

Selfridge Ceramic Art

The 2006 Jingdezhen Pottery Workshop Residency

We wish to thank the Alberta Foundation for the Arts for their generous support for this project

Carol and Richard were invited by Takeshi Yasada to the residency program at The Pottery Workshop in Jingdezhen, China. We spent one month there from March 16th to April 16th, 2006. It was an incredible experience. We made lots of work using the different kinds of porcelain clays there and explored a number of new (to us) techniques. We were well looked after and helped by Takeshi and his talented staff. This is a pictorial account of our month long adventure in China. The first portion is about the Pottery Workshop Facility and our work there, including our daily routine. The second half is about the techniques and processes that are special to Jingdezhen. Their ways of working are often different to the work done in North America and Europe.



The entrance to the workshop on a sunny day.
We had many during our month stay.



The large lower studio which contains power equipment, a gas kiln and woodworking tools.

We started our adventure from our home studio in Edmonton, Alberta, but first we should give the information that Takeshi sent to us which made us want to come to China. It is indeed what Takeshi called a "potter's wonderland".

"Jingdezhen PWS Experimental Factory is a newly created ceramics design studio and residential artist's studio. It is situated at the site of the old National Porcelain Company, Sculpture Factory. Jingdezhen has

been the world center for porcelain production continuously for last 1000 years. This new Experimental Factory is surrounded by hundreds of small and independent craftsmen and artists with every kind of ceramic skill, clay producers, throwers, sculptors, mold makers, blue and white decorators, over glaze decorators, glaze and Colour shops, kiln firing workshops, brush makers, black smiths, box makers and shippers.

Objects made here are from fingernail size to twelve feet high, all in porcelain. We are right in the middle of a hive of activity. Jingdezhen PWS Experimental Factory Residential Studio Program offers an Air-conditioned Studio that is well equipped with excellent facilities including a fully kitted glaze laboratory. US\$200/week fee will cover the use of the studio and its facilities; use of an electric wheel and a work table, tools, bats and boards, 50kg of porcelain clay, basic glazes and firing, also full board (lunch & dinner, except on Sundays) accommodation with flush toilets and a hot shower.

There is also a free wireless broadband Internet connection available. We recommend you to bring your own personal hand tools although you can buy basic tools here. Also we have some wood and metal work facilities. If you need more clay, special glazes, stains or over glaze enamels, you can buy from nearby suppliers at extremely modest price. To travel to Jingdezhen from overseas it is best to fly to Shanghai. You may need to stay a night in Shanghai to take one of daily morning flights to Jingdezhen. Travel takes an hour to Jingdezhen."

The contact information for The Pottery Workshop is
<http://www.potteryworkshop.com.cn/english/jingdezhen/home.html>

After an eleven-hour flight from Vancouver, we overnighted in a nice inexpensive hotel in Shanghai. The next morning, we arrived early at the smoggy Shanghai domestic airport for our flight to Jingdezhen.



7am. and all is smoggy.



Carol catches a brief rest before boarding the plane.



Although one million people live in and around Jingdezhen, the airport is very modest but efficient.



We were met by Libby Lee and Jiangbo as well as Mr. Hu, our faithful driver of the workshop van.



This bronze statue is about 20 meters from the workshop entrance.



The workshop, office and gallery are located on the third and fourth floors of a building in the Jingdezhen Sculpture Factory Complex.



This is the entrance to the lower workshop space on the left and the kitchen, dining area as well as three resident rooms on the second floor on the right.



The kitchen dining area with cook in the background preparing lunch or dinner for ten to fifteen people.



Mr. Hu, our proud driver, who picked us up every morning in Sanbao and nearly washed the paint off the van in keeping it spotless.

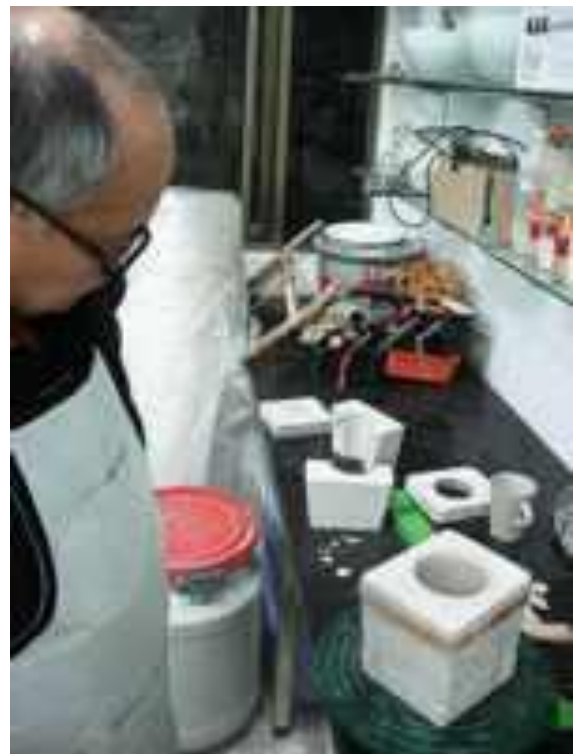


The rooftop view with smokestacks (old coal fired kilns no longer in use), from the balcony of the studio where we worked.

