

POKING
THE
LILIES
PAD



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Photo Credit: Asia Institute, Inc. and Participating Artists

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Introduction

BY Namita Gupta Wiggers

Mud is powerful. When harvested, twisted, bent, pounded, shaped, and fired, it can be transformed into a breathtaking array of objects. Individually, each of the works included in *Poking the Lilies Pad* reveal a range of global influences. Collectively, the group offers a lens through which we might better understand the complexity of the world in which we live, and the challenges artists face when they bring together the breadth and range of their experiences and ideas through objects. In the case of this exhibition, mud crosses cultural boundaries and lines. Stirring things

up to see what lies beneath the symbol of tranquility — the lily — this exhibition offers a quiet exploration of identity. Clay is undergoing a bit of a spotlight in the contemporary art world; the work within this exhibition offers a cross section of the zeitgeist of the moment through mixed vantage points.

Sebastian Moh, guest curator for this project, pivots the exhibition from his own position as a ceramicist of Asian origin living in the United States. Moh brings together artists who are similarly immersed in a quiet, subtle cultural exchange. While each may have been



born in Japan, Korea or Malaysia, their chosen place of study and work through teaching and studio practice is in the United States. Several of the artists speak of the shifts in daily life, communication, and developing relationships that come with immersion in a new place with different norms, patterns, and systems. Individually, their personal experiences with transitions may or may not visibly impact what they make or how they create. Collectively, the seven artists bridge multiple cultural traditions and ways of working with clay: figurative sculpture to digital experimentation, ornament and pattern to decorative objects, vessels, sculpture and examinations of text and image, the work is a cross section of what might be seen in any ceramics survey exhibition across the globe.

Kensuke Yamada (Japan), reminds us of the impact of face-to-face exchange — and the challenges of communicating even the simplest of meanings through gesture. The monumentality of his figures counter the simplicity of the expression. Coupled with a high luster glaze, within which the viewer is somewhat visible in a "cloudy mirror," his work reminds us of the tensions of bodily communication, when the smallest of efforts to convey an idea or emotion take on a level of magnitude when connectivity is questionable.

Homes in the United States are secular structures, a different experience from the Japanese homes with small shrines and sacred spaces of Shoko Teruyama's childhood. Through her objects and ornamentation of their surfaces, she creates moments to pause with an object, its story, and offers an opportunity for a quiet, contemplative and spiritual moment.

Megumi Naitoh (Japan) employs open source platforms — free software and shared designs — and turns them into digitally produced objects.

Translation here happens on multiple levels, and yet, the translation is simultaneously non-verbal, non-linguistic, and non-culturally determined. In some ways it speaks of a utopian opportunity where the possibility of an a-cultural object might exist. The works offer a digitally-inspired contrast to the fantastical forms by Kyoung-hwa Oh (Korea), whose work operates in the tradition of the highly decorative porcelain object. Oh's amalgam of elements which could not exist in the natural world that serves as inspiration reify ideas into new forms in much the same way Naitoh creates faceted, chunky digital objects where none existed.

While Naitoh uses systems which are, in theory, depersonalized and universal, Haejung Lee (Korea) employs pattern and Buddhist philosophy in her compositions. In Lee's work, repetition becomes strength and comfort, it is a known relationship between the elements in which the duplication speaks of the consistencies in human experience and our desire to use patterns to understand the world in which we live.

Playing with pop culture and the ways in which language disconnects or floats past people without landing in meaning, Yoko Sekino-Bove (Japan) uses recognizable functional vessel forms embellished with text and image flourishes to call attention to the challenges of communication. A turn of phrase becomes jarring and stilted, oddly disjunctive when paired with a palette and forms from the long history of ceramics. The play on production, with the series titled "Genuine Fake China," recalls the humor of pop culture t-shirts or packaging on which language translations miss the mark, a meeting of the familiar and odd in one space.

