

Cultural influence: From Traditional Expression to Modern Context

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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". Michelangelo also said that "a piece of sculpture should be such that it could be rolled down hill without breaking." Ceramic, the art of making in clay and firing, is among the most ancient arts of man and also is one of the most important. To try to define the beauty and fine art of the material, we consider the unlimited number of appeals we enjoy through ceramics. So it is that some wares feel right in weight and form, and some glazes are far more pleasant to the touch than others. This is ceramics.

Certainly the first cups made were hand patted and took the place of primitive needs. The Chinese are credited with the discovery that clay is made dense and impermeable at high temperatures. This is one of the major technical discoveries in ceramics. This ware, when fired, turns white and soon the drive was on among potters around the world. There is evidence as early as 5000 B.C. The influences of Han (206 B.C – A.D. 220) to Six Dynasties (A.D. 220 – 587) of China and Chinese porcelain naturally spread to Korea.

The dominant characteristic of Japanese ceramic art is the love of nature. Some Japanese pottery was original in conception; most Japanese porcelain is imitative from nature as well as the traditional wood firing and wood ash glaze are particularly attractive with local clay bodies in Japanese pottery history. In pre-dynastic Egypt as early as 4321 B.C., red and black pottery was made and decorated with some angular ornament and freely drawn human and animal motives.

The Greeks making pottery were as early as 2500 B.C. They had developed successful pottery-manufacturing technology. The Greeks claim the invention of ceramic art applied to representational form of the human figure. The majolica ware of the fifteenth century developed by the Moors on the island of the Majorca was a type of enamel. Germany is known for salt-glazed stoneware, which first appeared there in the sixteenth century, and for its Dresden porcelains.

England has given much leadership to the industry. In 1751 in Liverpool, the first successful attempts at transferring engravings to pottery and porcelain were made. Designs were printed in ceramic colors on paper and transferred to ceramics much the same as is done with ceramic decalcomania transfers today. Native American pottery began about 500A.D. The coil method was used; the designs went through periods of realism and conventionalism. Now, American ceramics is actually showing the influence of the American spirit of its contemporary tradition. Today the cultural influences are less bound by the traditions and through visual communication have crossed boundaries of cultures.

If we look back at the history and the traditional expression in ceramics, is the history affecting how we think today, how we work as artists, how we communicate, and how we even educate the young and next generations?

Cultural influence allows ceramic art education to cross the boundary of cultural experiences and challenges in a profound artistic development. As a Chinese individual in the United States and teaching at Indiana State University, I understand that the impact of both cultural influences communicate in ceramic art education the diversity of universal vision. Ceramic art education through cultural influence is an attempt to reach for the best synthesis of contemporary communication and to find a link with younger generations.

Drawing from cultural experiences and a philosophical vision of the world, the extraordinary power of ceramic art education will help young generations and artists. International student exchanges, residency programs, conferences and symposiums, and cross cultural exhibition opportunities are some examples of ways to create hope. This is experimentation for new and different inspirations and serious intellectual and critical exploration for students.

Ceramic art education with cultural influence also presents a strong artistic development with the broadest positive definition in the international visual arts community. A cultural experience is ideally suited to explore new ideas and contexts and have the potential to stimulate creativity and promote the sharing of skills and cultural impulsion between personal and cultural aesthetics. It would also provide young generations the freedom of wider international arable and interconnection with the global ceramic profession.

The total commitment of ceramic art education characterizes every reason to hope for extending the world. I believe that ceramic art education reflects a clay artist's development and movement, and it opens a vast new world of possibilities and flexibilities with knowledge through our imagination. Cultural influences achieve and develop each individual's artistic vocabulary. This impact will help to stimulate the younger generation's creativity and direct them into more successful life experiences.

I communicate Asian ceramic traditions to modern American culture, for instance, by using Eastern traditions, materials and techniques, and by reinterpreting them into a contemporary context. In Chinese art, there is a consistent characteristic in composition that is "nature" and "symmetry" as well as "balance" and "stability", and these are the most important elements for expression. It also forms the focus of my vision in the series of my work – "Mother and Child." The Chinese characteristics can purify and engage the American culture through education and professional communication. Natural material resources and traditional Eastern techniques communicate in the modern Western society of America through ceramic art education. Through my art training, knowledge, personal expression, cultural aesthetics, and communication, I share and serve the Asian tradition

of cultural ceramic art history and movement to the vastly different cultural background of America society.

Ceramic art education attempts to clarify the significance of technique and material, form and content, history and process, possibilities and creativity, value and conception, image and communication, and the future to cross the various young generations, either directly or indirectly. From the historical point of view to contemporary eyewitness, the material and conception are the reproduction of our own interpretation. Meaning is the result of understanding. The message is not only present in images but also reflects the truthfulness of our own experiences. More importantly, art and art education are continuing to cross boundaries of cultures through cultural experience and artistic development. A young generation's steadiness at originality and vision presents the clarity of artistic purpose that will make great artists.

An artist's statement of "Mother and Child" through cultural influence expresses the development of the growth of cultural expression that characterizes the quality of originality through the material to images, from East to West as well as from tradition to contemporary as following:

For the last several years, I have addressed in my work the central relationship between my mother and myself. Eighteen years ago, she fell into Parkinson's disease. As the only son in my family and in accord with the tradition of Chinese culture, it comes to my role to take full responsibility of her and be strong. As a result, my relationship with my mother has grown. I encourage her with love and warmth and I told her I love her. May 7th, 2003, my mother has 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.

My sculpture exploration of form, space and line has become my outer language to embody my inner feelings about this experience. I value form, space and line between internal and external – one cannot exist without the other. It has also expressed the crossed boundaries between Eastern and Western culture and aesthetics-as well as the physical distance between my mother and myself.

"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. As a ceramic art educator myself, I always encourage my students to create experiences, and to work with challenges, to remain true to oneself and any honesty mark is potential. I always want to make a special environment for my students. That is structure, discipline, challenge, and personal direction. I also encourage my students to consider their personal and social values when making professional goals and prepare them to meet life's challenges with confidence and purpose.

Finally, ceramic art education through the material – clay connects cultures from tradition to contemporary. As an artist, as an educator, I share my experience with my students,

and help to bridge students to grow. Using simple, profound truths through education is to empower the material to stir emotion and creation to share amongst ourselves. “Mother and Child” is one of the examples of cultural influence – from traditional expression to modern context.