

MAINE CRAFTS ASSOCIATION 20TH ANNIVERSARY EXHIBITION

# 20/20 ENVISION

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# GOW HWEI (RAY) CHEN



**Mother and Child 2002**  
Ceramic 31" x 27" x 21"

Ray Chen's work first came to my attention in 2001, in Charlotte, North Carolina. He was chosen as one of six "Emerging Artists" by the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts (NCECA), and gave a slide talk to the crowd of 4,000. Although he may be new to Maine, he is certainly well known nationally.

The work impressed me. Two strong forms lean to each other in an embrace of exquisite tension. Often one was sheltering, one huddled. The space between these formal elements came alive. In contrast to the powerful and raw materials, Ray's presentation was quiet, sincere, and about his relationship with his mother, who was struggling with Parkinson's at the time.

I was so glad to hear that Ray had taken the ceramics position at the University of Southern Maine. He will add new perspective and new energy to the Maine clay community.



*Sharon Townsend*

The *Uncommon Denominator*



## Ray Chen

*Mother*  
Stoneware  
4½" × 5" × 5"  
2003

My work focuses on human relationships. My mother has represented love and generosity. Function is the most important connection. I value form and space as I do the relationship between the internal and the external—one cannot exist without the other. Form and space distinguishes interpersonal relationships as well. Eastern and Western cultural influences have also shaped this vision. My work is my language of communication.



VOLUME 6 • NUMBER 4

# ImaGiNe...

Opportunities and Resources for Academically Talented Youth

March/April 1999



**SPOTLIGHT ON  
CROSS-CULTURAL STUDIES**

**Bridging the Language Gap**

**Becoming Slovakian**

**Improving Lives Through Physical Therapy**

**Students Review Case Western Reserve University**

*Imagine is a publication of  
The Johns Hopkins University.*

# HANDS ACROSS THE WATER: The Transcultural Sculptures of Ray Chen

by Lesley Mackay

*Clay—fine-grained earthen material or sticky soil, made up of rock that has been pushed to the earth's surface and aged and battered by weather.*

A SMOOTH, MALE HAND and a gritty wedge of American clay ... a mother and son separated by the world's largest ocean ... the artistic disciplines of East and West ... memories of a Taiwanese childhood and present-day life in the U.S. From these divergent elements, Ray Chen creates unusual, beautiful, and, above all, expressive sculptural forms.

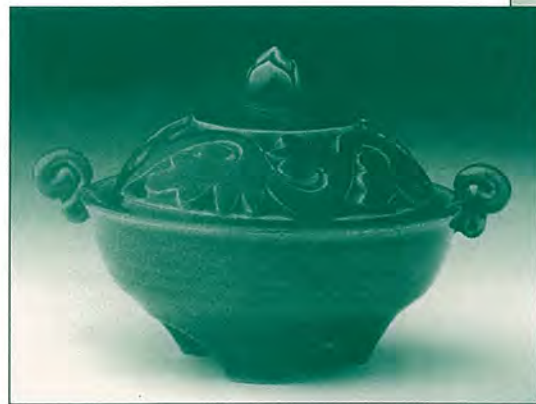
Born in Taipei, Ray spent his youth immersed in art. At home, his mother instructed him in the Japanese-inspired discipline of formal Eastern flower arrangement—an unusual area of study for a Taiwanese male. In school and, later, at Taiwan University, Ray studied classical Western music, becoming an accomplished choral singer and violinist.

After college, he expected to spend his life making recordings of Western classical music. But this plan was complicated by a passion for another art form—drawing. Since early childhood, he had loved sketching. “After college,” he says, “I realized I liked creating my own sketches more than playing music others had composed.”

In search of his creative destiny, and a way to make a living, Ray began to think about other avenues in the visual arts. Setting music aside, he began to study pottery at a neighborhood studio in Taipei, where he slowly mastered the basics of ceramics.

## From Traditional Eastern Forms...

Curved slightly over a potter's wheel at Baltimore's Clayworks, where he is currently a resident artist, Ray describes the beginnings of his odyssey into the world of clay. “It took me six months to learn to throw a single pot,” he says ruefully. Like all newcomers to the wheel, he grappled with the tough, yet delicate, process of centering a slippery, spinning clay mound,



smoothing its surface, and opening it up into a shapely vessel.

He also began an intensive study of hand-building techniques. In hand-building, pots are created from slabs (clay is rolled out with a rolling pin or sliced with a wire or tossed into sheets) or from coils (clay is layered in long, snake-like ropes that are left visible or smoothed over). Sculpture is advanced, freeform hand-building. The unstructured process of sculpting, as well as the abstract nature of contemporary sculptural forms, called to Ray Chen.



*Uniformity and smoothness characterize Ray's traditional pottery.*

But he had embarked on a long, traditional apprenticeship—four years at his neighborhood studio followed by three more with one of his teachers, an expert in the pottery of the ancient Chinese dynasties. With this teacher and two other potters, Ray took on an unusual, idealistic project: they threw large quantities of traditional Chinese pots and sold them at the same price as factory-made pots. The team's intention was to offer ordinary Taiwanese consumers a household full of individually created replicas of historic ceramic pieces.