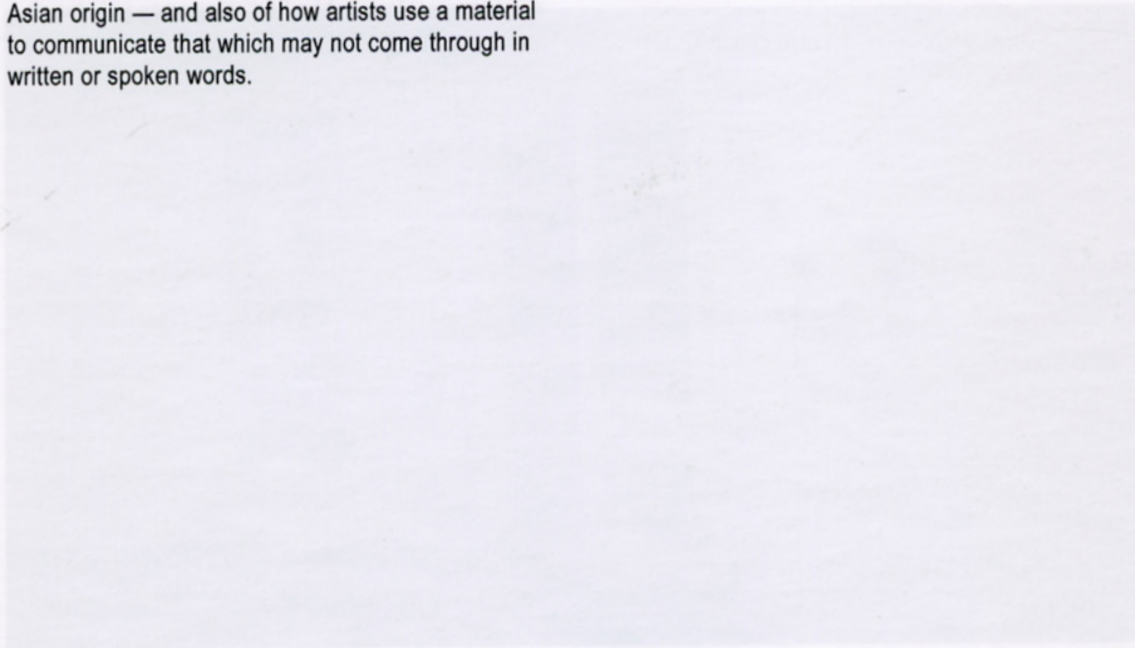
Sebastian Moh (Malaysia) luxuriates on surface, reminding us of the infinite possibilities of simple

Notes from the Curator

by Bryan Warner

forms. His vessels give us moments of refuge in color and shape, the glazes providing visual satisfaction for those who pause to look, look again, and look more deeply into the layers upon layers of glaze.

The potential of this exhibition is to reveal the complexities of heritage, identity, history, and contemporaneity in ways that enable fresh dialogues, conversation, and understanding of what it can mean to work through clay in the USA as an artist of Asian origin today. *Poking the Lilies Pad* could prompt discussion of materials and processes, shares objects that reveal cross-cultural influences, and calls attention to how immersion in a different culture triggers notice and attention to things otherwise overlooked. The exhibition can speak to being of Asian origin — and also of how artists use a material to communicate that which may not come through in written or spoken words.



Notes From the Curator

BY Sebastian Moh

Curator and Artist

Lily pads are ubiquitous to Asia. Floating on the surface of the water, they create a verdant canvas that is celebrated for its beauty and utility by Asian cultures. They grow in a variety of environments, thriving in waters dense with rich sediment derived from all sorts of organic processes. As such, it is a fitting symbol for this exhibit, *Poking the Lilies Pad*. On the surface, the work in this show is visually beautiful, demonstrating a strong sense of understanding of material and process by the artists represented. But peering under the work, the inspiration and conceptual underpinnings are murkier. They reveal a swirl of influences directly and indirectly related to the Asian heritage of the artists.

In selecting the artists, I first looked at my own underlying influences and found a push and pull in my work that tied into my Asian identity. In ways, I straddle different spheres including my Malaysian heritage, American ceramic education, and contemporary practice. It is muddy, but rich in options for creating objects. Understanding this, I looked to artists whose work had similar affinities. As members of the new global community, they represent a new way of working.

Poking the Lilies Pad, is a small look under the surface of contemporary Asian American ceramic artists that shows the fertile mixture of sources that produce the beautiful works on display. It is not meant to disturb or stir up the system, but it is a means to appreciate the environments that enable this work for flourish.



Notes From the Curators

BY Bryan Warren

Executive Director, Asia Institute – Crane House

Our first National Endowment for the Arts funded project is beautiful. *Poking the Lilies Pad* marks an important moment for Asia Institute – Crane House (AICH). In our fourth year of exhibition programs we have raised the bar in our capacity to produce exhibits and increase the space for exploring Asia and Asian cultural practice in our region to new levels.

