

Invitation to the 10Years Work with Clay

This is the exhibition of the works by Mr. Roe Kyung-Joe who has worked for ten years as a porcelain artist. For these ten years, he has undergone three changes in his art, step by step, experimenting in the nature and possibility of the clay in porcelain art.

The first of them was made with the white porcelain, and the next with the overglaze-ware. Going through such two steps, he has entered, again, into the new experiment and attempted to discover another phase of his art, the marble-ware.

It is, indeed, the most important one of his artistic achievements realized with his fine sense of clay as well as his cultivated skill treating it. The present exhibition is intended to show, at a time, what he has done so far.

Before he started his life as a porcelain artist, his concern was to find out, theoretically, the characteristic quality which is embedded in the traditional white porcelain of Joseon Dynasty.

As a way out, he tried to understand it, first, by studying the history of it. However, dissatisfied with the limitation of this way, he made another attempt to experience and approach its nature by doing practice. That is, by deliberately reflecting upon what happened in his mind, and by feeling himself into the original situation in which great potters of the past suffered, he expected to get to its nature.

He was eager even to project himself into the secret realm of history and put himself in the minds of those potters.

By doing so, he thought he could catch a glimpse of something almost similar to that quality which the traditional white porcelain have. That is a great wonder and an ineffable attraction to him as well. However, tantalizingly, the core nature of their quality reached him not as a bright light, but only as a faint glimmer. He hoped to catch it, but it disappeared immediately as soon as he tried to formulate it in language. That is why Mr. Roe left the theoretical work behind.

Could there be any better way to catch it in its full sense than to embody it into clay? He realized what he was destined to be, and has begun his life as a potter since then. Ten years ago when he began to play with clay in earnest, the white porcelain was his model to chase after as was hinted in the above. He thought it was an Ur-type and that there contained all factors of ware which most potters have aspired to realize. It is why there was the white porcelain period of his art, and during this period he trained himself from the ground up by cultivating his sense of clay and acquiring the important technical knowledges. As the end of this period, there appeared, however, an attempt to overcome or transform the white porcelain he made as his model. That is, he preferred the linear and angular form in his work to the curve or the circle which was used in the traditional white porcelain.

What he intended at the next stage was to obtain a colorful world of overglaze-ware. Thus, he indulged in it a new, but did not stay long. He went on to ask how so innocent ground of it can be harmonized with the colorful decorated and, further, whether there could be a more genuine combination. Such a problem led him, finally, to seek for the more primitive sort of combination and open the third stage of the marble-ware in he is art.

Also the moment of this he discovered in the native ware which inherited from the past

along with the white porcelain and celadon-ware. This marble-ware has an obvious characteristic from the overglaze-ware. It is due to the way the marble-ware is made. Whereas in the case of the overglaze form of a ware is made in advance and, then, the decoration is added on the ground of it. In the case of the marble-ware, both the form and the pattern are not made separately but together at a time from the start when a potter plays with clay. Accordingly, in the making of the marble-ware the form goes hand in hand with the pattern. Form is made as pattern is created, and pattern takes shape as form is created. Put it another way, form is pregnant with pattern, and vice-versa. As the making of the marble-ware proceeds in this way, the sort of its making is rather arbitrary in a certain sense. Because of this arbitrariness, there can not be found the same pattern among the marble-wares. For if every form has its own uniqueness different from each other, in the same way it also creates patterns different from each other. Mr. Roe has sharply noticed this characteristic in the marble-ware and shows us in the exhibition the naive quality composed of both the unintentionally made natural line and the delicate color the clay has originally.

Looking around the exhibition, we can easily discover at once that each ware whether it is a white porcelain, overglaze-ware or marble-ware, seems to be breathing quietly and that it touches and strongly moves us. To be sure, he succeeded in reproducing the great tradition in his own fashion, and his ten years efforts are valuable to deserve attention. Being sure that he has the merits enough to be considered as one of the most able contemporary porcelain artists. I would like to suggest it is also worthwhile to keep attending to the next stage in his art.

October 10, 1985

Oh Byung-Nam

Prof, Seoul National university, Korea

The 10 Year's Work Ceramic art by Roe Kyung-Joe

Those ten years for ceramic artist Roe Kyung-Joe has been a difficult road pursuing to create in his ceramic art.