The project did not succeed financially. “We weren't able to throw enough pots to make a profit,” Ray says. “But the forms

were beautiful, and I learned a lot about classical Chinese aesthetics.” Those aesthetics, he explains, emphasize uniformity and smoothness of line and texture.

## ...to a Western Expressiveness

Ray gets up from his wheel and walks to the sunny, open gallery where his latest exhibition, entitled *Mother and Child*, is mounted. The contrast between the smooth, flowing pots he has just described and this asymmetrical work could not be more dramatic. The pieces bring to mind ancient, barnacled sea-creatures. Each sculpture features two massive, strangely shaped, highly textured, and beautifully colored forms propping each other up, flowing into each other, or simply lying side-by-side. While the forms are abstract, Ray explains that the larger piece in each pair signifies the mother.

How did the artist who had thrown hundreds of perfect, identical bowls come to create such forms? By setting aside the ceramic techniques he had learned with such devotion. Ray created each sculpture in miniature with a tiny amount of clay. Then he found ways to realize the form on an outside scale. “That part is difficult,” he says. “Every material, including clay, has its limitations.” What works on a scale of centimeters can easily fall apart when re-scaled in meters. “But once I decide on a form,” Ray says, “I find a way to make it viable in the scale I want.”

The sculptures in *Mother and Child* took shape on the pottery wheel; but their strange beauty comes from the bending, twisting, battering, and roughening Ray inflicted on them afterward and from the cracking and the peeling of the low-temperature glazes he purposefully chose. In their devolution away from any kind of perfection, the sculptures became both less and more than ideal forms: they became expressions of Ray's inner world. Looking at his



*In the sculptures in his exhibition Mother and Child, Ray used techniques he refined in the West to express Eastern ideals.*

mounted pieces, he says, “I am happy I have found a way to express my feelings.”

## Objects in Space

The *Mother and Child* dyads are all installations. In this complex kind of sculpture, two or more pieces are presented together, the spatial arrangement among them contributing to their beauty and significance. Ray studied installations in his last apprenticeship in Taiwan: a three-year period with the renowned Taiwanese artist Margaret Sui Tan. “I left the studio where I had been making traditional Chinese pots to create white porcelain, paper-thin sculptures for Ms. Sui

Tan's installations. I made the pieces from slabs, and she altered the shapes.”

The image of clusters of white, paper-thin, porcelain sculptures evokes a spray of orchids, bringing to mind the art of flower arrangement Ray learned years before. “I think that flower arrangement influenced me a lot,” he says. “My mother taught me to think about the formal qualities of objects and how they might exist together in space.”

## New Life, New Art

After his work with Ms. Sui Tan, Ray applied for, and won, an opportunity to teach ceramics at Ohio University, where he would earn a second Bachelor of Fine Arts degree, in ceramics, and concentrate on sculpture. He finished his formal studies with graduate work at the Rochester Institute of Technology before, in 1997, accepting a teaching fellowship and then his current position in Baltimore.

“It's been a long journey,” Ray says. “Actually immigrating has been an important part of it. I feel each piece of work I do now expresses my affinity for both East and West. In this exhibit, the Eastern ideals of tradition and permanence within the family are conveyed through an expressiveness I have achieved here in the U.S.”

Ray's muse remains in the Orient, where, for nine years, she has suffered from Parkinson's disease. “I am the only son in my family,” he says. “I must take care of my parents no matter what happens. But, for now, I am exploring questions of family mostly through my art.”

And so Ray Chen has no plans to depart the United States. He enjoys the “creative atmosphere” he finds in this country. And, in the U.S., you can get better stuff. “Ceramic materials are more diverse in America,” he says, standing among his sculptures, looking down at his white-stained hands. “I have more choices. I can get different porcelains and glazes that harden at different temperatures. I can get many textures of clay.” ☺

# 100 Artists of New England



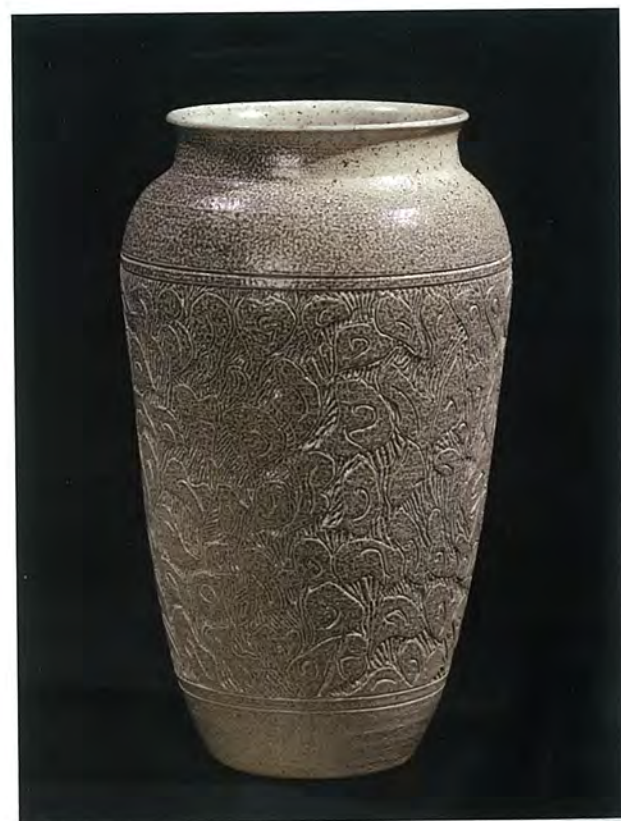


## Ray Chen

seasons, the colors, and the details of nature, and witnessing and experiencing the changes in my life, I am very fortunate to bring them into my artistic vision.