We were shown around the studio, unpacked our bags, had lunch and got settled into our workspace. Takeshi arrived the next day from Britain and we three took up residency in our landlord's house in Sanbao which is 6 kilometers from the workshop in town. Sanbao is a beautiful village with lots of the old China in evidence both physically and in the daily routines of the people.



Carol and Takeshi in front of the landlord's house with its distinctive fence made from electrical insulators.



Takeshi working on his large project of slip cast porcelain cups for a museum in Britain.



The cooking and washing courtyard of our landlord's house in San Bao.



A typical breakfast at our San Bao home.
The crepe pancakes were very special.

Our daily routine was being awakened by the village roosters and then having hot showers, breakfast with Takeshi and learning new Chinese words from our landlord, Jiang Min Ai. He works for Jackson Lee as his construction foreman. He also makes wonderful bamboo pottery tools, furniture and implements. After the sumptuous breakfast, Mr. Hu would arrive to take us to the studio. We passed from the pastoral areas of San Bao to the bustle of Jingdezhen.



Misty morning San Bao view with old factory in the background on the left.



The house across the narrow street of San Bao from our balcony.



Our landlady selecting greens from the vegetable man.



He departs after his daily sale.



Traditional chair made by our landlord,
Jiang Min Ai.



The little neice of Jiang Min Ai.

We did alot of shopping and exploring around the town, often with Joey or Jiangbo. Both have good English and were really helpful, both for showing us the wonders of Jingdezhen and teaching us how to bargain successfully. Joey loves antiquities and spends much of his income on acquiring Chinese cultural artifacts. He really appreciates the history of his country.



Carol and Joey Zhao in an antique shop
examine huge porcelain planters.



Carol posed by a large blue and white
porcelain platter.



Joey and Carol in the pottery market.



The shard market with Song Dynasty saggars
lined with fused translucent porcelain bowls.



Vendors and observers gather around Joey at the shard market.



One of Richard's favorite sellers. She drives a hard bargain but often has great Song Dynasty shards.

The shard market was full of modern works as well as fakes (very believable) and whole pots and very desirable shards from recent excavations. They were building all the time in Jingdezhen and often on sites with old kiln remains.



Sometimes the saggars would be fused together - almost always the bowl inside was fused to the sagger. The saggars were often cut apart with a diamond saw.



Carol, Wan Li Ya and Joey at the shard market, which is really a vacant lot with vendors and ware on blankets.



A blanket with many carved Song Dynasty bowls. Almost all had a crack or foot flaw



Carol in her work area and a view of the studio. In the background on the right are

and the most expensive ones might be \$25 to \$30.

some of Caroline Cheng's porcelain bottle vases destined for the gallery in Shanghai.

There are three Pottery Workshops, one in Hong Kong, another in Shanghai and the latest one in Jingdezhen. Caroline Cheng, herself a ceramic artist, is the owner and was at Jingdezhen the first two days we were there. She also came back for a brief two-day visit during our one-month stay.



Jesse Small, an Alfred MFA grad and resident artist for about three months, is working on his calligraphy studies.



An over glaze enamel painter hired by Jesse to paint gold and enamel designs on Jesse's slip cast porcelain "ghost" sculptures.

Joey took us to glaze street, where we picked out an amazing sample of colored high fire glazes. We also went to the brush shop and to the over glaze and underglaze decal shops. We also did a lot of shopping for over glaze enamel colors and over glaze enamel gold. The gold place was a bit like Fort Knox, with an armed guard at the gate where you had to show the receipt for the gold purchase.



The glaze shop on glaze street, with an incredible array of colour samples. We could take home the dry mixture with the proper wet glaze compliment for mixing. They also sold large and small (plastic pop bottles) quantities of the many colors available.



Joey petting the cat at the best brush shop where we watched the father making brushes.



Joey introduced us to his glaze painter friend who did amazing brush work and helped Carol with the concentrations of some of the colors used at 1330C.



Peking sculptor, Wan Li Ya, with over glaze enamel painter working on one of his large tile works. Wan Li Ya has worked in Europe and was just finishing a residency at the Pottery Workshop. He has established a studio close to the workshop and plans to spend two months twice a year working on designs in Jingdezhen.



We had a number of presentation boxes made by these excellent makers of brocade silk boxes. We have them for porcelain plates and tea bowls which we made in Jingdezhen.



An impromptu street side brush seller's wares.