The exhibit is also an opportunity for AICH to continue to build the artistic network of our local Asian arts community. Sebastian Moh, a wonderful local artist who exhibited at AICH a few years ago, returns in the role of curator. In his first turn as a curator, he has collected a remarkable group of ceramists to reflect upon the role of Asian identity in arts practice. Through his work, he has built important connections to the national clay community and added professional skills that benefit him and our community at large.

In organizing the exhibition, he called on Curator and Art Critic Namita Wiggers to write her reflections on the practice of Asian American artists and Harris Deller to talk on the historical underpinnings of their influence and work in America in the 20th Century. Through a collaboration with the University of Louisville and Louisville Clay, we hosted one of the artists, Shoko Teruyama, for a workshop with students and community educators in the Louisville area. This overlay of educational programming broadened the reach of the exhibit and added a critical discourse that will continue beyond the physical display of objects.

Asia Institute – Crane House is pleased to share this outstanding exhibition with our community and to continue to showcase the rich artistic work of our nation.



Sebastian Moh

www.SebMoh.com

I grew up on a small farm in Batu Pahat, Malaysia. My family was fairly isolated from neighbors so my brothers and sisters became my best friends. It was also up to us to provide our own toys and entertainment, making us quite resourceful. Nature was an integral part of our life. This developed within me a more quiet and reserved personality with a keen observation to detail.

My first exposure to the actual shaping of raw clay was in a shopping mall in Kuala Lumpur, I witnessed a demonstration on the wheel and it planted the seed. I was drawn to the idea of infinite variation, of tapping an eternity of creativity. From that point I paid close attention to the ceramic arts. An opportunity presented itself and I was able to come to the United State to attend school. I received my degree in product design but had the opportunity to take ceramic classes as an elective. After working in hospitality for a few years, I decided to pursue the vision that had formed so strongly as a youth. I set up a small studio and began exploring the possibilities.

The essence of my work is to create a visual interest that will trigger an aesthetic response. The vessels articulate a rhythm that appeals to an abstract of universal human emotion. Art is an articulated arrangement of a profound idea. To create is divine, I just rearrange.

My goal is to simply make good work.



ABOVE Tea Bowl

3.4375"h×4.5"w×4.5"d

Porcelain, wheel thrown, electric fired. Cone 10/11

OPPOSITE Tea Bowl

2.75"h×5"w×5"d

Porcelain, wheel thrown, electric fired. Cone 10/11



Kensuke Yamada

www.yamadakensuke.com

Ten years ago, I moved to the United State from Japan as a foreign exchange student. My story begins with the limited knowledge of the English language I came here with. My primary commonality with other people and with my surroundings was of the human gesture: facial expressions, body motions, the darting of a hand or blinking of an eye.

In my struggle to learn the language and communicate through speech, I gained a strong empathy for the universal experiences that seem to provide the undercurrent to language. I gained awareness for the complexities of our daily function, and the social infrastructures that subtly guide these interactions.