In my work for the last several years, I have addressed the central relationship between my mother and myself. Seventeen years ago, she fell into Parkinson's disease. As the only son in my family and in accord with the tradition of Chinese culture, it became my role to take full responsibility for her and be strong. As a result, my relationship with my mother has grown. I encourage her with love and warmth. On May 7, 2003, my mother left her physical body and she is in God's hand. Her love has been around as always, and she has more to offer. My sculpture is also, then, the testimony of my faith.

*Salt Glaze.* Stoneware, Cone 10, Reduction. 10 x 16 x 10 in. Photo: François Gagné.



My sculpture exploration of form, space, and line has become my outer language to embody my inner feelings about this experience. I value form, space, and line between internal and external – one cannot exist without the other. It has also expressed the crossed boundaries between Eastern and Western culture and aesthetics – as well as the physical distance between my mother and myself.

Living in Maine and seeing the natural forms in my daily life inspire me to continue as an artist. This experience makes me create and "think" about the organic forms through my life experience. Watching the changing



*Chun.* Clear Glaze. Stoneware, Cone 10, Reduction. 11 x 5 x 14 in. Photo: François Gagné.



*Mother and Child.* Stoneware, earthenware. 18 x 23 x 16 in. Photo: François Gagné.



*Mother and Child.* Stoneware, earthenware. 33 x 36 x 42 in. Photo: François Gagné.



*Mother and Child.* Stoneware, earthenware. 18 x 23 x 16 in. Photo: François Gagné.



*Mother and Child.* Stoneware, earthenware. 52 x 54 x 28 in. Photo: François Gagné.





Australian  
National  
University



## MATERIAL MATTERS

5-28 AUGUST 2011

School of Art  
ANU College of Arts & Social Sciences

## Ray Chen | Mother and Child

School of Art Foyer Gallery | 15 - 21 August

Reception 6pm Monday 15 August



Ray Chen, *Mother and Child*, ceramic, stoneware, earthenware, 115 x 102 x 97 cm [LEFT]  
*Mother and Child*, ceramic, stoneware, earthenware, 92 x 122 x 102 cm [RIGHT]

*"Relationships between human persons have been the core theme of my ceramic sculpture."*

### Mother and Child

For the last several years, I have addressed in my work the central relationship between my mother and myself. Seventeen years ago, she fell into Parkinson's disease. As the only son in my family and in accord with the tradition of Chinese culture, it comes to my role to take full responsibility of her and be strong. As a result, my relationship with my mother has grown. I encourage her with love and warmth. May 7th, 2003, my mother has left her physical body and she is in God's hand. Her love has been around as always and she has more to offer. My sculpture is also then, the testimony of my faith.

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© Siobha

# CERAMICS IRELAND

INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL EXHIBITION 2014



## Ray Chen

Henry Moore says sculpture must have life in it. Creating a vitality and life within a form, gives it meaning and primitive power infused with humanist content. For the last several years, I have addressed in my work the central relationship between my mother and myself. Twenty some years ago, my mother fell into Parkinson's disease. As the only son in my family and in accord with the tradition of Chinese culture, it comes to my role to take full responsibility of her and be strong. As a result, my relationship with my mother has grown. I encourage her with love and warmth. May 7th, 2003, my mother has left her physical body and in God's hand now. Her love has been around as always. The bond is strong that constructs the work of "Mother and Child".

My work is a connection over space and distance with my mother. It is a measurement in feelings through my own personal experience, presenting movement, energy, love, relation, honesty, and integrity. The composition of gestural abstract forms is effected strongly by the spaces between forms. The energy comes from the point where the pieces touch. Also, I believe the content of my sculpture to be an emotional connection between form and materials. My work is my language of communication that crosses the boundaries of culture.







## Ray Chen

\*1. 9. 1967

1992 - 1995 B.F.A. (Bachelor of Fine Arts),  
Ceramics, Ohio University, Athens,  
OH, USA

1995 - 1997 M.F.A. (Master of Fine Arts),  
Ceramics and Ceramics Sculpture,  
Rochester Institute of Technology,  
The School of American Craft,  
Rochester, NY, USA

*Relationship between human persons have been  
the core theme of my ceramic sculpture Mother and Child.*

