Beijing, - The Forbidden City 'Ceramic Words on the Silkroad' Macsabal Woodfire Festival

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For the 18th year running, the organisation 'Macsabal' founded by the Korean Master Ceramist Kim Yong Moon brings together ceramists from all over the world for international symposia. Beyond technical and cultural exchanges, human and artistic meeting are at the heart of the events.

After Korea and Turkey, Beijing was the venue in November for the third symposium of 2015—without a doubt the most exciting and prestigious of them all. The star exhibition 'Ceramic Words on the Silk Road' was presented in the mythical Ancestral Imperial Temple of Forbidden City.

The language barrier was not a problem for the 66 persons from 22 different countries. They all spoke the language of ceramics. Nevertheless, diversity was a constant in these events assembling professionals in the field whose nobility is drawn from both art and craftsmanship. You can thus watch the same ceramist making a poetic sculpture on Monday and then on Wednesday throwing perfectly functional and identical bowls with ease and rapidity—these are the famous Macsabal—and in spite of their regularity, joyful and unique decoration completes their own originality.
Ceramists share the ethics of their craft, a way of experiencing and working with it, their role in society and all the handling of technical or material difficulties.
The artists invited took the full measure of the scale of the event as soon as they arrived and appreciated the welcome and the unlimited attention paid to the well-being of each and everybody. The Beijing and Chinese national press photographers who welcomed them after landing worked as alternating teams throughout the symposium.



Jonggu Lee (Korea)



Carving work by Alvin Tan Teck Heng (Singapore)

The disparate and universal aspect of the Macsabal organisation gives it its undisputable richness: Korea with Kim Yong Moon, the founder and famous ceramist and Turkey with Mutlu Başkaya, both of whom teach at the Faculty of Fine Arts at Hacettepe University in Ankara. The third pillar was Chinese this time—Din Yinbing, assisted by the omnipresent David Ding who was always quick to

find solutions in real time. Another member of the organisation staff that the participants will never forget is the Chinese teacher Wang Jin, always smiling, dynamic and available to find answers to their questions, whatever they might be.

The grand opening ceremony of the festival honoured all the nations in this colourful abundance of flags that then accompanied daily work throughout the stay.

A dozen potter's wheels and a sea of tables, clay and a few basins and everyone got down to work. The studio was full of embryonic creations from the first day. Each person had his own goal while happily observing the mystery of each emerging piece created by the hands of the others.

Then came the great day of the opening of the exhibition at the Imperial Ancestral Temple in the Forbidden City. We were in the country in which high-temperature firing was invented about 3000 years ago. Later, the Song dynasty was the cradle of glazed stoneware and porcelain that ceramists all over the world still try to reinterpret, like marvellous music with no score.

The participants walked through the street of Beijing to the entry of the Imperial Ancestral Temple. A group of nearly 80 people guided by an attentive, discreet and efficient staff.
Posters, flags and signboards announced the exhibition when we reached the City. Yes, we were expected!
It was cold but the red carpet was unrolled and photographers clicked away everywhere, each trying to fix an unreal, delicious moment. It was so friendly and joyful that everyone shared the atmosphere—that could last forever.

It was a historical first contemporary exhibition in the Forbidden City. The



friendship between nations and people by a Chinese ceramist



carvings from Wang Shengli (China)



Jung-Soon Shin (Korea)

Kim Yong Moon's speech in the Forbidden City, translated by Wang Jing



two immense wings of the Imperial Ancestral Temple were prepared for the occasion under the protection of the golden dragons ornamenting the pediments, conciliating celestial and dark forces.
Twenty years ago, when my father and Master talked about this magical place visited during a long trip in China, we never imagined that one day we would have the immense joy of exhibiting there. One of the pieces that I contributed was thrown by him and glazed by me after his death ... and now there we were!

The opening ceremony of the exhibition started. Political representatives, senior civil servants, journalists, organisers were present and the numerous official speeches focused on the determination to hold a founding even for the promotion of ceramic art at the world scale, universal exchange and closer links between cultures and peoples.
The speeches were concluded by those of some of the ceramists participating in the symposium. They were humble, true and moving.
After Vilma Villaverde (Argentina), Lee Middleman (USA) expressed our feelings: 'The Forbidden City is an impressive symbol of the great history and culture of China. We hope that sharing our best ceramic works with the people of China will contribute in a small way to the continued road of communication and understanding between our nations.
May the creation and appreciation of art lead to greater peace and prosperity for all peoples.'

Although it was cold in the courtyard of the Temple, like the magnificent 'Chinese wax doll' in her décolleté who ran the ceremony brilliantly, hearts were warm and emotion won against temperature.
Finally, the opening of the museum itself, with our pieces…
They were shown in the east and west wings on either side of the immense courtyard.


