

Cub Creek workshop  
at Longwood University  
with Takuro and  
Hitomi Shibata  
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STUDIO POTTER

**NETWORK  
NEWS**



# LIVING THE DREAM

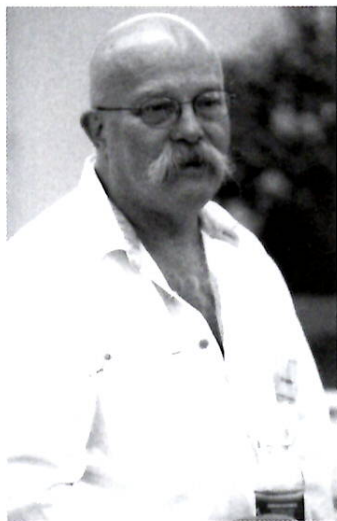
by Randy Edmonson

In the rolling hills of the Virginia Piedmont, near the historic town of Appomattox a new ceramic center is beginning to flourish. Located on "Grassydales," an early nineteenth century tobacco plantation, the Cub Creek Foundation was established in 2002 as a nonprofit organization dedicated to the advancement of the ceramic arts. The foundation, named for the creek flowing nearby, is the longtime dream of its founder and resident director John Jessiman. Jessiman, a graduate of Ball State University and the New York College of Ceramics at Alfred University, moved to Virginia six years ago after a distinguished thirty-

three-year teaching career at the State University of New York at Cortland. After purchasing one hundred acres, which included the 1833 plantation house, the veteran potter quickly established himself in his new environment, constructing a studio and two large kilns during his first eighteen months in Virginia.

Business was good and the rhythms and cycles of the potter's life were enjoyable and satisfying, but somehow not enough. As a lifelong artist and educator, Jessiman was appreciative of the

knowledge, help and kindness extended to him over the years by his teachers, colleagues, friends and students and felt the need to "give something back". During his career Jessiman had occasionally employed apprentices in his studio, but now, was envisioning something larger or broader in



scope. He spent the next two years brainstorming with friends and colleagues and slowly shaped his vision.

A familiarity with craft schools such as Penland, Arrowmont and Haystack, as well as teaching one summer at the Archie Bray Foundation, had convinced Jessiman of the value of an art experience in a communal environment auxiliary to a traditional college or university education. He decided to establish a nonprofit foundation to







provide reasonably priced housing, studio space and facilities for a number of young people interested in careers in the ceramic arts. In addition, the organization would sponsor workshops by prominent clay artists and have an artist-in-residence program for

professionals wishing to work at the foundation for a given length of time.

Jessiman formed a board that includes an attorney and a museum director as well as several artists and educators. The foundation was incorporated, and in the summer of 2002 received approval of its application for 501(c)(3) status as a nonprofit organization. The board approved a concept that stressed a resident intern program geared to young clay artists preparing to set up their own production studios, producing a body of work for a portfolio to gain admittance to a graduate school, or post-MFA artists in need of studio space. Internships are one year in length, usually beginning in August or January.

In anticipation of beginning the program, Jessiman had constructed a new, large (40 ft. x 72 ft.) studio for use by interns and visiting artists as well as being the venue for workshops. The new building has six studio spaces, a glaze mixing area, small kitchen and a full

bath. Plans call for a gas kiln and a small wood-burning kiln to be housed in a kiln shed next to the new building. A large noborigama kiln Jessiman built two years ago is situated between his studio and the intern studio. Interns and artists-in-residence currently live in the plantation house approximately a quarter of a mile from the studios.

The fall of 2002 saw the arrival of the



**THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:** Val Cushing during the first workshop. Artist-in-residence at Cub Creek, Takuro Shibata working on a slab sculpture and large urn at Longwood University.

