

## Ceramic Arts and Art Criticism – A Perspective of Contemporary Measure

Ceramics is a language that allows clay artists to cross the boundaries of cultures. International art activities have been crossing borders of East and West with the most broadest and positive definition of visual art in the ceramics field. This is a breadth of experimentation for new and different inspirations for many. Also, it ideally explores new ideas and contexts and has the potential to stimulate creativity and promote the sharing of skills and cultural impulsion between the global, audiences and professional artists.

“Ceramic Arts and Art Criticism – A Perspective of Contemporary Measure” reflects critical thinking and its development and movement today that has opened a vast new world of possibilities and challenges. It also breaks through and confirms a constantly being reinvented and more vibrant artistic movement as a development of contemporary ceramic arts in the Twenty-First Century.

Art criticism is a discussion or evaluation of visual art. We usually criticize art in the context of aesthetics or the theory of beauty. One of criticism's goals is the pursuit of a rational basis for art appreciation.

Examine any object we are willing to call art. Observation, representation and interpretation have to be joined in order to fully understand the symbols, subjects and themes affiliated with a specific work and how the work relates to the culture and times in which it was produced, and must be familiar with its heritage and purposes. In order to appreciate the significance of the work, critics must be able to identify, describe and interpret what is actually in the work in terms of its expressive properties, and to assess, or make judgments about, the work's personal, artistic and social values. This is within the realm of art criticism.

When we carefully examine works of art, we are sharpening our perceptual tools; we are both building and utilizing our knowledge of the images required for making visual sense out of experience. When we make objective judgments about what works of art affect us emotionally and intellectually, we are engaging in an analytical and critical thinking process. Specifically, art criticism leads to a greater understanding and appreciation of works of art.

Identifying and describing: if anyone is to respond to a work of art as fully as possible, it is essential that effort be invested in carefully examining every aspect of the work. Specific shapes, colors, values and textures, and where these visual qualities are located need to be identified and observed. In addition, what is obviously needs to be articulated. The key point is the necessity to evaluate what has been experienced in detail in order to verify the validity of one's observations; for example, describing the range of colors, variations in dark and light qualities, the width of lines, and visual textures... If qualities within the artwork are not carefully observed, than one's response will be stunted and appreciation will be limited. On the other hand, if qualities are ascribed to the work that do not actually exist within it, then one's response will be invalid.

Analyzing: contemplating how the characteristics of the work that have been identified and described are organized. What can actually be seen in a work of art includes the ways visual elements and images have been arranged, how the work has been formed, in other words - its formal properties. A careful look through of a work will reveal: its means to achieve a sense of unity, the elements that appear to be dominant, the nature of implied movements, and how balance is achieved ranging between symmetry and asymmetry. It is essential to analyze as carefully as possible how visual qualities are arranged because the nature of these qualities and their distribution are the best and most legitimate indicators of what is being expressed both overtly and covertly.

Interpreting: making an accurate assessment of the formal "objective" qualities in works of art are critical to discerning what the work expresses. Interpretation is also a pure description of the object without value judgments to establish the broader context for the work. The emotions and thinking process evoked by looking at the work should be based upon what can actually be observed.

Judgments: Judgments do not exist in isolation; they are relative to a variety of criteria, which also need to be clarified. Judgment must consider a very important aspect of the visual arts – its originality. Judgment without interpretation and understanding the artwork is irresponsive to the work itself and the artist.

Good criticism is careful and engaging argumentation that furthers dialogue about art and the experience of life; unclear statements of good or bad judgment can be negative to fruitful critical dialogue and argument. Positive criticism involves the experience of art through language to interest and inform the audience, and to increase the public's thoughtful appreciation of art. Criticism must very carefully articulate the responses to art and communicate it to the audience. This communication includes the critic's own voice and reaction to the work. In addition, a variety of critical voices also are healthy for artists as well as for the audience to learn and grow. Thinking about works of art allows them to identify and formulate their own voices.