MATKA A DÍTĚ, I



## Ray CHEN ■

V přednesu lineárním, plošném, plastickém, v tvarové i barevné souhře, v dokonalém záznamu pohybu zaměřeného na dění, na dynamiku a pohyb, živá, expresivně rytmizovaná hmota, která je podřízena myšlence a citovému vznětu, jako znamení lidského vztahu k organické přírodě, s onou prostorovou dynamikou lisuje prostor do plochy, zachycuje bez kompoziční hierarchie zóny velmi jemné, často atmosférické hmotnosti; v závislosti na prostředí či na věcném substrátu volnější zpracování, odpovídající jinému směřování, tuto erudici vložilo i do dramatické formy, v rozvíjení hybnosti, v plastice především obdivuhodné citění vitálního rytmu přírody a zvířecího těla vytěžuje z něho tu nejintenzivnější a nejzajímavější realizaci, živoucí sílu ve svjívém pohybu, v emocionálním účinu se prosazuje hluboká jednota jeho výtvarného projevu i jeho nezaměnitelný, sugestivní a bezprostřední výraz jako komentář o prožitých emocích a vjemech, jako bytostná životní zkušenost a skutečnost objevilo své tvůrčí možnosti: síla výrazu působí svou hmotností, atmosférou určité chvíle, dramatinovaná struktura povrchového zpracování svou věcností i vnitřním napětím. Ray Chen zachycuje okamžik, který pomínil, ale jeho formálně uvolněná modelace tento pomíjivý okamžik představuje věčně.

*For the last several years, I have addressed in my work the central relationship between my mother and myself. Fifteen years ago, she fell into Parkinson's disease. As the only son in my family and in accord with the tradition of Chinese culture, it comes to my role to take full responsibility of her and be strong. As a result, my relationship with my mother has grown. I encourage her with love and warmth. May 7th, 2003, my mother has left her physical body and she is in God's hand. Her love has been around as always and she has more to offer. My sculpture is also then, the testimony of my faith.*

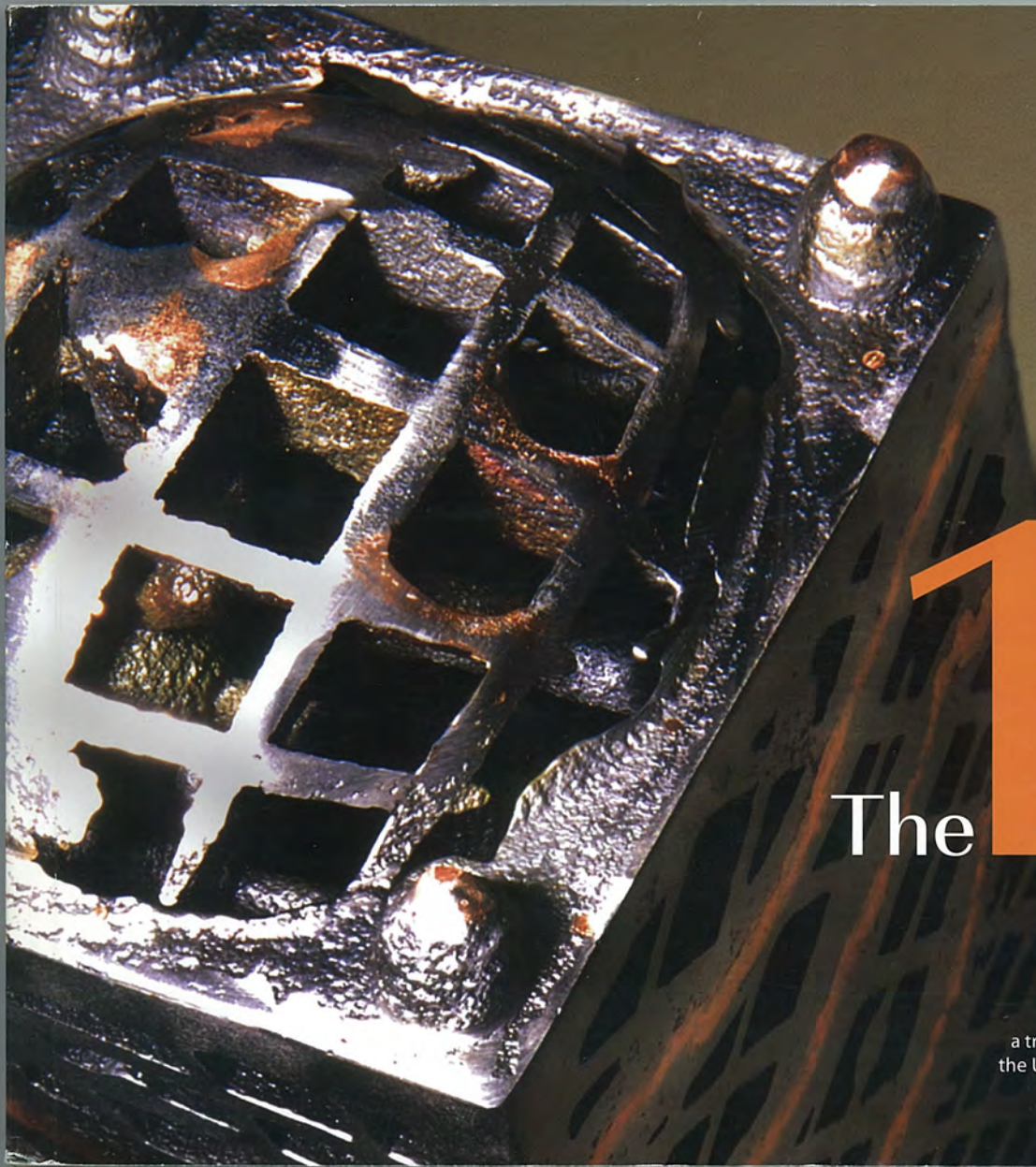
*My sculpture exploration of form, space and line has become my outer language to embody my inner feelings about this experience. I value form, space and line between internal and external – one cannot exist without the other. It has also expressed the crossed boundaries between Eastern and Western culture and aesthetics—as well as the physical distance between my mother and myself.*

