

Vision, Tension and Persistence: The Ceramic Artworks of Po-Ching Fang

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Considering the artworks presented in this exhibition as a culmination of years of thinking, making and research, there is a multiplicity of recurring themes that create this cohesive and very successful body of work by Po-Ching Fang, professor and mid career Taiwanese ceramic artist. The body of work is robust with both materiality and conceptual strength. Both demonstrate elements that the artist manipulates with skill and grace to bring about strategic visual communication of his carefully considered ideas.

The work is complex; it is not “about” one idea or another. Instead it reflects a persistent thread, and the artist manipulates that thread, much in the way a musician develops a theme, and from it spins off variations, harmonies and refrains. First of all, Fang gives us the cup. It is his primary statement, and it unites and creates cohesion through this entire exhibition. It is, however a subtle and nuanced cup, more than suggestive of utility and function. Certainly these cups can contain liquid, but clustered as they are within a supporting structure, they can act as a hive, a group of cells within a matrix, or an assembly of vehicles. The visual idea is containment,

and the research is the gesture of positioning containment. This notion stretched to its ultimate reference is the dialog of one cup, one vessel to the other. Do they nod? Are they preparing to collide? The cups with their tilting and off-kilter stance are anything but static—they are moving and dynamic.

In contrast to the constant gestural shifting of the cups is the dark, metallic sculptural table-like structures of the surround, the shelf, the enclosure. It is the juxtapositioning with the flatness—so unlike the lyrical cups - that creates the tension in these pieces. This constraining sculptural element suggests both industrial architecture and a harsh, dark landscape. The support, while acting as a visual and functional constraint, is not a harmful one. The playful, gestural cups can move and function because the structure keeps them secure and safe. The architecture of the slab support then reads as “shelter”.

In his use of the clay in making this work, the evidence of the artist’s hand, his touch, is capable and secure. The thrown form is handled deftly; the lightness and translucency of the porcelain works in

service to the conceptual idea of gesture and “conversation” among the cups. The crackle slip/glaze and dark rectangular marks on the lower parts of the vessel become a transitional surface, a kind of preparation for the eye and the hand to travel back and forth from the glassy cup to the darker, drier surround. The thin dark band and the small rectangles foreshadow the supremacy and power of the surrounding support. That “shelter” is both protective and imposing, built with deliberation from a strong, immovable heavy metallic stoneware. Fang handles this clay with the same confidence, expertise and care that he gives the porcelain. The material becomes conceptual. It is a cave for the hive, a strong dock and pier for the little boats, a shelter for the family.

The materiality that enlivens the conceptual is made possible by Po-Ching Fang’s singular vision. The contrasts of material and form could be seen as an expression of the duality of human experience—at once tender, loving and playful yet undertaking a more somber responsibility, duty and caretaking. Or could the expressive quality of material and form—with the mastery of both—also be viewed as a response to both Eastern and Western cultures that is so much

within the psyche of Taiwan? With Fang’s training, residencies, graduate education, and travel in the United States and in Australia, can the viewer help but draw those parallels? It is the province of the artist to challenge and assist the viewer and user to consider the world in a more illuminated way. Fang accomplishes this with his use of material; a cup of porcelain could simply be fine craft, but in this artist’s mind and through his vision it becomes much more.

If we were to use Po-Ching Fang’s cup for drinking, we will have had a singular and intimate experience. But if we consider our experience with that cup as a kind of shared existence within a hive, cell structure or family, we have expanded our understanding of community. If we replace the cup in its structural environment, we become active in its protection. In our ultimate experience of participating and viewing works in this exhibition, we become connected with a strong and persistent dialog between Eastern and Western cultures as expressed by a significant ceramic artist and educator of our time. With his exhibition, Po-Ching Fang has created an illuminated experience for us that engages our intellect, our artistic awareness, and our sensuous human sensibilities. ■