

## 2016 Taiwan Ceramic Biennale International Competition Contemporary Currents of Ceramics

### 'International Regionalism'

The 2016 Taiwan Ceramics Biennale - with its stated purpose to "summon the spirit of passion for ceramics", and with the historical and contemporary commitment of the New Taipei City Yingee Museum to support international ceramics- has a substantial charge. If there is a single common observation we could make about this broad realm of ceramics - it is the ever-diverse formats whereby the 'stuff of clay', through human agency and technology, is taken towards the state of 'ceramic'. Visual artists who work with clay and ceramic in this multiplicity of ways find themselves identified through categories influenced by institutions and commerce – especially the financially consequential commerce of the visual art world. The purpose of any international exhibition competition might be to address the 'contemporary' by aligning it with relevance – beyond or despite predictable categorization and art world commerce. But is this really possible?

Across the globe artists/ceramists come up through the ranks of educational systems, socio-economic systems, theoretical positions, geographies, cultural and political histories, and other first hand experience that shape what they do, why they do it and who they do it for. Artists have ready access to trending international ceramic art tenets while their practice might be simultaneously rooted in what is distinctly regional or local. Online culture is one enabler in this case and it can be strategically narrow and self-affirming, or it can be expansive and connective. Regardless of any particular tendencies or professional orientation, ceramic practices that primarily have regional visibility can certainly be relevant to global culture, even if less visible in the international ceramic arena (such as international competitions). Work that is highly visible at the international level may be available broadly, but this does not guarantee that it is the most culturally effective artistic output. Obviously, to suggest the regional and the international are mutually exclusive, or to suggest there is one comprehensive ceramic 'scene' that shares common values are both erroneous statements.

The coined phrase 'international regionalism' is awkward and paradoxical. It emerged out of attempts to visualize the complexity of sociological structures that impact critical thinking and making in creative ceramic practice, how these practices are 'lived' in the world and 'where they live' in the world. It resists the assumption that what is labeled 'international' is far-reaching and fully representative. It also recognizes that creative work may, or may not be, contingent to current national borders – as stable or instable as these might be - but that it is connected to culture/s, situation and circumstance. It is also a way of thinking about how a community – regional or international, not only accounts for 'difference', but supports difference and the range of ceramic based practices and genres that are relevant and vibrant– beyond the most visible and obviously privileged.

The 21st century is a time of 'essential paradox' and is essentially paradoxical in ways that are increasingly apparent. Dichotomies such as old/new, forward/back, analog/digital, historical/contemporary, regional/international, are increasingly less productive as the century unfolds. The paradox inherent in the international juried exhibitions we see every two or three years in the countries of Taiwan, Korea, United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Australia to name several – might be the visible/invisible. There is a wide range of work that shows up in these exhibitions and there is a lack of range. There is contemporary work that appears regularly and there is relevant ceramic work that is conspicuously absent.

Connections between how and why things get made, and how and why things get seen, are in the stories of people, places and resources. What gets seen, in the most general terms, is always related to proximity, focus and light. Proximity, focus and light, in the above context are where this conversation begins.

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