MATKA A DÍTĚ, II



MEZI





The **10**<sup>th</sup>

International  
**Shoebox  
Sculpture**  
Exhibition ■

a traveling exhibition organized by  
the University of Hawai'i Art Gallery

2009 – 2011

## Ray Chen

| Terre Haute | Indiana

## Mother and Child

C

*For the last several years, I have addressed in my work the central relationship between my mother and myself. . . . Her love has been around as always and she has more to offer. . . . I value form, space and line between internal and external—one cannot exist without the other.*

Ray Chen was born in 1962, in Taipei, Taiwan. He resides in Indiana where he is an assistant professor and head of the ceramic department at Indiana State University. He earned a BFA in ceramics from Ohio State University, 1995, and an MFA in ceramics and ceramics sculpture at Rochester Institute of Technology School for American Crafts, New York, 1997. Chen received an Honorable Mention Award in the 4<sup>th</sup> World Ceramic Biennale 2007 Korea, Icheon World Ceramic Center, and is a recipient of an Arts Endowment Fellowship from Indiana State University, 2008.

### selected exhibitions

| *Mother and Child*, solo exhibition, Gopalan Contemporary Art, Terre Haute, Indiana, 2009

| *The International Ceramics Symposium at Bechyně*, traveling exhibition, Czech Republic, 2008

| *LXXVIII Exposition of Pottery and Ceramic*, La Rambla Ceramics Museum, Córdoba, Spain, 2008

| *The 8th International Ceramics Competition MINO*, Japan, Ceramic Park Mino, Japan, 2008

| *Another Cup?*, Baltimore Clayworks, Maryland, 2008

| *A Cup & Saucer Exhibition*, Where I Fell in Love Gallery, Warwickshire, England, 2007

| *Jingdezhen International Ceramic Expo*, Jingdezhen Ceramic Museum, China, 2007



ceramic |

11.5 x 31.2 x 16.6 cm |

2008 |





**NCECA JOURNAL 2001**

## Report on Emerging Artists 2001

ROBERT MONCRIEF

A good reality check for a would-be "emerging artist" is to witness the commitment levels of the six distinguished artists assembled each year by NCECA. The 2001 Emerging Artists, without exception, have wonderful academic and show credits. More importantly, each has produced a substantial body of work.

KOSMAS BALLIS

Kosmas Ballis, who presented first in Charlotte, may be the most challenging of this year's emergers because he does not conform to conventional ideas of design. Each of his roughly spherical forms seems to grow randomly—a network of objects linked by generous drips of slip and glaze,—often with jarring, high-chroma color. On closer examination, you see that the nodes in the matrix are cultural icons, trapped in the secretion-like layers. Castings from (for example) dolls, toy birds, butterflies and children's building blocks are drowning and disappearing into the goop.

This is an expression, Ballis says, of our excessive consumption, the deadening quality of the monoculture, the corrupting nature of mass cheapness. His ropes of garish glaze are the special-sauce of devolutionary McLife in the United States. The congested masses are meant to indicate the cages of our freeways, once liberating, now ensnaring us in an auto-driven suburban landscape, which by its nature engenders waste, isolation, alienation and no aesthetic value.

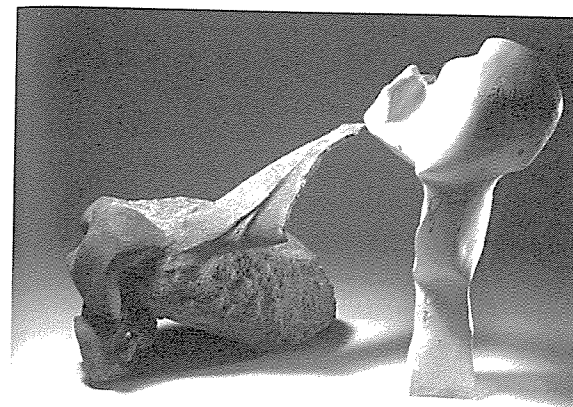
Ballis creates these things in sittings of 50 to 70 hours. He works freely, loosely, in riotous splashes of three-dimensional color, with an action-art intensity that overrides his needs for food and sleep. Has he ever been filmed in the act of creating these things?

GOW HWEI (RAY) CHEN

Gow Hwei Chen's "Mother and Child" series, like the work of his influence, Henry Moore, is



2k Bouquet #1, Kosmas Ballis.  
11" x 8" x 6", ceramic, 2000



Mother and Child, Gow Hwei (Ray) Chen,  
46"L x 35"W x 32"H

massive, with strong line, more abstract, yet clearly understandable, particularly when witnessed in series. Before screening the "Mother and Child" slides, Gow Hwei Chen (we are invited to call him Ray Chen) gives heart-felt thanks to mentors, family and all who have encouraged him. He refers to Moore's sentiment that sculpture must be charged with meaning from the sculptor's experience. Chen was a boy when his mother was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease and his father deserted the family. In keeping with Chinese tradition, Chen has grown into manhood taking care of his mother through her struggle with disease. He expresses the deep love, pain and constant change of this profound relationship with his many groupings.