He started with the white porcelain, then he moved step by step to pottery with the overglaze-ware and now he is absorbed in Yunrimoon (Marble-ware). First stage in his work he had fully grasp the subject of the white porcelains which is deeply rooted in Korean tradition from Yi-dynasty. He research this traditional subject of the white porcelain not only theoretically but also by creating his own works. In becoming a potter, he has utilized all the processes such as modeling, forming and glazing-But experimenting with the white porcelain was the foundation from which his later works grew. He preferred linear and square forms rather than traditional curve or circular one in the white porcelain.

What he intended at the next stage he reach the colourful world of overglaze-ware. In this, he also started with traditional techniques and then he added modern idea to create his own style of ceramics.

During this time, the other problem he had to confront was the subject of Pungchung-ware which were created during the early Yi-dynasty. He was so fascinated with the unconventional and nationalistic sprits of Pungchung-ware that he was absorbed in them. But he did not stay longer, it was also another process to transfer to the other world of more genuine combination.

His bursts were colours. His method harmonized the primary coloured elements with the basic white porcelain-Overglaze is the mostly decorative elements in potteries. In this formative method the shape of the structure is very important, and colours give the expression and characteristics to the structure. During his work of over glazing period, Roe Kyung-Joe stuck to the forms and accomplished his own formations. Finally he reached the world of Yunrimoon(marble-ware). Continuing until now, after building up his foundation as a ceramic artist and such itinerancies.

Yunrimoon was a folk ceramic that was dominated by the superiorities of the white porcelaines and celadons. He found it and then had it revived in the present day. Not like the coloured potteries that are daze decorated on the surface of the shape. This Yunrimoon has an own characteristic different from the over glaze decorated, in the case of the Yunrimoon both the form and the pattern are not made separately but together at a time from the start when the patterns formed in the first kneeding stage.

As the patterns are created and take shape as form is created. Since they are created spontaneously, all the patterns are different. As every shape has its own individuality and style so does the expression of Yunrimoon. But these patterns are restored deeply in our heart because of these basic clay colored indigenous characters.

His works of Yunrimoon with its unique forms and colours, not gorgeous but still shining, survive as a unique existence in contemporary Korean ceramics and they represent a section of modern potteries.

Let us have an opportunity to trace ten years foot steps of ceramic artist Roe Kyung-Joe, and have a chance to look back upon his achievements in the corner of pottery formation.

October. 1985

Lee Kyung-sung Director

National Museum of contemporary art, Korea

Professor Roe Kyung-joe - His Life and Arts

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The 3rd Workshop for Korean Art Curators

The Korea Foundation, Roe Kyung-joe Ceramic Studio, Korea

His Family Background

Long ago I called on him several times to his house in Sungbuk-dong, Seoul. His father was usually a calm person and raised orchids indoors. It was a rare case in the 1970s when only a few households grew orchids and hard to find them even in the flower shop. So, he seemed extremely noble and pure.

Roe with close-cropped hair is in no way fastidious, but looks rather chic. His fanciful Jeep seems to be so practical for traveling the tough ground between Seoul and the country where his kiln is located, and for carrying soil and equipments. I have been to his studio nestled in a scenic part of Gwangju adjacent to the Han River. In the two spaces for life and work there were various shapes of earthenware pots and jars which he had collected for long years. Neatly and humbly arranged, they were all in harmony with each other and well fitted with their environs. The ceiling of the spaces papered with “hanji”(Korean traditional mulberry paper) suited each piece of ancient furniture such as clothes chest, cabinet and table. As his studio was properly sized and filled with a harmoniously natural atmosphere, I felt like staying more.

Considering that financial capability is required to build the kiln and equip it with necessary furniture and materials, and some aesthetic sense is needed to locate the studio in a scenic place, I think, Roe was financially supported and aesthetically trained by his family from his childhood.

Born in 1951, Roe launched his ceramic study in 1969 when he entered the Kyung Hee University College of Fine Arts. At there, he was apprenticed to Professor Chung Kyu, the first contemporary potter of Korea, and widely studied the relevant fields of ceramics such as ceramic craft and materials study. He kept studying ceramics at the graduate school of the same University. He was awarded his master’s degree for a thesis on Goryeo inlaid celadon. He executed an in-depth study on “yeollimun” and “inlaying” techniques, while writing the thesis. He also had an opportunity to

practice the 'four gentlemen,' plum blossoms, orchids, chrysanthemums and bamboo, studying under Kim Young-ki for his thesis. After completing the graduate school in 1976 he went to Japan to study absolutely different ceramics from ours. Improving his technical competence at the Kanazawa College of Art and Craft, he further studied there other technical matters and theories such as the gas kiln and color paper work.