**OPPOSITE PAGE LOWER LEFT:** John Jessiman, founder of Cub Creek. **CENTER AND LOWER RIGHT:** Val Cushing during the first workshop.



first two interns, Shanna Fliegel and Richard Taylor, both of whom are interested primarily in functional pottery. Shanna is a BFA graduate of James Madison University and plans on attending graduate school in the future. She is currently working on forms in stoneware and porcelain for salt and wood firing. Richard attended Alfred





**CENTER AND ABOVE RIGHT:**  
Artist-in-residence,  
Hitomi Shibata working  
on a large bowl.

**LEFT:** Professor, Suk Jin  
Choi kneading clay.  
**LOWER RIGHT:** Ms. Choi  
hand building a large urn.



University, has worked with different studio potters and was working for Clay Times magazine prior to coming to Cub Creek. He was drawn by the opportunity to learn more about firing wood kilns and intends to set up his own studio when he leaves the program.

In October Val Cushing presented the first workshop sponsored by the new organization. Long recognized as a leading American master and one of its greatest ceramics teachers, Cushing conducted a thoughtful and meaningful two-day session for sixty participants from the region. Reviews of the event were overwhelmingly positive, and potters of all levels left the workshop with a few new techniques,

a refreshed perspective and a great appreciation for Val's abilities as an artist and a teacher.

Two of the workshop participants, Hitomi and Takuro Shibata, were so impressed with the facilities that they asked Jessiman if they might return to Cub Creek in January 2003 as artists-in-residence. The Shibatas are both professional potters and residents of Shigaraki, Japan and were living in Massachusetts where Hitomi was finishing a year as the recipient of a Rotary Club International Ambassadorial

Scholarship at the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth. Takuro had worked as a resident artist at both the Worcester (MA) Craft Center and Peter's Valley

Craft Center (NJ). Arriving at Cub Creek in early January, Hitomi and Takuro walked in the front door of the studio and right out the back door where they dug clay from the "mountain" pushed up during construction of the new building. They spent the next five months creating an impressive array of pots made primarily from this local clay, glazed with ash from the fireplace and fired to cone 12 in the noborigama kiln. A workshop at the Longwood (University) Center for the Visual Arts introduced the

Shibatas and their work to the local community. They also joined Richard and Shanna in an outreach program at a nearby elementary school where the four potters spent the day working with over two hundred students, helping them create wheel-thrown and handbuilt projects. Hitomi and Takuro shared a wealth of knowledge with everyone they met prior to their June departure for Japan. They plan on returning to the U.S. in 2004 for the NCECA conference in Indianapolis.

Enhancing the international flavor at Cub Creek in May was the arrival of Professor Suk Jin Choi. Ms. Choi, an accomplished clay artist who has taught at three universities in Seoul, South Korea, had just completed a semester as a visiting professor at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) and a one-month residency at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond. She was invited to be an artist-in-residence by foundation board member Steven Glass, the resident potter at the Virginia Museum. Suk Jin spent several weeks in May and June creating a series of beautiful stoneware sculptures as well as numerous







ABOVE LEFT: Friends and interns at the Cub Creek workshop – Takuro Shibata (STANDING CENTER), Hitomi (SEATED CENTER). ABOVE, CENTER AND RIGHT: Takuro Shibata hand building a large urn.

functional pieces in the traditional Korean “Onggi” style. In May she joined Hitomi and Takuro to present “Three Asian Points of View,” a dynamic workshop attended by an enthusiastic audience. In June, Suk Jin’s work was fired in the noborigama kiln with stunning results. Suk Jin will return to VCU in the fall and will be coming back to Cub Creek occasionally to create work to be fired in the noborigama.

There is much left to do, but by fall the new interns will be settled in and working, and the Cub Creek community will be looking forward to the Brad Schweiger workshop on October 25 and 26. The second edition of the foundation’s newsletter, The Firebox, will be in circulation, wood will be split and stacked for the fall firing, and plans

for the construction of new intern housing will be underway. The rhythms of the potter’s life continue, and John Jessiman’s dream of giving something back is alive and well in the heart of Virginia.

EDITOR’S NOTE: For further information on John Jessiman or the Cub Creek Foundation, see “How Deep a Life;” in the Nov., 2002 issue of *Ceramics Monthly* magazine; “A Weekend With Val Cushing;” in the Jan./Feb. issue of *Clay Times* magazine or log on to [www.cubcreek.org](http://www.cubcreek.org).

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