Among this year's emergers, Mr. Chen's presentation has the greatest cumulative effect. The pairs of highly abstract figures, often not more than four feet in any direction, are twisted, torn, boiling, beaten and gracefully soaring masses that as easily could be land or oceanscapes. Stain, glaze and raw body are used to contrast or differentiate Mother from Child, in low-chroma earth tones, a few of which might be called red sandstone, volcanic flow, kaolin quarry or sea-washed clam-buff. In each pairing, the figures touch at some point.

Though these lyrically composed works appeared to be freely formed and spontaneous, Chen always works from sketches and maquettes. Perhaps this deliberative approach accounted, too, for his uncluttered presentation at the podium where, once he had given us the

simple context of his moving, intimate work, he advanced the many slides, one after another, stating only dimensions.

ADELAIDE S. PAUL

Adelaide S. Paul said that she hopes to seduce her audience with "lush glaze and pristine form" to get across her "disconcerting content," which is about the abuse of horses, cows, pets, race dogs and research animals. In one series, beautifully formed limbless porcelain animals, often greyhounds, lie in petrie dishes. Many of her animal figures are limbless or modeled with prosthetic limbs, showing their dismemberment or disintegration via interaction with humans. Ms. Paul was inspired for another series when she saw a live cow that had installed in its side a glass window to aid in a children's biology class. This experience inspired her windowed horse series, also limbless, stripped of power, diminished in dignity. "Hamstrung" is a figurine of an Australian sheep dog, which Paul found with the front paws broken off. She replaced them with porcelain human hands, an integration which disrupts our sense of separateness. In an installation piece called "30 Days," she documents the death by injection of 432 unwanted shelter dogs in a given month in Lubbock, Texas. A numbered porcelain urn for each is arranged on shelving around the installation space, and a small table bears an album of each dog's photo and name. "30 Days" is a comparative song of holocaust, which may offend our anthropomorphic nature, or raise our consciousness, or both.

BONNIE SEEMAN

Bonnie Seeman explores the relative natures of flora and fauna with her functional ware. Inspired by her grandfather's painting, her early work was formed as, and adorned with, a richly palletted assortment of plant life. For example, she has formed and transformed clay into vine-entwined trees, trees into coffeepots or teacups with saucers into lilies on lily-pads.

Then at some point she began incorporating the interiors of humans or animals into the interiors of her plant pots. A tastefully arranged floral butter-dish opens to reveal the bloody and perhaps diseased guts of something. Some of her teapots have a stomach body, intestine for spout and handle and a lovely bed of green-



Ewer and Tray, *Bonnie Seeman*, 9" x 6" x 14",  
porcelain, 2001

ery for a foot. She showed a slide of two pitchers, identical but for the glazing: one predominantly in greens, the other in reds. Amazingly, the red looked like organs and guts, the green a plant.

Sometimes Seeman retreats back to her more peaceful, exclusively green-world themes, away from the gross animal interior. But she feels that the juxtaposition and merging of animal with plant life is her strongest work.

#### TIP TOLAND

The arc of Tip Toland's surreal work in ceramics arises from a painting tradition. Many of her wall-mounted pieces are painted with pastels and fixative. Her earlier ceramics are dioramas, in which she experiments with forced perspective and dramatic lighting. Then came her wonderful series of tiles that are still very painterly and concerned with light and dream. From here Toland says she moved joyfully on to bas-relief. Those included the use of mixed media, additions of carved wood with gold and silver leaf. Presently she is working fully in the round. The imagery and composition throughout this substantial trajectory are visually ap-

pealing, disturbing and surreal. Her work is inspired by works such as Giorgio de Chirico's "Melancholy and Mystery of a Street".

In the Toland wall-piece, "She knows her way back home," a woman in the foreground is naked and crumpled on the rocks, while in the distance a white horse — her horse, — follows a winding road away through a largely barren landscape. In another piece, a man tied to an interior door is forced to listen to something on the hi-fi. In "Skaters," two sisters skate on a pond, joined by their long hair. In "Protest," a person perches in a single remaining tree where all else is burning. In an interior scene, a woman reclines on and is trapped in a couch. In "Stolen," a crone runs through a field in her wedding dress while a group of crows fly off with her veil. Crows in the landscape are reminiscent of Van Gogh's late fieldscapes.

In the more recent sculptural pieces, Toland's figures are doll-like. "Look, she can fly" is an old woman, seated and weary, partially naked, with one breast and one scar, poorly coifed doll hair, arms attached with elastic bands, and a textile cape that might have been added by some little girl owner to help her old woman doll by the suggestion of super powers. In another, a vacuous baby-sitter sits nearly comatose, with a lively, vital infant on her lap.

