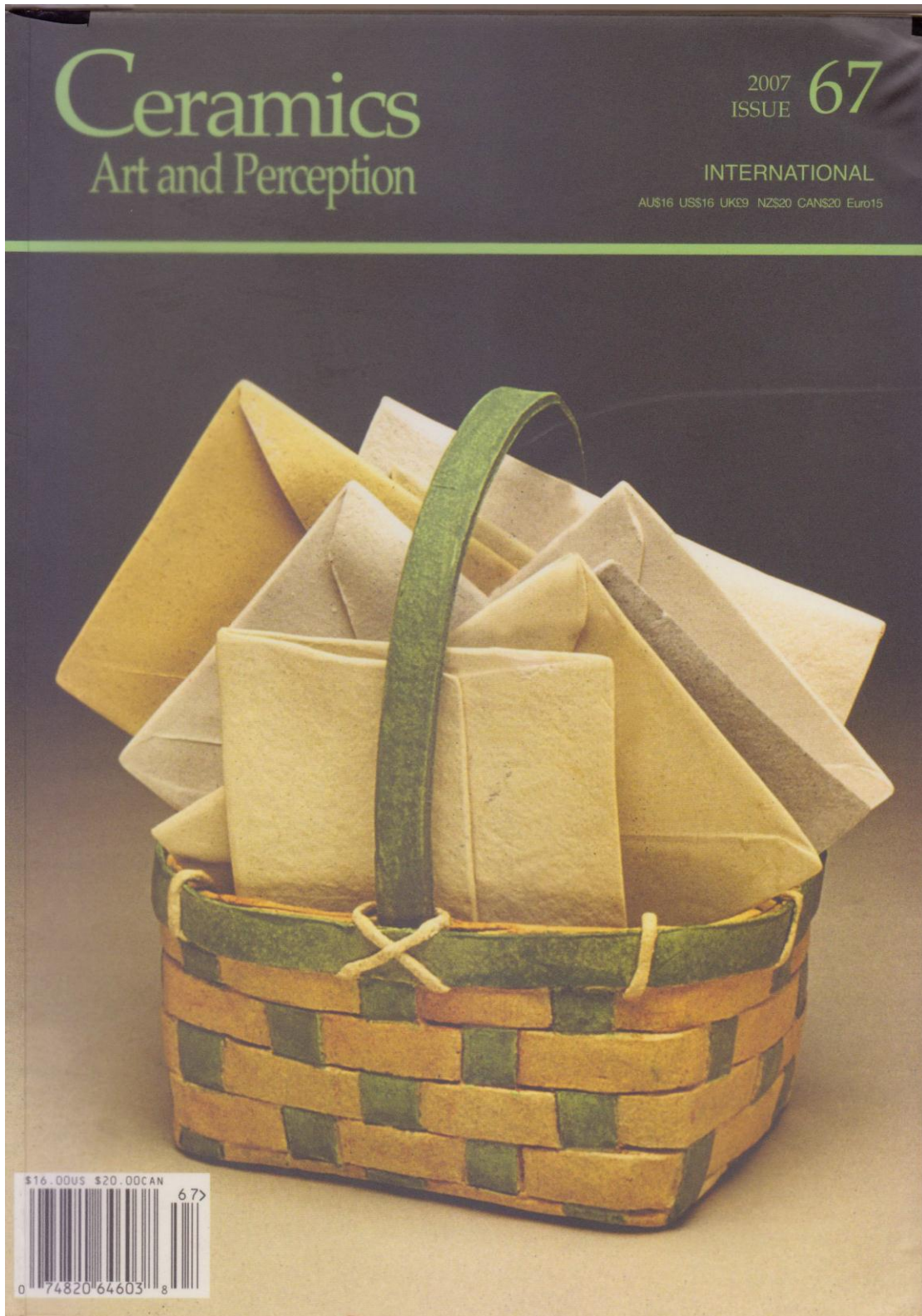


Ceramics Art and Perception NO.67 2007

Crossed Paths Ruta Sipalyte of Lithuania and YU-Ying Huang of Taiwan

Review by Anthony Stellaccio

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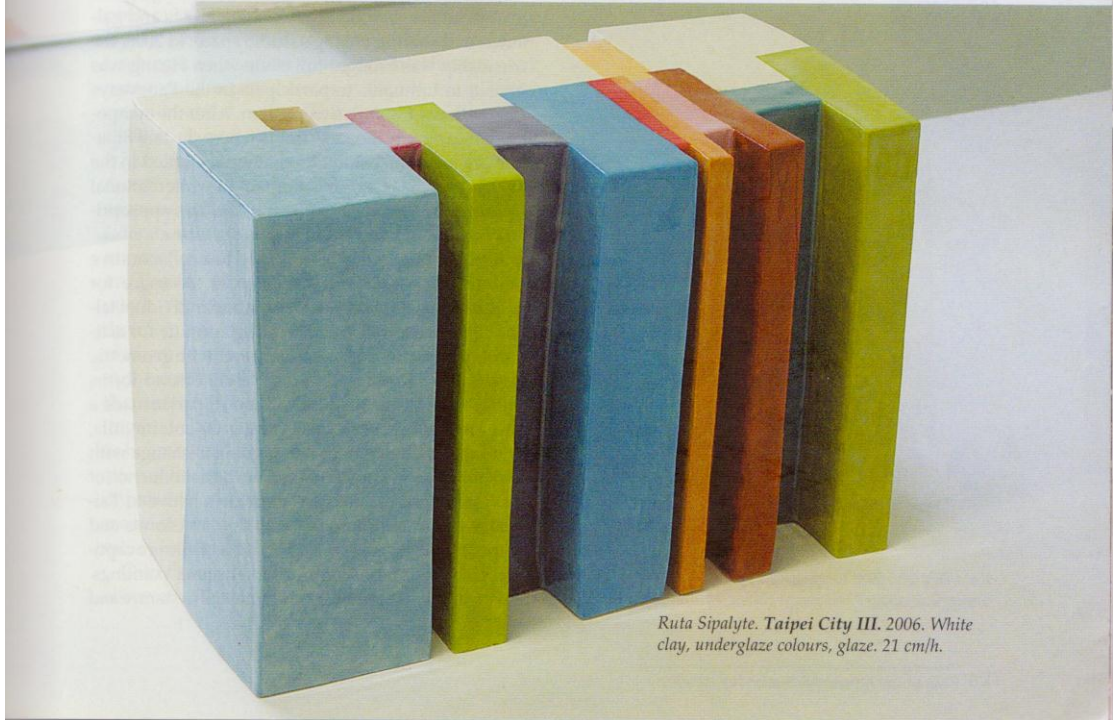


Yu-Ying Huang. Tea Set. 2005. Stoneware, porcelain, glaze.

Crossed Paths

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Ruta Sipalyte. Taipei City III. 2006. White clay, underglaze colours, glaze. 21 cm/h.



Ruta Sipalyte. *Paths of Water*. 2005. Stoneware, porcelain, anagama firing. 34.5 and 29 cm/h.



Ruta Sipalyte. *Blossoming and Spring*. White clay, underglaze colours and pencil glazes. 24 and 22 cm/h.

THE BIENNIAL MEETINGS OF THE INTERNATIONAL Academy of Ceramics (IAC) could be compared to the Olympics in the sense that the country hosting either event strives to meet a call for displaying its grandeur. In its true and noblest purpose, however, the host country becomes the grounds for a unique and potent period of interaction and exchange. In the case of the IAC meeting, exchange generally occurs between the ceramics community of one nation and the representatives of many others. Yet the most recent IAC meeting was Trans-Baltic, allowing two additional countries, Estonia and Lithuania, the chance to participate in the Latvia-based event.

