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ON EDUCATION FOR THE CERAMIC ARTS

Chanakarn Semachai

Wonder Fruit

I came across a story of a man who went to jail before social media took over and changed forever how we live and interact with other human beings and the world around us. The first day he earned his freedom back, he was walking around and noticed that people had little devices on their ears and were talking to themselves. Tons of people were staring at their big phones, and no one was reading newspapers or books in the subway anymore. He had so many new things to learn and keep up with. He felt out of place, as if he didn't know this world anymore. This story got me thinking; what if dinosaurs came back to life in this present world? How would they feel? They were here first, a long time ago. They died and we took over, slowly changing their world. They would probably struggle to fit in and strive to live the life that suits this modern world. And yet, they will stand out anyway simply because they are dinosaurs.

In 2016, I moved from Thailand to the US to pursue my masters degree and was unavoidably immersed in an entirely new culture. I faced new and unforgettable experiences that have changed my thought processes and the way I make art forever.

During my time abroad, whenever I explored new places and surrounded myself in a new environment, I felt like I was a dinosaur. People's glares and culturally-insensitive comments gave me a deep stinging sensation that I did not belong. And living in a small college town with a less-than-five-percent Asian population enhanced those feelings. On one heavy snow day, I was walking to the studio while bundled in a coat and scarf with nothing showing except my eyes. I noticed a middle-aged man was staring at me. Instantly, I ran to the bathroom to look into the mirror, wondering if a person could tell if I'm Asian based on the two-inch gap between my beanie and my scarf. That was the moment I realized that this insecurity isn't good for anyone, especially me.

Since then, the more time I spent observing others in my foreign surroundings, I saw more and more people from all around the world who share similar feelings. I realized that you don't need to fit

in to be happy. I don't understand why the word 'immigrant' is associated with anything negative. I long to be in a place where my first language doesn't apply. I want to know how the experience would affect my practice, and me as a person. I learned from my experiences in the US more than any other period in my life. I learned that we should embrace our differences and find ways to live with them. I want to proudly amplify them, love them.

**Live Hopefully!
You're brilliant and
amazing and
beautiful.**

The use of different colors in my work is a way for me to demonstrate everyone's differences. Each person, as well as each color, is unique. To further demonstrate this point, I have developed a special technique for creating and casting color effects on my work by layering plexiglass. Combining colors on top of colors allows me to tell stories of cross-cultural experiences and dual or multi-cultural backgrounds, each combination is entirely unique. We are the color, the 'fruits' of our own experiences.

Before I went to the US, my future in clay seemed cloudy, so light and so vague. I didn't know how strong our clay community is. Looking back, I wouldn't even dare to imagine persuing a career in clay. I was raised and now live in Bangkok, Thailand, where ceramics has deep roots in our history

and lifestyle. For this, I am undoubtedly grateful, but also tremendously terrified. With cheap labor and numerous ceramics factories, most Thais perceive the concept of clay as being nothing more than a bowl you can find at a bargain shop. Most of the time, they devalue the handmade and view clay as a cheap material, so ceramics is on the verge of not being considered an art form. This feels like an obstacle but this also means there is still plenty of room to grow.

Becoming one of the 2022 NCECA Emerging Artists is not only a benefit to me, but I know with complete certainty that it will generate hope for other BIPOC artists like me. As an Asian woman from a tiny, forever developing country in Southeast Asia, I desire to improve my quality of life using all of the power one can create with a passion for clay.



1 CHANAKARN SEMACHAI



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2 CHANAKARN SEMACHAI, *Something, Something a Day Makes a Dogtor Come 'n' Play!*, 2019, Stoneware, underglaze, glaze, luster, nichrome wire, plexiglass Cone 04 oxidation-fired, 28" x 19" x 21", Photo credit: Chanakarn Semachai



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3 CHANAKARN SEMACHAI, *Punch and Her Yoyo Dino in a Kiln*, Edinboro, Pennsylvania, 2018, Photo credit: Brandon Lipe



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4 CHANAKARN SEMACHAI, *I Cry Rain*, 2021, Stoneware, underglaze, glaze, luster, plexiglass, Cone 04 oxidation-fired, 12" x 18" x 10", Photo credit: Chanakarn Semachai



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5 CHANAKARN SEMACHAI, *Assorted Mugs*, 2021, Stoneware, underglaze, glaze, luster Cone 6 oxidation-fired, Approximately 5.5" x 4" x 4" (each), Photo credit: Chanakarn Semachai

Chanakarn Semachai (Punch) was born and raised in Bangkok, Thailand. She graduated in 2012 with her BA in Thailand, and she earned an MFA degree from Edinboro University of Pennsylvania in 2019. She focuses on issues of identity and multiculturalism in her artwork. Currently, Semachai teaches ceramics at Chulalongkorn University, Thailand.