Description, interpretation, judgment and art theory are often connected and confused in criticism. I think that interpretation is the most important critical element and activity in criticism, if one fully understands a work of art, judgment becomes secondary, and may not be even necessary. Judgment without interpreting and understanding the artwork are irresponsive to the work itself and the artist, especially. One of criticism's goals is the pursuit of a rational basis for art appreciation.

In critiques, interpretation is very often given by the artist whose work is being discussed. Then the critique is based on internationalism and, specifically, the artist's intent. The focus of a critique is usually and predominantly the judgment of how good or bad the work is and how to make it better. Often the judgments are based on the artist's stated intent. I always encourage

my students to create experiences and to work with challenges, to remain true to oneself and any honest mark is a potential. The result of these efforts should be looked at with great fondness and evaluated for what it is and what potential it might bring. This brings a breadth of experimentation for new and different inspirations for my students.

As an artist, and as a maker myself, how do I describe, interpret and even evaluate my own artistic work? How sensitively am I involved with my own art making process? How do I fully express my artistic language to the material and form? How do I define the abstract forms in an artistic language that is expressive? How are the forms interesting enough to be creative? How is the communication language through the art forms clarified? How is the quality of the craftsmanship as well as the artistic message? How is every mark on the work to be honest and sincere as needed and necessary? How is the message delivered to the viewers through the forms and its details? How could I make the work alive so that it is able to face viewers and communicate with them? How is the visible art form to be of equal weight with its invisible deepest understanding of my inner feelings? How do I continue to evaluate my motif and the final visual presentation and I keep asking questions of myself?

Henry Moore says sculpture for me, must have life in it. By creating a vitality and life within a form and meaning is to keep primitive power with humanist content. Conceptually and ideally, *Mother and Child* is from tradition to contemporary, from realistic emotional expression to abstract presentation, from East to West, abstract forms based on value and aesthetic expression of feelings toward my mother. I value form, space and line between internal and external – one cannot exist without the other.

For the last several years, I have addressed in my work the central relationship between my mother and myself. Twenty some years ago, she fell to Parkinson's disease. As the only son in my family and in accord with the tradition of Chinese culture, it became my role to take full responsibility of her and be strong. As a result, my relationship with my mother continued to grow. I encouraged her with love and warmth. May 7<sup>th</sup>, 2003, my mother left her physical body and she is in God's hand now. Her love has been around as always and she has more to offer. My sculpture is also the testimony of my faith.

*Mother and Child* is a connection over space and distance with my mother. It is a measurement in feelings through my own personal experience, presenting movement, energy, love, relation, honesty, and integrity. It is a dialogue. It is a vocabulary of visual communication. The composition of gestural abstract forms is effected strongly by the spaces between forms. The energy comes from the point where the pieces touch. Also, I believe that the content of my sculpture to be an emotional connection between form and materials. The whole process is an attempt to reach for the best synthesis of contemporary communication and to find a link to express my voice in artistic expression with mass audiences both in Eastern and Western cultures. My work is my language of communication that crosses the boundaries of culture.

My sculptural exploration of form, space and line has become my outer language to embody my inner feelings about this experience. It also expresses the crossed boundaries between Eastern and Western culture and aesthetics-as well as the physical distance between my mother and myself.

The Twenty-First century of modernism and post modernism with the idea of the contemporary is characterized by pluralism. Critical thinking must continue to develop for artists and art educators for a better quality of artistic characteristics, which describe its value and process. Using aesthetics through artistic challenges and innovation empowers the materials and stirs up emotions and creativity to share among ourselves, which in turn is shared within the artistic community.

I continually seek to refine, strengthen and challenge myself and my ceramics work, and am willing to share my artistic and technical abilities, my culture, my serious intellectual and critical exploration of ceramic art and ceramic sculpture with the international ceramics community. My vision and expectation brings to the professional environment energy and a new sense of purpose. It also enables me to open up more and to communicate a higher level of intellectual and creative endeavor. I will do my best living in an accord and harmony with the principle to pursue a more successful life experience, to be a fine educator and an excellent artist.