

East-West Ceramics Exhibition in Korea

Evelyne Schoenmann and Petra Lindenbauer



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Evelyne Schoenmann, Jane Jermyn, Petra Lindenbauer and Kylli Kõiv at the opening ceremony of the exhibition

South Korea's capital city Seoul is a place with two complementary facets. On the one hand, carefully maintained examples of the centuries-old Korean culture are everywhere in evidence, including extensive parks and royal palaces, repositories of calm. The lovingly cared-for ancestral shrines that encompass the parks also radiate a special atmosphere. And in addition, the traditional districts are full of appeal, for example Insadong with its narrow alleys, lined with tea houses in the hanok style, small artisan workshops and hospitable local restaurants. And wherever you go, you come across the inviting street kitchens and street markets. In marked contrast stands the modern side of Seoul with its 12 million inhabitants, its sea of housing, the flood of flashing lights, oversized video screens on the facades of many high-

rise buildings displaying an uninterrupted stream of garish advertising. Of course visitors constantly encounter all the latest technology, which in the simplest possible way helps them to find their way around and to keep up to date with the latest news and information.

Of course, Korea is the country of ceramics. In the national museum, which Koreans of all age groups are justifiably proud of, but also in numerous museums based on private collections such as Leeum or Horim, exquisite ancient ceramics and other exhibits can be found. Here, visitors can admire the famous Buncheong ceramics in high-class exhibitions, but galleries and university museums also exhibit ceramics on a regular basis. Thus the well-known Han-yang University has organised exhibitions with ceramic artists from Korea and chang-

ing guest nations for the past five years. For 2016, the chair of the university art department, Professor Lee Boo Yun had decided to invite four smaller European countries at once to exhibit as guests: Estonia, Ireland, Austria and Switzerland. I was pleased to take over responsibility for the coordination of the four Western countries and, together with Professor Lee, the organisation of the event in Korea. The first task was to select the participants from the West. The number of western ceramists was restricted to the handy formula 4×8 . There was great interest in participating in the four Western countries and the work submitted by the applicants was of a correspondingly high standard. During the organisation phase, e-mails were flying to and fro between Korea and Switzerland as well as among the four Western countries. I discovered at that time that in spite of frequently differing views on organisation and responsibilities, the common goal of a joint exhibition of East and West generated a unifying force.

In April 2016, the four representatives of the respective countries and further participants met in Seoul. In the afternoon of 14 April, Kylli Kõiv for Estonia, Jane Jermyn for Ireland, Petra Lindenbauer for Austria and myself for Switzerland gave talks on the history of ceramics in our respective countries as a part of a specialist seminar. Then the opening ceremony took place in the Museum of the University. To

Icheon Ceramics Village – kiln



Stone house and onggi pots on Jeju



the great pleasure of all participants, besides the Vice Chancellor and dignitaries from the University, the ambassadors and representatives from the embassies from Ireland, Austria and Switzerland did us the honour of attending and jointly cut the ribbon to open the exhibition. In addition, the embassies had generously supported this event. The following day, Lynn Frydman Kuhn from Switzerland and the Estonian ceramists Urmas Puhkan and Lauri Kilusk demonstrated their skills in various workshops. In the following days, we were able to learn a great deal about the various other cultures at events in Seoul and Icheon, as well as cementing new friendships.

Ceramist Petra Lindebauer also flew to the island of Jeju to study the ceramic culture there. This is what she had to say: “After the opening ceremony, I went to the Island of Jeju to the south of the mainland. This volcanic island is a UNESCO World Natural Heritage Site. The extinct volcano Hallasan, the highest mountain in South Korea, is situated in the centre of the island. Its geology: basalt, trass and scoria, a kind of pyroclastic material, has long dominated the lives of the farmers and potters there. The soil on the island is rich in volcanic ash, and just as the sand on the coasts shows a whole range of colours from greyish brown to a yellowish red, the important onggi pots display various nuances of colour. Due to fly ash during the woodfiring, the surface of the pots is strikingly smooth and glossy. In contrast to the mainland, the earthenware pots on Jeju are not glazed, but after firing they are treated with oil. Onggi symbolises the island, the oldest archaeological find dates back to 10,000 B.C. A visit to the Jeju Stone Park makes the geological history of the island accessible. In the extensive grounds, the path leads the visitors past countless onggi pots. They are used as fermentation vessels for rice wine. However, the pottery tradition is in decline here as only a small number of potters still possess the requisite making and firing skills. In the grounds, I also discovered much smaller onggi pots than the fine specimens I had previously seen. They are more suitable for making and storing kimchi, the fermented vegetables that are served with meals everywhere in Korea. The kilns are special: basalt is the building material of choice used for the boundaries of fields but also for house and kiln building. The ceramist Kim Young Soo (Jeju Ceramic Culture Museum) has made an intensive study of the soil on the island.”

Incidentally, the multinational exhibition in Korea has led to a highly positive sequel: each of the four participating European countries is shortly to invite the other three countries to exhibit in their own country.

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PETRA LINDENBAUER

studied art history and archaeology after training in ceramics. She has been working as a freelance ceramist in Austria for over twenty years.

Roof tiles and pots at Jeju Stone Park



Cumin Kim outside his shop in Icheon



Part of the Hanyang exhibition

Workshop with Lynn Frydman Kuhn

