

## ARTIST LEE JONG MIN'S CHALLENGE AND PERSEVERANCE

**Amidst the nature of South Korea's forested mountains, Lee Jong Min works on his ceramic forms and structures. His studio is located in Anseong, 70 km south of Seoul. He watches a single elk descend the mountain. He hears the noise of wild cats, pheasants and sparrows. He feels the cool breeze of the night under the stars. Hours, days, months, he steadily works on the white porcelain sculpture he has under his care, until the moment of completion.**

Lee Jong Min (b. 1982) grew up in the South Korean port city of Busan. His father collected Korean paintings and ceramics. Consequently Lee developed a feeling for the arts from his roots.

An early childhood memory describes how Lee once knocked over and broke a ceramic object belonging to his father. It was carefully repaired with rice paste. He was an observant child and fascinated by the process of disassembly and assembly. His father was a dentist, a profession requiring great dexterity, patience and precision.

### **The answer is in the museum**

Lee studied arts and crafts at the renowned Chung-Ang University. After a short period of study in Europe, he returned to Korea due to family circumstances. In Europe, he experienced that frequenting museums and art galleries was the best breeding ground for his artistic development. Lee: "I realized that the answer is in the museum. There he can see and find all the material that nourishes and widens his mind.

### **René Lalique**

Discovering the work of French artist René Lalique (1860 - 1945) exponent of Art Nouveau made a big impression. According to Lee, Lalique's work blurs the line between art and craft. For Lee, it then became clear that he wanted to go along that path as well.

### **Moon jar**

When he began making pottery in 2007, Lee was primarily focused on traditional design and technology. He made white porcelain forms, such as the Moon jar and the Plum Liquor bottle. The Moon jar is a well-known form of the Joseon Dynasty, a royal house that ruled for over 500 years (1392 - 1897) and still defines Korean culture. The name of the jar is derived from the shape and color of the glaze reminiscent of the moon.



Porcelain, wheel thrown and hand carved, height 33 cm, width 29 cm, 2014

### Jeon Seong Keun

As a student, Lee met Korean ceramicist Jeon Seong Keun, whom he admired, in a pottery materials store. This artist's work consists of double-walled openwork white porcelain. Jeon Seon Keun on this occasion invited Lee for a meal. The famous master said that he was pleased to meet a student who also works with white porcelain. After Jeon Seon Keun's death in 2015, Lee Jong Min was allowed to exhibit his own work alongside that of his great example at the exhibition *The Power of [Extra]Ordinary* at the famous Korean Craft and Design Foundation's gallery in Seoul.



Porcelain, wheel thrown and hand carved, height 34 cm, width 24 cm, 2015

### **A distinctive style**

In exploring tradition, a distinctive style of form and decoration emerged that has reached fruition in 2013. By further inflating the convexity, lengthening the neck and narrowing the opening, Lee is seeking the limits of material and technique. He discovered the best clay and the best form to achieve the best possible effect of the decorative carvings. Beginning in 2014, the patterns on the sculptural forms take on more structure.

He also values following and understanding the latest developments. His goal is to create a new form with respect for history, culture and tradition that is timeless and transcends contemporary trends: "just beautiful".



Porcelain, wheel thrown and hand-carved, height 42 cm, width 21 cm, 2016



Porcelain, wheel thrown and hand-carved, height 38 cm, width 34 cm, 2018



Porcelain, wheel thrown and hand-carved, height 37 cm, width 21.5 cm, 2019

### **Turning need into virtue**

The effects of the Covid-19 crisis put the life of exhibitions on hold, but provided Lee with an opportunity to observe his own work. This brought him to take the boundaries of his designs to a new level. The basic form became more sculptural, more voluminous, and the thicker walls were given a delicate carving. The patterns, inspired by everything he observes in nature, express a new energy.

The more difficult the attempts are the more satisfying it is to complete it. A process of challenge and perseverance.



Porcelain, wheel thrown and hand-carved, height 52 cm, width 25.5 cm, 2020

**Car**

Admirers of Lee Jong Min's art are experiencing beauty, peace and comfort. It is found in many collections. Also by the German car designer Peter Schreyer, who was inspired by a piece of Lee's art when designing a streamlined model for Hyundai-Kia.



Lee exhibits all over the world. He enjoys the encounters with enthusiasts. But the artwork is created in isolation of the studio. One floor up, he lives with his family. His 10-year-old daughter gets lessons on the turntable on weekends: she too wants to make ceramics when she grows up.

Text Elisabeth Eyl

Photos Ye Gum Hae

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