

'FROM THE FIRE'

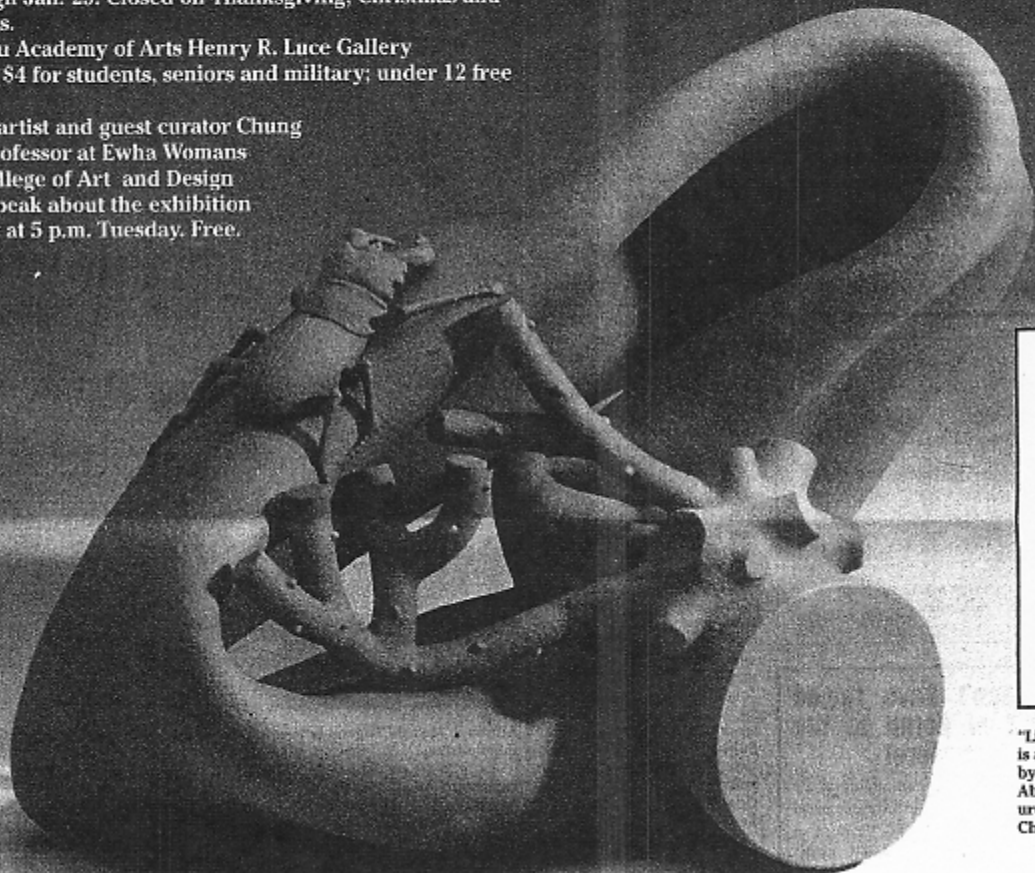
An exhibition of contemporary Korean ceramics

On view: 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Tuesdays to Saturdays and 1 to 5 p.m. Sundays through Jan. 29. Closed on Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's days.

Place: Honolulu Academy of Arts Henry R. Luce Gallery

Admission: \$7; \$4 for students, seniors and military; under 12 free
Call: 532-8701

Note: Ceramic artist and guest curator Chung Hyun Cho, a professor at Ewha Womans University's College of Art and Design in Seoul, will speak about the exhibition at the academy at 5 p.m. Tuesday. Free.



"Life of Nature 2000 — II" is a stoneware clay work by Chun Hak Oh, left. Above is one of the figures from Jin Won Chung's "A Pair I."

Art reflects the cycle of life

By Nadine Kam
nkam@starbulletin.com

TO BE a ceramist in Korea today is to bear the weight of past struggles to keep the tradition alive. It's no wonder Ewha Womans University professor Chung Hyun Cho says that fewer artists want to soil their hands by taking on the burden and labor required to transform clay. Korean students instead are gravitating toward the instant gratification of technology and computer arts.