Opening ceremony in the Forbidden City


'Iron Spark'
thrown by Christian Coissieux
glazed by Ariane A.Coissieux - France,
exhibited in the Forbidden City

Little by little, I saw with pleasure and patience the works by everybody and then, finally, 'my pieces'. They were there, shown in a mythical and grandiose venue with strong symbolism. Emotion grew. It was happening now. We have to get used to this kind of thing.



Group photo of symposium participants before climbing the Great Wall

Yes, exhibiting here was incredible, marvellous and unique.
Intense moments experienced together, seeking tirelessly to feel reality—well beyond prestige, just the emotion of being there.



Korean potters working together

Each ceramist was able to present his or her work during the festival. All the talks were translated brilliantly by Alvin Tan Teck Heng (Chinese-English), a ceramist from Singapore.
The assembly was shown in turn the work in glazes and stamp decoration by the Californian ceramist Bob Pool, that of the Egyptians Ossama Emam and Haytham Hedayah, work by Elisabeth Le Retif from France and Pallab Das from India, Katharina Böttcher from Germany, Nato Eristavi from Georgia, Mohamed Hachicha from Tunisia, Rolando Giovannini from Italy and many others, all equally singular and interesting.
Anadolu University in Turkey presented a symposium chaired by Prof. Bilgehan Uzuner and combines technical challenge and an educational aspect by grouping 10 foreign ceramists every year for 10 years for the creation of monumental sculptures in the town of Eskişehir.
The persons present included teachers for Silpakorn University in Thailand, LISA NA, Director of sculpture institute of Inner Mongolia and two of her students, ceramists from Ukraine, Russia, and elsewhere ... and, of course, eminent Chinese masters.



Soon Kwan PARK (Korea) finishing Onggi for all the participants to sign

Faithful to the legend, Koreans impressed with their talent. They not only excel in the art of Onggi, immense pieces made with slabs and coils on a wheel, but also joyously and indefatigably throw ever-larger pots.

After a visit to the Great Wall, public talks on the theme 'What Ceramics means to our time' were given in the 'Art Zone 798' district of Beijing.
Contemporary works—'contemporary' being understood as 'of our time'—can be based on the foundation of tradition used as riches but do not mean being prisoners of this. And it is quite something to mention this subject in a country that is so rich in history, culture and strife.
David Binns (University of Central Lancashire - UK) reminded the audience that ceramics owes Bernard Leach for having made a bridge between the Far East and the West. He was a pioneer and built the first climbing kiln in the land of the setting sun! That is where British ceramics—and probably, more generally, European ceramics—have their present foundation, together with the modern German contribution of Lucie Rie and Hans Coper. He deplored the fact that ceramics departments are tending to disappear in the UK because of budgetary restrictions.
Wang Shengli (a Chinese artist) was very optimistic about a lot of art schools in China. The students of his Institute are taught to not only create a piece of art but also think of its position in everyday life, to encourage harmony between everyday life and art.
Hang Chunhui, a painter who has a Ph.D. from the China National Academy of Arts, compares tradition with a train that never stops, considering that artists should incorporate tradition and technology in their work and that our responsibility is to create our language and elevate the quality of our art.
Following a speech by Wu Xinjun (Director of the Beijing Cultural and Creative Industry Promotion Center), Huaqing of the Strategic Development Alliance of China advised artists to cooperate with industry in scientific research and technological innovations.

For Mutlu Başkaya, the emotion of the artist is the basis of his capacity to combine tradition and contemporary art. She mentioned the usefulness of this type of symposium, particularly in China, that allows osmosis between contemporary artists and Masters of ancestral techniques, thus contributing to bridging the gap between crafts and art.



Vilma Villaverde (Argentina)



Supphaka Palprame (Thailand)



Liza Portnova and Yuriy Musatov (Ukraine)

After each Macsabal symposium, the participants return to their studios, charged with energy resulting from the synergy generated by meeting other people, and each of their future creations will bear the imprint of this.

My thanks go to Kim Yong Moon, Mutlu Başkaya and the whole Macsabal team for assembling so many persons in optimum conditions. All are markedly individual but have in common the same reason to live: work that is a passion deeply anchored in the history of humanity.



Student from Mongolia signs the Onggi pot made by the Korean ceramist Soon Kwan Park



Semih KAPLAN
Anadolu University Eskişehir - Turkey



Yixing teapots by QUIAN CHAO (China)



Andrii KIRICHENKO (Ukraine)



Petra LINDENBAUER (Austria) each participant signed in Forbidden City



photo: Petra LINDENBAUER

Ariane A. Coissieux: *Master Craftswoman in Ceramic Art.*
Her studio 'AGIR Céramique' in the South of France produces unique pieces such as lamps, washbasins, tiling made to measure, chawans, furniture, etc. in stoneware and porcelain.
www.ceramique-deco-maison.com

She also manages the Ecole des Céramistes where she teaches the entire process of ceramics.
www.ceramic-school.com

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