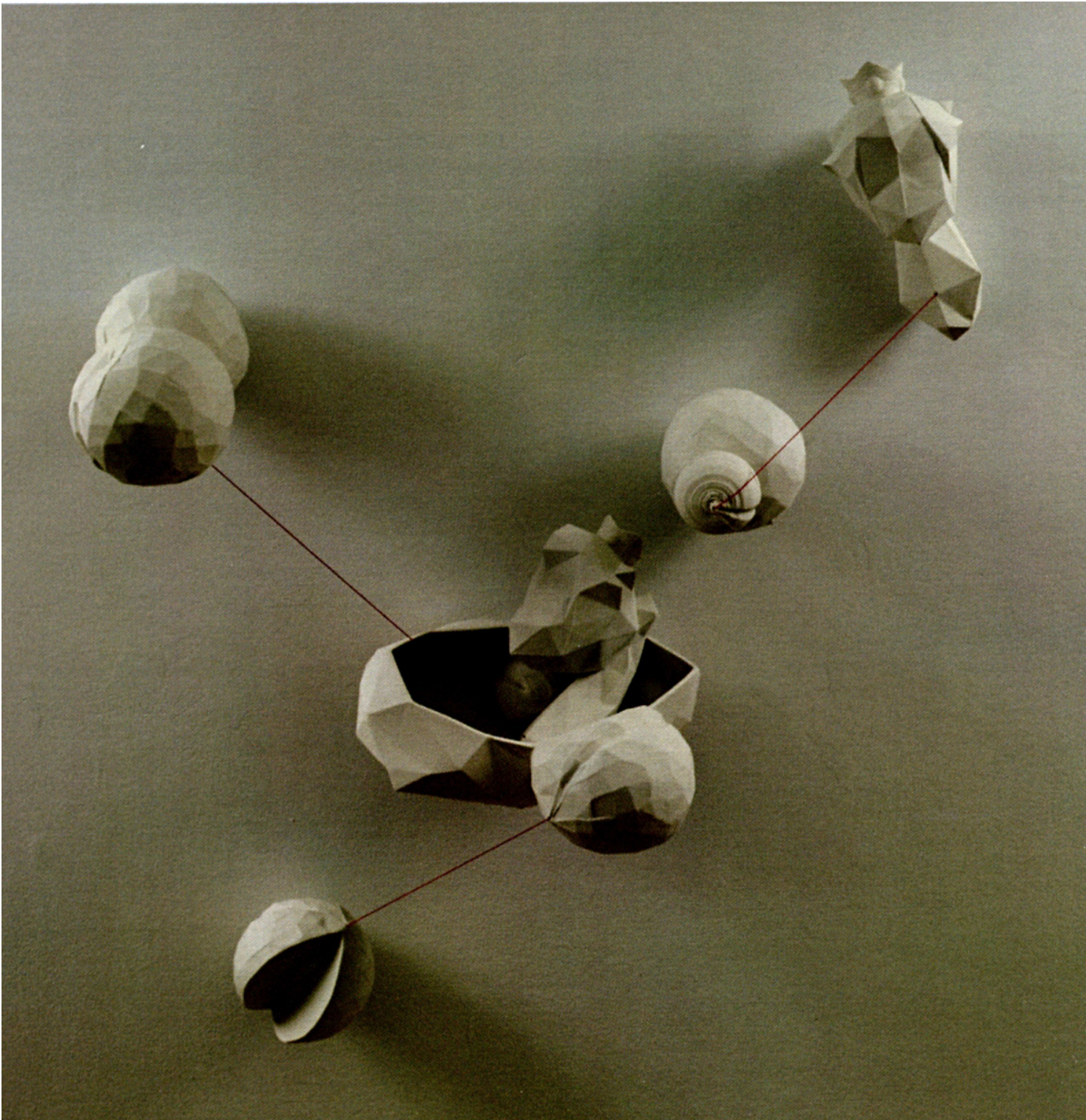
In my sculpture, I seek figurative extensions of these shared experiences. Clay has become another primary source of communication for me. The vocabulary consists of gestures, patterns, textures, colors and rhythms. In conversation these qualities bring the figure to life.

With clay I look for the sculptural conversations that evoke the beauty, the subtleties, the sadness and the humor of our everyday life. In viewing my sculpture, I hope for people to enjoy the moment, rather than the movement of time. I hope for my work to fill the space between two seemingly distant things, to provide a connection and thus create the story of you and me.

OPPOSITE Head

46"h×31"w×21"d

Stoneware, wood



Megumi Naitoh

www.meguminaitoh.com

Many 17th century European still life paintings revealed how the artists lived, or showed their thoughts or the environment they lived in by a series of objects that surrounded the artists. Some of these objects possess symbolism, some reflect social changes in their everyday lives.

My work evokes our cultural changes associated with current technology. It directly references our accessibility to 3D technology such as open source software, home built 3D printers, and online forums and communities that support the software and hardware.

In the 21st century, I am surrounded by many digital objects in my studio. These objects are created by users of Google Sketch Up which is free 3D modeling software available online. The users have an option to share the objects that they created in Sketch Up by uploading them on Google 3D warehouse. They are available online to anyone and can be downloaded for your own use. I search and collect these digital objects to create my still life compositions in clay. I am fascinated with the relationship between basic materials like clay and the current digital technology. It is shaping the new practice in my studio.



ABOVE Dish of peaches, green
32"h×35"w×14"d

OPPOSITE Dish of peaches, red
34"h×29"w×9.5"d