#### GEOFFREY WHEELER

Geoffrey Wheeler, like Bonnie Seeman, brings references from plant and animal life to his otherwise dissimilar work. His animal suggestions, unlike the blood and bowels of Seeman's work, refer rather to the exterior surfaces, curves and colors that are readily appealing to the eye. Also, rather than the obvious representation of body parts, Wheeler makes subtle references. He wants his mother to miss the sexual suggestion and say, "Isn't that nice," while others will say, "Oh, Baby!" Green nipple, or thorn-like, elements pressing into the soft, yielding flesh of the teapot (featured in this year's NCECA Clay National Exhibition at Winthrop University), may be a stamen, or female genitalia, or some beautiful abstract form. Or if they are thorns, he says, they are not meant to be confrontational. The ripe banana-like handle and spout of this pot may be phallus or fruit: banana yellow, pomegranate red and arrested glaze drips of translucent kiwi-green. Or

these are the colors of tropical birds. Mr. Wheeler says he goes after the red-orange-green "of the cockatiel and the bright bloom of a baboon's butt."

Utility and metaphor are Mr. Wheeler's language, and in his talk he used more than once the word "sweet." He is interested in celebrating or rejoicing in that which is sweet, and in bringing this sense to the experience of his pots. This sweetness seems not just a reference to sensual appeal, but to everything in life that is positive, pleasing, comforting and beautiful. He knows that his pots are a life-affirming commentary, but he wants them also to invite participation, touch, heft and the pouring out of a nice cup of tea.

NCECA 2001 has chosen here two functional Emerging Artists and four "dysfunctional". Ballis, Chen, and Wheeler (the men) produce the more abstract work, while Seeman and Toland use a more directly representational language, as does Paul in the service of her con-

ceptual art. All six make art rich in content. Ballis and Paul make socio-political commentary. Chen and Toland's art work, while deeply personal, has the clarity to touch a universal audience. Wheeler and Seeman explore our integration with nature or the lack thereof. But this could be said, too, of Chen's ever changing mother/son relationship, of Paul's animal kinship message, of Toland's gentle, psychic eruptions. These six emergers identify levels of human integrity to varying degrees along a spectrum, from the corruption of Ballis' spheres to the rejoicing unity of Wheeler's ves-

**Robert Moncrief** grew up in the tile and shard studded Fulper house in Flemington, New Jersey. He earned a BA at George Mason University, did some meager graduate work at the University of Virginia, and has been affiliated for ten years as a student, volunteer and instructor with the Boulder Pottery Lab. His lovely and nearly credit-free sculptural work appears from time to time in Colorado and at his mom's house.



"Emerging Artists" for 2001: Gow Hwei (Ray) Chen, Bonnie Seeman, Kosmas Ballis, Adelaide S. Paul, Geoffrey Wheeler, and Tip Toland

## Emerging Artist: Gow Hwei (Ray) Chen

GOW HWEI (RAY) CHEN

Glen B. Blakley



Ray Chen being congratulated by Phyllis Kloda, new NCECA Board Director-at-Large

*I could put feeling and life into clay that becomes unnecessary to translate verbally, much like the feeling transferred by composers through music.*

Coming from Taiwan, Republic of China, a traditional and agricultural society, all of my perceptions of human relationships are influenced by this oriental, conservative background. My new experiences within the vastly different culture of the United States have led me to search for a deeper understanding of human relationships. Through my work in clay, I have looked for a new form of communication that crosses the boundaries of cultural experience.

I grew up in a loving family environment; within our household, my mother's influence was constant. Her career as an opera singer gave depth to my musical understanding as well as gave me an introduction to the arts. I studied violin beginning in childhood and later graduated from the National Taiwan Education University with a Bachelor of Music degree. My mother's passion for floral design was another important influence. Both impacts helped to stimulate my creativity and direct me into the arts.

It was again through my mother's influence that I tried ceramics. I discovered that clay has unique qualities: plasticity, texture, color and form. With clay, I began to make a comparison to music. Clay could be touched and seen. I could put feeling and life into clay that becomes unnecessary to translate verbally, much like the feeling transferred by composers through music.

When I was in a production functional ceramics studio in Taiwan, I realized that the decoration of oriental ware had a consistent characteristic in composition that involved nature and symmetry. On the other hand, Chinese sculpture is physical and requires that balance and stability be considered equally with symmetry. Traditional Chinese culture influences both functional ware and sculptural ceramics in more subtle ways of color, pattern and form.

Fourteen years ago, my mother fell into Parkinson's disease. At the onset of this

sickness, my father abandoned our family. In accordance with the tradition of Chinese culture, it became my role to take his place and to be strong. As a result, my relationship with my mother has grown. I encourage her with love and warmth. I kiss her and tell her that I love her. Even now I have not fully accepted her illness. I pray that she will recover one day.

This experience made me very aware of the relationship between mother and child. The bond is very strong, and I began to re-examine my own relationship to my mother. This became my central focus. Through the relationship between two forms, I am presenting movement, energy, love, relation, honesty and integrity. I began to examine, through my own experience, the universal experience of a child honoring and protecting his mother.

For the last several years, I have addressed in my work the central relationship between my mother and myself. My sculpture exploration of form, space and line has become my outer language to embody my inner feelings about this experience with my mother. It has also expressed the crossed boundaries between Eastern and Western culture and aesthetics, as well as the physical distance between my mother and myself. My sculpture is also, then, my testimony of my faith.

Henry Moore said that "one distorts the forms in order to create space." Moore also said that "Sculpture, for me, must have life in it, vitality." By creating a vitality and life within a form, one creates in a piece of sculpture, meaning. Moore said that "The great (the continual, everlasting) problem (for me) is to combine sculptural form (power) with human sensitivity and meaning... i.e. to try to keep primitive power with humanist content."