Regardless of where exactly the IAC meeting is held, the value of the interaction and exchange that it fosters is profound. Subsequently, one might regret that the significance of the event, at least in Lithuania, was lost on most people outside of the ceramics community. Fortunately, amid an onslaught of exhibitions arranged in Lithuania's capital city of Vilnius for IAC's visit, a memorable, dual exhibition took place. The exhibition featured artists Ruta Sipalyte from Lithuania and Yu-Ying Huang from Taiwan, and it captured the spirit and reflected the values of the Academy.

Sipalyte and Huang met for the first time at the Kohila Anagama Symposium held in Estonia in 2004. Both artists are of a similar age, at a similar point in the production of mature works, and both share a propensity for openness and communication. Thus, from a natural attraction emerged a genuine friendship. In 2005 Sipalyte spent a month as Huang's guest in Taiwan firing wood kilns, visiting artists and galleries, and sharing Huang's studio space. In 2006, the friendship was brought full circle when Huang was invited to Lithuania to participate in the Panevezys International Ceramic Symposium. After the symposium Huang travelled to Vilnius where she and Sipalyte organised an exhibition that was included in the events for the 42nd meeting of the International Academy of Ceramics. The exhibition was appropriately entitled *Borders of Art, Borders of Culture*.

As a dual exhibition, as opposed to a collaborative one, the gallery awarded each artist the space for demonstrating her personal vision and individual talent. Sipalyte exhibited her ongoing aptitude for activating comprehensible interior spaces with geometric structure by transforming local architectural forms into vibrant design. In this exhibition Sipalyte made a new step in her work by digesting Oriental motifs, undoubtedly taken from her ongoing exchange with Huang. Sipalyte's work also showed the influence of newly adopted architectural structures native to Taiwan, which she summarised into rhythmic forms and planes of colour. These architectural works were captivating, appearing as if three-dimensional paintings. Huang's major works were monumental in stature and

organic in structure with fluid pulsing ornaments that danced around function and a number of references to nature, tradition and tea. Huang's works often captured that masterful and unique quality of appearing completely natural, free and effortless while not betraying precision and intent.

The two artists' works are decidedly different, and their juxtaposition allowed for some interesting comparisons. First, some of Huang's works incorporated elements of traditional Chinese ceramics. Lithuania has a tradition of its own but it was absent from Sipalyte's works. In fact, as opposed to any references to Lithuania, which are more typical of the artist, in this exhibition Sipalyte presented the motifs and references reminiscent of Taiwan. However, in displaying influences from abroad Sipalyte did not appear to be emulating or misappropriating another's tradition or philosophy. Rather, Sipalyte adapted elements of design and did so in ways that varied between works, ranging from astute to almost sisterly and even child-like in a fashion that mixed recollection, curiosity, a swell of adoration, and humour. Beside works by a Taiwanese artist, Sipalyte's interpretations of contemporary Taiwan and Asian culture might have seemed quite bold or even risky. One should not overlook, however, that the fearlessness of Sipalyte's artistic decisions, and their success in the exhibition were a testament to the admirable character of both artists and the quality of their relationship.

In an exhibition that showcased culture, the viewer may have yearned for some emphasis on Lithuanian tradition in Sipalyte's works, although one could point out that without the guidelines of tradition Sipalyte's works seemed to enjoy a certain freedom. Looking from a similar vantage point, Huang's work occasionally retained traces of the rules implied by tradition and function. This compliance was especially acute in a display of cups made by Huang in which an observer might have even detected a thought toward marketability. In light of any trace of consumerism, one must take some factors into consideration. For example, in Taiwan, Huang is privy to a market for ceramics that is probably beyond the imagination of most Lithuanian ceramists but that may have certain guidelines and exert influence. Furthermore, no artist can be penalised for the necessity of income or the satisfaction of distribution. However in the context of the exhibition the cups insinuated that in her works Huang is meeting expectations imposed either by herself, her audience, her culture or her market. The drawback of this is that in the creation of fine art and the pursuit of self-expression the impulse to meet expectations, rather than the elements of function or tradition in which the desire to satisfy is often entangled, strikes one as a constraint.

