

Eleanor Swan

Residency at Yingge Contemporary
Ceramic Museum Taiwan



View of the Museum from my apartment



The famous Pottery Street in Yingge

The island of Taiwan lies on the Tropic of Cancer, is surrounded by ocean, the East China Sea, the South China Sea and the Pacific Ocean, has fertile soil, a warm climate and 200 years of ceramics making history. Taiwan is a little more than half the size of Ireland and has a population of about 23 million mainly concentrated along the west coast.

Yingge, situated in the Southwest Taipei Basin became the pottery centre of Taiwan due to its plentiful supply of clay. It has a famous 'Pottery Street', many studios, factories and galleries and the most famous addition to the area in recent years is the Yingge Contemporary Ceramic Museum. Construction of the museum began in 1988 and it was officially opened on November 26th 2000. The Museum is the first professional pottery museum in Taiwan and has dedicated itself to preserving the town's cultural legacy while instilling a new energy into the area. It is a busy active museum, integrates very well with the local community and has a footfall of about 1.5 million visitors per year.

On September 1st 2014 I began a 3 month residency at the Museum. I had no idea what to expect when I arrived but as everyone was so helpful and made me feel very welcome, I settled in very quickly. My first impressions were that the place was much bigger than expected, a very contemporary looking building with lots of glass and cement and bright open exhibition areas. The sculpture park I walked through on the way to the studios each day was always a hive of activity with workshops, slipcasting or throwing demonstrations at weekends, a very busy childrens pool area, a picnic area and all



Some of the sculptures in the Sculpture Park that I passed each day on my way to the studio.

interspersed with wonderful garden sculptures.

The Artists Residency Studios are in a separate building to the main Museum and can take 3 artists at any one time. There are 3 working bays but also a glazing and kiln room, mould making and plaster room and workshop and lecture area.

When starting a residency it is difficult to know where to begin. I spent the first three weeks making pots for no reason other than hoping I would be inspired to take my work in some unknown direction. Shuilin, the director of Exhibitions came to talk to me one day about the first Tactile Exhibition the Museum was planning for November. As this is the subject that drives my work we had many interesting discussions on the logistics of doing this. It was some weeks before I realized I was to be part of this exhibiton but here is nothing like pressure and a deadline to get the brain working!. With concentrated work and no distractions it was a great experience to be able to become completely consumed with ceramics and the creative process. The work I normally make is centred around the human form but I realized that I had to do something else here, something relevant to Taiwan. From the time I arrived at the Museum I had been recording my thoughts and impressions in a series of notebooks and from these I began to develop ideas for new work. I made a series of orbs, each dedicated to the 5 senses. I decorated each in themes that caught my attention in Taiwan....the magnificent perfumes from plants, the unusual tastes, the lack of singing birds, the heat, and sight of children playing among the ceramics in the pool of the sculpture garden. Each orb contained a selection of related porcelain pieces, birds, flowers etc. I had hoped that these pieces would be taken out and a conversation would ensue....it is exactly what happened!



Painting the orbs!

Having a discussion about plant fragrances at the exhibition opening.



I wanted to make a large tactile pot inspired by a small painted vessel in the museum collection. I did not have the time or the expertise to make this pot but Chan Guo-xian came to my rescue and in 3 days I had my pot delivered to the studio. Chan is a 4th generation potter and he began to make pots at the age of 8. He is an expert at his craft, is famous throughout Taiwan and is a demonstrator at the Museum at the weekends.



Chan Guo-xian delivering his pot to the studio

3D representation of the small painted vessel in the Museum Collection.



The first tactile exhibition “A Touch of Pottery” opened at the Museum on November 14th. There were other carefully selected pieces from the Museum collection in the exhibition as well as my own pieces but the exhibition itself was considered a great success.

“One group of 11 visually challenged visitors from Eden Social Welfare Foundation in Taipei City was given the rare opportunity to experience the beauty and richness of our artworks,” the official said. “Many of them were visibly overjoyed as they moved among the exhibits.”

[Taiwan Today](#)





My Residency finished on November 30th and, as each resident is expected to give a workshop or lecture, I finished with a workshop. In some ways I was sad to leave as I met so many wonderful people. While I was there Suzanne Wolfe from Hawaii came for 3 weeks and Peter Beard from the UK was in the middle of his Residency when I left. The staff at the Museum were so helpful and patient and went out of their way to make all of us feel welcome. The Museum itself is an extraordinary place, full of life with all its activities, workshops, demonstrations and exhibitions.....a very busy place and it was a privilege to have experienced it.