From her vantage point as curator of the Honolulu Academy of Arts' new exhibition "From the Fire: A Survey of Contemporary Korean Ceramics," and as one of the artists of a generation that helped to resuscitate the art form from near death in the latter half of the 20th century, Cho recognizes the struggle as part of the cycle of life.

"Like any movement, some come up and some come down, and it will come back again. I hope this exhibition will have an impact eventually on Korea itself."

She wouldn't be surprised if the next "Korean" ceramics revival is led by Americans.

"People in the East are becoming more Western, and in the West people are looking more toward the East. It's a recurring thing in the new millennium."

"This show began touring four years ago across the U.S.A. It began in Dallas, then went to New Mexico, Pasadena and L.A. The response has been overwhelming because people are not only finding it refreshing in the area of contemporary Korean ceramics, but in the field of ceramics generally."

"People have been very supportive, and more American students are wanting to come to Korea to study ceramics."

The exhibition comprises 108 pieces by 54 artists, with works reflecting ancient celadon, white ware and "punch'ong" traditions, while displaying a dynamic, contemporary aesthetic. Works are divided into three broad categories representing the modern move-



"Inlaid Celadon Bottle with Fish Shaped Handles" by Jong Koo Hwang is included in "From the Fire," on exhibit through Jan. 29 at the Honolulu Academy of Arts.

ment's early years, sculptural works and pieces that combine tradition with individual expression.

Julia White, the academy's curator of Asian art, said she first saw the pieces in photos circulated by the show's organizer, International Arts and Artists, and looked forward to presenting the show where it could be compared with the academy's collection of traditional Korean ceramic ware dating to the eighth century.

"We probably have one of the biggest and most important collections of Korean ceramics outside of Korea, and this was an opportunity to see it juxtaposed with very avant-garde, very experimental and innovative work in which some pieces

look like wood, some look like stone."

CHO CREDITS her teacher, the late Jong Koo Hwang, with starting the modern movement by founding the ceramics school at Ewha Womans University. Two of his works are included in the exhibition.

"Teaching was based on traditional Korean ceramics, but it changed very quickly because many students studied in America and they came back to teach," Cho said.

Before then, Korea's ceramic tradition had been on a downward spiral since 1910, when Japan invaded. "We were very unstable politically, economically, and ceramics could not develop. What was there at the time was very functional and was made to Japanese taste. To make the situation worse, the Korean War started."

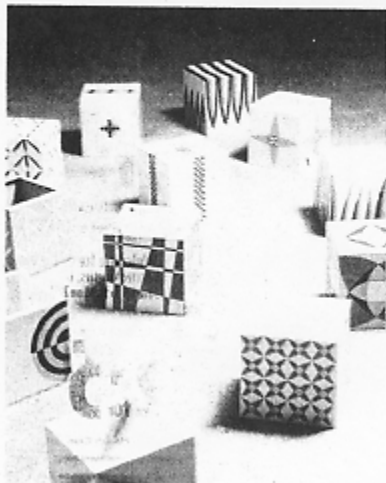
A treaty ending the war was signed in 1953, although stability was slow to return. Hwang, a third-generation ceramist, took inspiration from his family's collection in trying to return the art form to its former glory.

"He always told his students that one had to be a craftsman, a scientist and an artist, in that order. He believed that if you wanted to develop as an artist, you had to understand your own traditions and history," Cho said.

"He was very true and honest in his expression. Take a willow tree, for example. His design would vary depending on the season because the direction of the wind is very different at different times of year. He also studied how a crane flies, and how the positioning of its neck and leg would change."

"If you were a student, he was very harsh if you got the direction of the leg and neck wrong, because he was looking for overall harmony."

"A lot of people in ceramics today stated somehow they felt responsible for preserving much of the tradition. And although a majority of what one sees may look avant-garde and contemporary, it still has that spirit underneath."



Ceramics pioneer Jong Koo Hwang worked with white porcelain for "Lotus Flower Design in Black and Red (Tea Pot)," above. Hae Sin Ro used colored clay for "Square," at left. And Young Sil Han's "A Place of the Heart is a mixed clay piece evocative of hidden spirit.