His Exhibition Records

For an artist, holding an exhibition is the be-all and end-all of his life. Through the exhibition he can show all he has explicitly. To make a show successful he has to set up a close plan and make extremely careful preparations, giving it a long consideration. Even if it ends in failure he should pour all he has for the show.

Roe's first exhibition was held in Kanazawa, Japan where he studied ceramics for two years. It was a significant occasion to bring light to his artistic aspect of the embryonic period, and conclude his two-year study in Japan.

His lengthy exhibition records began in 1979 when he returned from Japan and actively did a variety of works including white porcelain, "buncheon" and "yeollimun" ware. It is certainly worth mentioning here he had a connection with the late Choi Soon-woo, whose penname is Hyegok and Former Director of the National Museum of Korea. Roe first met him at Kyung Hee University when he lectured there. He also recommended Roe to the Kanazawa College of Art. He was one of the jury members of Dong-a Craft Competition in which Roe received an award. Widely acknowledging his potentials and qualifications, Choi encouraged him to go further ahead.

So happily, Roe also had a special opportunity to lead his study under the guidance of Chung Kyu, Kim Soo-keun, and Lee Kyung-sung, Former Director of the National Museum of Korea. After returning from Japan in 1979 he received lots of prestigious awards including "Space" Ceramic Award and grand prize at Dong-a Craft Competition. His first solo show in Korea was held in 1981 at the Space Art Gallery. He was consecutively invited by Birmingham Museum of Art in 1982 and Japanese Cultural Center in Seoul in 1985. He also had a lengthy exhibition records, participating in 41 competitive and group shows from 1979 up to now. An artist collectively demonstrates his all potentials through a solo show, while he intensively

or selectively shows one of his artistic aspects in a group exhibition. The artist gains momentum to grow himself from all types of exhibits, as he has to exert his utmost for each show.

Such achievements were made by his strenuous efforts. He served from 1984 as a part-time lecturer and was appointed in 1984 a full-time lecturer by Kyung Hee University. He moved in 1985 to the Kookmin University College of Design and became an assistant professor in 1986.

His first encounter with the late Kim Soo-keun, a representative architect of Korea was made in 1979 by the introduction of Choi Soon-woo. Kim Soo-keun was then the Director of Kookmin University College of Design and so favorable to Roe's work that he provided in 1980 the space for displaying his work at his own architectural office under the title of <Roe Kyung-joe's Life Ceramics and Yeollimun>.

Being versatile, teaching college students, doing artworks and maintaining own art space requires much efforts and great diligence. In this respect, Roe is an artist ceaselessly urging himself to achieve the greater in the future.

The World of His Arts

Beginning ceramics first in 1979 by using a gas-fired kiln, Roe Kyung-joe started in 1982 his own studio at Punwon-ri, Gwangju-gun and built there a lumber kiln. What he submitted for his bachelor's degree was the "onggi" tile reflecting his experience with an "onggi" kiln. And he presented a thesis titled <A Study on Goryeo Inlaid Celadon> for his master's degree. Those studies and works opened his eyes to the beauty of traditional Korean ceramics. Furthermore, he was able to deepen his world through the meetings with Choi Soon-woo, Chung Kyu and Lee Kyung-sung. He massively collected old "onggi's and kiln equipments and let them occupy the center of his house. Deeply infatuated with their beauties and charms, he often did many fieldworks in the ancient kiln sites lying scattered in the entire parts of Gwangju, home to the 500-year history of Joseon earthen ware and porcelain.

Roe is much more experienced in various styles of ceramics than others: he has done porcelain, "buncheong" stoneware and even enamel ware which is absolutely different from ours. Moving away from such genres, he is now focusing his attention on "yeollimun" ware(marbled ware) whose origin is believed to be in the Goryeo era.

His “yeollimun” ware is, of course, widely different from Goryeo’s. Remains are largely tiny cups and small “hap”s(vessel with a lid) that were often used in everyday life. It is assumed that they were all made by the mixture of various clays such as porcelain, celadon and China clays, smearing its surface with glossy, pale bluish-green celadon glaze.

