

Peace of Pottery

The brilliant, earthy art of Po-Wen Liu

By MARIA JOHNSON



Three Eaves Pagoda

he space within.

That's what you need to visualize in order to understand Po-Wen Liu's pottery, or, as he likes to call his pieces, sculpture vessels.

"Usually, sculpture is about the space surrounding the sculpture," he says, "but a sculpture vessel is about the space within the vessel."

Viewers will have a chance to mentally crawl inside Liu's latest works during a solo exhibition at UNCG's Gatewood Gallery this month.

The vessels on display are a departure for Liu, in form and in method. Tall and thin, shaped like wings and cylinders, the new pieces were cast in molds, not thrown on a wheel. Some of the works will be hung on walls.

Still, Liu says, the good stuff's inside.

"They're like seed pods," he says, smiling.

It's a different way of thinking about space and art, one that's foreign to the American obsession with the exterior, one that whispers of a different culture.

Liu, pronounced lee-oh, traces his sensibilities to his native Taiwan.

Growing up in an agricultural area, he drew and painted landscapes for school contests.

"Whenever I did, I would get first place," he says. "It was encouragement."

The future took shape, too, in the hours that he and his cousins played around his uncle's ceramics factory, a bakery of roof tiles, water jars and bricks.

"I was fascinated with the process," Liu says. "How can clay, so soft, become fired and hard and so useful?"



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