Over the course of the exhibition, however, this last observation proved to be temporary. In Huang's



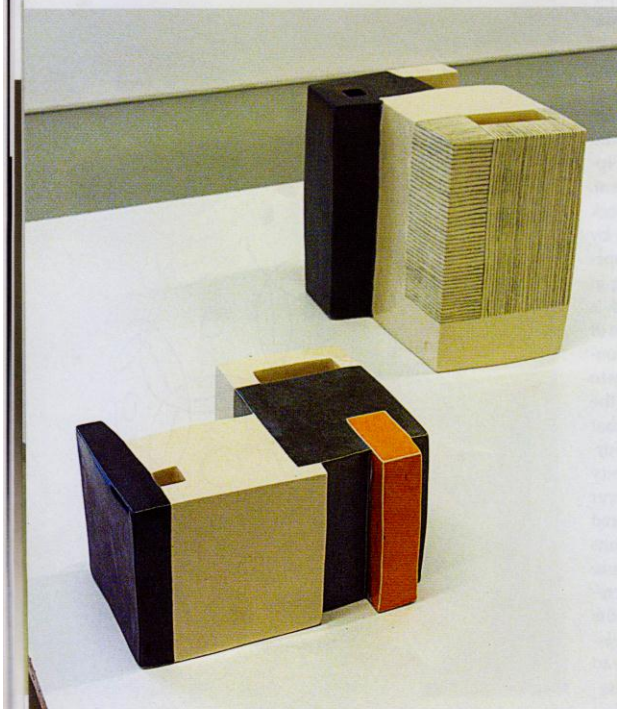
Yu-Ying Huang. *Spring Water*. 2006. Stoneware, oxides, glaze. 30 x 20 x 40 cm.



Yu-Ying Huang. *In the Beginning*. 2006. Stoneware, oxides, glaze. 33 x 20 x 44 cm.



Yu-Ying Huang. *Don't Try to Stop the Water*. 2006.
Stoneware, oxides, glaze. 42 x 30 x 50 cm.



Ruta Sipalyte. *Taipei City I*.

major works the viewer found the real power and value. There, in Huang's most ambitious works were elements of tradition and function as part of a larger vocabulary, something that gave the work depth and a centre, which she orbited and departed from with precision and conviction in realising her own artistic vision.

The contrast between these two artists was a fascinating look into culture, values and art. What was important about the exhibition, however, were the moments when the style and arrangement of the works managed to highlight the subtle accents they share and the threads of continuity running through them. The similarities that existed between the artists' works may have been as fleeting and delicate as the meeting of a form's contour and a line's gesture of the moment in which the contrast of black and white, tipped by a teapot's tree branch spout faded into the purple blush and autumn brown of a planar form's anagama-fired surface.

In these almost transcendental moments what was expressed was the sense of equality between these two accomplished artists that is part competition and part mutual respect. There was harmony and some tension in this exhibition, which at times seemed simultaneously, yet inconclusively peaceful, endearing and fierce. The precarious balance was passionate and tender. Despite the tension, the exhibition made the assurance that neither similarities nor differences are absolute. Where aesthetics met in this exhibition there was beauty and where styles diverged there was evidence of the irrepressible individuality of the artist forever in search of a context. The exhibition was fresh and, amid a barrage of exhibitions shown in Vilnius during the IAC meeting, it was invigorating. Not least of all, the exhibition captured the most precious aspects of the exchange of artists' thought, knowledge, experience and friendship.

Anthony Stellaccio is a scholar of late 19th to early 21st century Lithuanian ceramics and he holds a position as consultant at the Lithuanian Art Museum. He is also a ceramic artist who has most recently completed a residency at Joshua Tree National Park in California, USA. While traversing the US he has presented lectures on Lithuanian ceramics at such locations as Illinois Wesleyan University, the Archie Bray Foundation, The Nottingham Center for the Arts and Arizona State University. His lectures will continue in the eastern US. His email address is keramikazi@yahoo.com. Featured artist Ruta Sipalyte can be contacted at utra@takas.lt and Yu-Ying Huang at vesta_huang@yahoo.com.tw.