Roe’s “yeollimun” ware is newly created by interpreting Korean tradition into his own aesthetic sense. His “yeollimun” ware is largely categorized into four parts: he draws the motif of his square-shaped case and “hap” from the Joseon Dynasty’s refined square bottles between the 18th and 19th centuries, adding a modern touch. At the first stage his ware, in terms of pattern, was quite similar to Goryeo’s. It has a brownish tinge in harmony with beige. The color appeared is naturally divided into the lower, darkish brown and beige areas of color. That looks like a patchwork of colors. His “yeollimun” piece makes the viewer feel comfortable with its well-balanced, stable shape and the texture and color of its body clay.

Roe was so strongly attached to the shape of square bottles that he tried to express it variously: he transformed his work’s length, width or height to create various effects of shapes, maintaining its original square form. He also diversely combined two or three body clays to render a rich variety of color plates and patterns.

What he mainly created was the shape of square case and “hap” with the base and lid. Decorating with tiny ears and painting brownish tone, he executed various types of square cases. Roe, however, applied “yeollimun” technique to part of the ware. He produced also many types of “hap” that was suggestive of a small hut in the country yard. Its lid looked like a roof of the hut. Glassy yet translucent, the glaze he utilized slightly covered the color of body clay.

As his work may be divided into many groups, he is fully competent in doing white porcelain, “buncheong” stoneware and enamel ware, not to mention “yeollimun” ware. I see his other types of work as the fundamental process of his “yeollimun” piece. Deeply permeating it, those works adds more meanings and depth to his “yeollimun” ware. Through the work done by all experience, studies and techniques Roe has so far accumulated, he would like to widely inform us of the beauty, taste and meaning of the soil.

By Chung Yang-mo, Former Director of National Museum of Korea

Spirit of Korea

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Embracing the texture, color and flavor of soil in his work, Roe Kyung-joe has served as a professor at the Kookmin University College of Design. Born to a good family, he led a happy life. After studying ceramics at the college and graduate school of art in Korea, he spent two years in Japan, where he was infatuated with the new style of ceramics. At that time with a far-reaching perspective to realize his own distinctive individuality, he focused on studying ceramic art theoretically rather than practicing it. Trying on a variety of ceramics such as white porcelain, “buncheong” and enamelware ceramics, Roe released a thesis titled “A Study on Goryeo Inlaid Blue Celadon”. He intermittently made a field trip to Joseon Porcelain kiln sites mainly located in Ichon and Kwangju, Gyeonggi Province to collect a considerable volume of information. He also endeavored to capture the beauty of “onggi” and woodenware.

All types of ceramics are made of soil whose characteristic remains quite natural. Even if created artificially, ceramic art is a rare genre that carries nature as a whole. In a close-up view, however, the details of unnatural expressions are visible. For instance, glaze which is used to give the surface a shiny look has a practical purpose in ceramic making. It functions in a negative manner, concealing the infinite beauty of soil spring from its texture, color and flavor. His mature ceramics do not stop at merely executing blue celadon, “buncheong” and overglazed ware. His recent approach to “yeollimun” ware(marbled ware) tells of his affection to soil.

Everything in the universe changes constantly. All things at last turn into soil and are believed to be reincarnated in the forms of the visible or the invisible. Roe’s color scheme mainly employing brownish tone is closely associated with the colors of soil and the country yard of our hometown. His “yeollimun” ware is characterized by its strong attachment to the elements of nature. His work evidently has a natural quality in its texture, color and flavor, captivating the viewer with its expression of nostalgia.

Roe’s work, in terms of shape, appears less decorative and more pared-down. He draws the motif of square-shaped case and “hap”(vessel with a lid) from the Joseon Dynasty’s refined square bottles between the 18th and 19th centuries. Attractively

decorated with simple ears and punctured on the base to let air in, those works essentially resemble the shape of nature without adding any artificial quality. His “yeollimun” ware has the various color plates that are harmoniously arranged in a different shade of brown and beige. Oblique lines often appeared on the excessively plain and bold surface in his work look like streaks of rain falling on the window.

Amid extreme complexity in the real world in which nature is increasingly devastated, Roe’s work brings nature to our sensibilities. Full of expectation, I will keep my eye on the direction of his art in the future.

By Chung Yang-mo, Chairman of Cultural Properties Committee
Former Executive Director of National Museum of Korea