A major concern within my sculpture is to create negative space. I cannot understand negative space without equally understanding form. Chinese culture is imbued with an indirectness of spiritual vitality. In other words, an object perceived, then associated with a metaphorical meaning, has a higher sense of spiritual recognition than an object perceived as just an object in Chinese culture. This is when an object is imbued with life, for it takes on a significance beyond its physical appearance.

The form's vitality is drawn from the life of my mother and myself. By breaking the figure up into fragments, I increase the plastic potential of my aesthetic language. The composition of gestural abstract forms is affected strongly by the spaces between forms. The energy comes from the point where the pieces touch. It is an abstraction in form, of a child kissing a mother when she is ill. He is encouraging her to be strong.

"Mother and child" is an exploration of the emotional relationship between my mother and myself. Also, I believe the content of my sculpture to be an emotional connection between form and materials. The whole process is an attempt to reach for the best synthesis of contemporary communication and to find a link with mass audiences both in Eastern and Western cultures. In developing my personal knowledge and philosophical view of the world, these experiences have led me to express myself in ways that differ from traditional Chinese culture and they have affected the way I communicate with people through my art work. This event represents a very significant transition in my art world as well as a new experience in my life.

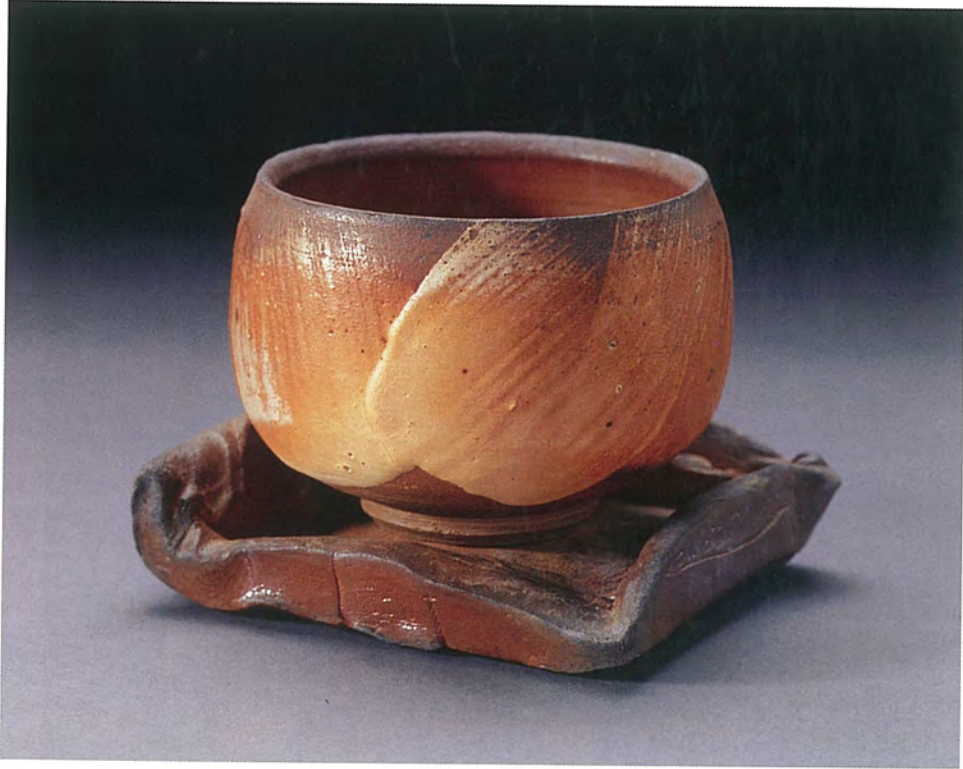
**Gow Hwei(Ray) Chen** spent ten years in Taiwan training himself in handbuilding and the ways of the wheel as a sculptor, five years teaching ceramics and four years managing a ceramics studio in Taiwan. He came to the United States in 1991 to pursue more contemporary issues in his work. He received his B.F.A. in ceramics at Ohio University and M.F.A. in ceramic sculpture at Rochester Institute of Technology. Since 1994, Ray has attended six NCECA conferences. During the 1996 conference, he assisted Brad Schwieger with his demonstration and was selected as a NCECA SHIMPO 1994 scholarship recipient. Mr. Chen was the 1998 Lormina Salter Fellowship Recipient with one year free residency and stipend at Baltimore Clayworks in Maryland where he continued as a teacher and resident artist until 2001. In 1998 he taught at Maryland Institute College of Art as a part-time faculty in the Ceramics Department and in 1999 he taught at Towson State University and Goucher College. He is also a 2001 NCECA conference emerging artist recipient. Presently, he teaches at the University of Southern Maine where he is assistant professor of ceramics.

At the age of 22, he began to study flower arrangement with his mother, a practice which helps him to think about space and visual objects from all perspectives.

THE BEST OF  
**500 CERAMICS**



CELEBRATING A DECADE IN CLAY



RAY CHEN

*Life II* | 2003

4 X 5 1/2 X 5 INCHES (10.2 X 14 X 12.7 CM)

Wheel-thrown and slab-built stoneware;  
wood fired in reduction, cone 10; white  
slip on surface

PHOTO BY MARK ROCKWOOD