porcelain.



Large lidded jar, late 19th–early 20th century, high-fired earthenware with padded decoration inside and stylized plants outside, British Museum (image from Jane Portal, *British Museum: Korea: Art and Archeology*, New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000, 161).





# THE HASENKAMP-NAM COLLECTION OF KOREAN CERAMICS AT UMMA

The core of the University of Michigan Museum of Art's renowned collection of Korean ceramics was assembled over four decades by Bruce and Inta Hasenkamp. Their collection included all three major areas of Korean ceramics: the gray stonewares of the archeological period, the celadons of the Goryeo (Koryŏ) period (918–1392), and the porcelains and buncheong (punch'ŏng) stonewares of the Joseon (Chosŏn) period (1392–1910).

When the Hasenkamps donated part of their collection to the Museum, their generosity was matched by that of University of Michigan alumnus Sang-Yong Nam and his wife Moon-Sook, ardent supporters of Korean Studies at the University, who stepped forward with a donation to purchase the rest of the collection. This remarkable joint gift has had a truly transformative effect on the Museum and the community it serves.

Unless otherwise noted, all the object images in this timeline are gifts of Bruce and Inta Hasenkamp and the Museum purchases were made possible by Elder and Mrs. Sang-Yong Nam.

The Hasenkamp-Nam Collection of Korean Ceramics can be viewed in the Woon-Hyung Lee and Korea Foundation Gallery of Korean Art in the Maxine and Stuart Frankel and the Frankel Family Wing as well as in the Open Storage Galleries. To explore the history of Korean ceramics further, we invite you to visit the gallery to see this outstanding collection and many of the works featured here.

