

A STAGE FOR INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION

GICB 2015

by Hyeyoung Cho

The “International Competition,” held in Icheon, South Korea, as part of the Gyeonggi International Ceramic Biennale (GICB) (<http://gicb2015ic.kocef.org/eng/main>), which celebrated its 8th year in 2015, is probably one of the most awaited events in the world among ceramic artists. It is widely known for both its reputation and also for offering the largest competition prize money (\$48,000 for the grand prize) within the field of contemporary ceramics. The competition, first introduced in 2001, is known among ceramic artists as a stage for developing recognition both internationally and in their home countries.

The International Competition plays an important role in leading the world of contemporary ceramics. When it began, the objective was to simultaneously analyze tendencies of the field and establish a path for artists to build a career. The competition was and still is an effective means to discover new and young talents from all over the world. Therefore the role of the Korea Ceramic Foundation





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1 Brad Taylor's *Mass compressed, rolled and cubed*, (1 m) in length, ceramic, 2014. Silver Prize Winner. 2 Patrick Crulis' *Here Without There (Huben Ohne Druben)*, 14 in. (36 cm) in height, ceramic, 2014. Bronze Prize Winner. 3 Andrew Burton's *Things Fall Apart*, up to 7 ft. 3 in. (2.2 m) in height, clay, paper box, 2014. Gold Prize Winner. 4 Alexandra Engelfriet's *Tranchee (Trench)*, video, 2013. Bronze Prize Winner.

(KOCEF), which administers the biennale, is to give international exposure to such artists. To a certain extent it has succeeded in achieving its objectives. The sheer collection of contemporary ceramics at the KOCEF headquarters represents years of organizing the International Competition. The works are kept in the archive building of the TOYASEUM within the Icheon Cerapia grounds and they are used for referencing different developments in both Korean and international contemporary ceramics.

Due to its size and reputation, the International Competition is certainly a much talked about event; however, in previous years it has attracted some controversy over the selection of both jury members and prize winning works. The 2013 biennale implemented changes to address these concerns, including the invitational exhibition, introduced by Inchin Lee, the Art Director for the GICB 2013. At that time, the recommendation and selection of artists was done by eleven appointed international

committee members. The artists were screened in three sessions for the selection of the final single grand prize winner. In addition to the invitational competition, a new type of special exhibition "HOT Rookies" was introduced in 2013 that focused on young and rising artists under 40 years old.

This year under the guidance of Kyoung-soon Park, director for the GICB 2015 events, the invitational exhibition was held again, and the competition exhibition returned to its original form, namely selecting ten prize winners—one grand prize, one gold, two silvers, three bronzes, and three special prizes. Unlike earlier years, the eligibility and the requirement for the competition were left completely open. The 2015 competition had a total of 2629 entries by 1470 applicants from 74 countries. The submissions underwent two screenings by the jury before the prize winners were selected. Screening was done online—97 pieces by 98 artists from 28 countries were selected—and the prizes were awarded in an



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on-site review. The outlook seemed to have been more international with prize winners coming from France, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Russia, the UK, and the US, in addition to Korea. The selection of the grand prize winner, *National Treasure* by Neil Brownsword, was unanimous as the piece seemed to pinpoint many key issues related to contemporary ceramics today. *National Treasure* addressed the subject of the diminishing field of industrial ceramic-based makers in Stoke-on-Trent in England, while also drawing attention to the way the closing of ceramics factories ended a long tradition of passing on ceramic making and china-paint decorating skills from one generation to the next in this region. Brownsword is

also indirectly commenting on the current state of ceramics worldwide, as the closing of smaller factories and movement of production to offshore companies is a universal phenomenon faced by the field today.

This year the International Competition attempted to rectify shortcomings of previous biennales while responding to recent developments and trends in the field. One of the initiatives was to open the competition to multimedia works. Requirements for the competition were left open, without setting specific guidelines, to reflect the ever expanding approaches found in contemporary ceramics today. Moreover, in order to connect one biennale to the next, new benefits for the grand prize winner include the opportunity to have a solo exhibition at the following biennale. To increase public participation, a new type of prize was introduced where the general public voted for the most popular piece among all the works exhibited. The people's choice award was given on the last day of the event as voting continued right to the end.

5 Raewyn Atkinson's *Deep Time #29*, 5 ft. 2 in. (1.6 m) in height, ceramic, 2012. Special Prize Winner. **6** Annouchka Brochet's *The Last Dream*, 2013. Special Prize Winner. **7** Jiin Ahn's *Hundred Water Droppers*, 7 ft. 10 in. (2.4 m) in length, ceramic, 2014. Silver Prize Winner. **8** Kosmas Ballis' *Fukushima*, 27 in. (70 cm) in height, ceramic, 2012. Special Prize Winner. **9** Jeffrey Miller and Thomas Schmidt's *Recycled China Series* (and detail), up to 6 ft. 6 in. (2 m) in length, factory-discarded ceramic, recycled aluminum, sand-cast with aluminum, 2012. Bronze Prize Winner. **10** Neil Brownsword's *National Treasure*, various dimensions, ceramic, workbench, chair, tools, light, sound, 2013. Performance by former Spode china painter Tony Challinor, 2015. Grand Prize Winner.



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The prize winning pieces definitely represent broadened concepts and versatility as there are installations, video projections, photo-based pieces, objects that reference ceramics or ceramic history but do not include any clay, function-based expressions, and many more. The interesting phenomenon about this year's competition was that while work by a number of Korean artists were included, only one, Jiin Ahn's *Hundred Water Droppers*, was awarded a prize.

Like any event, the International Competition has to be revised and analyzed for it to remain effective. It is important for the organizers to maintain an open mind with an international outlook as it is an event that accommodates the needs of international participants



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and audiences. It has come a long way but it also has to go further without losing momentum. The exhibition certainly attracts much attention but at this stage it is important to question the reason why many artists are interested in it. Fifteen years of continued planning and organizing certainly have contributed to its status today; however it is important to ask questions to assess the effectiveness of a competition today in terms of advancing not only the field of ceramics, but the wider public's understanding of it. Other questions worth considering include whether the event can simultaneously set a new paradigm in terms of contemporary ceramic development and

shedding light onto new international talents in the field; whether participants are only interested in the prize money or view (and value) their role as participants in other ways, and whether there should be more specified requirements for the submission of the work. These kinds of questions can help if they are addressed after any recurring show like this one, to help it to continue as an effective means of leading the field.

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