The Pottery Workshop hosts a slide night and lecture every Friday evening. Most attendees are students and faculty at the Ceramic Institute. The second Friday that we were there, we showed our movie, "Clay in Hand" (by Karvonen Films in 2006) and presented a slide lecture from our website. The Friday before we left, our friend, Janet DeBoos, the head of ceramics at ANU (Australia National University) gave a talk about her work and the design work she has been making with a porcelain factory in China.



Takeshi Yasuda in the front row of the packed house for our presentation.



In China everything is celebrated with firecrackers and the ground afterwards is a testament to some "important" event - new car, birth of a baby, store opening and birthdays.



Spring in semi-tropical San Bao can include warm days and cool monsoonish deluges. This is the river by the road from San Bao to Jingdezhen.



This is the river after a whole night of hard rain, thunder and lightning.

We learned a Buddhist lesson in letting go in Jingdezhen, China. With the intense construction and thunderstorms, there are often brown outs for several hours. Some days when we came to the studio, we wished we had kick wheels. Sometimes kilns weren't fired because it rained too much and not enough of the big sculptures were dry or the government had cut off the piped gas to the pipe gas kiln for a reason no one seemed to be able to understand. Once the plane couldn't land because of a thunderstorm and the Swedish couple with two small children came back to the landlord's place at midnight and stayed an extra two days awaiting the next regular plane flight.



Wan Li Ya painting one of his mysterious self portrait porcelain sculptures.



Carol and Takeshi at the opening show we were in with the other workshop participants at Wan Li Ya's new studio, on Richard's birthday.



Supper in our kitchen at the Pottery Workshop with a birthday cake for Richard's sixty-third birthday.



Delicious sponge cake with turquoise icing.



Firecrackers in celebration of Richard's birthday and the opening of Wan Li Ya's studio. The studio has a fireplace and is very cozy.



Jesse Small in front of two of Wan Li Ya's large tile paintings.



Wan Li Ya poses with another of his self-portrait mysterious sculptures.



Jing Jing's work area in the studio.

For six days a week we were fed by cook at the kitchen at the Pottery Workshop. On Sunday, his day off, we usually ate as a group and sampled noodles, buns, dumplings and soup for lunch. Later in the day we had a special dinner treat...Korean, Sechuan, Mongolian and Jackson Lee's restaurant at San Bao



The food shops on food alley near the Ceramic Institute where we often had Sunday lunch.



Carol with one of the landlady's breakfast selections.



The Sunday that we went to Yaoli, an ancient pottery kiln site town, we had lunch at a restaurant where a chicken was presented (like a fine wine) for our approval.



The soup preparers poured boiling water on the dead chicken for plucking.



Takeshi is ladling delicious fresh chicken soup, while Carol and Libby look on.



Richard's soup bowl with an impromptu sculpture in honor of our chicken guest.

The range of things made in porcelain in Jingdezhen is truly mind boggling. The scale and use diversity is wide ranging.



Joey stands next to blue and white porcelain lamp posts. The whole town is fitted out with them, sometimes with peach fruit and flower painting.



Libby Lee bought a whole box of tiny translucent porcelain bird watering vessels at the shard market and Carol did an ink drawing of the tiny still life.



Xu Lin Feng posing with his impressive jeep. He was a great help in the purchase of machines and renovations to the expanding studio. He is also an excellent wood fire functional potter.



Carol's birthday with Libby Lee who organized the cake and showed Carol lots of information about overglaze enamel painting.

Working with two of the porcelain clays there was at first challenging. We started with the "sculpture" body which was not bad for throwing and trimming but would not stand well if thrown wide and flared. We understand why they throw thick and trim so much. The other body "super white" was also a bit short and needed careful attention to trimming. It was possible to trim soft with nice loose effects but once at the cheese hard state the trimming resulted in the chunking off of the porcelain in curd like bits. They of course wait till it is nearly bone dry and re-wet with a brush of water and trim in a hard footed way.



Some of our work awaiting glazes and plaster molds down below.



Constructed porcelain vessels drying. Many of these were trailed with raised porcelain casting slip decoration.



Two bottle forms we painted to test the colours. Carol's painting on the left and Richard's on the right.



Some of the large plates and constructed vase forms with the Luang Chun glaze.

It was very valuable to see the work of the other residents and staff both past and present. There was a great variety of styles and approaches.



Painted birds on a piece from another artist's residency.



A view of Joey Zhao's workspace with many of his "Industrial Buddha" sculptures.



Large hand made tiles (sometimes 8 by 12 feet) which are then glazed and fired with a transparent or celadon glaze. They then become the canvasses for overglaze enamel painting.



Wan Li Ya's tile featuring a beggar and a golfer. He said, "They both use sticks."



Joey's work area with some of the disc molds I made and left. Back right is a painted plate from one of our firings



Libby's area where she is working on a "bird" piece using the small pieces from the shard market which she has painted with over-glaze enamels



Our medium and large sized plates with underglaze cobalt decals and figurative painting on sprayed glaze awaiting firing



One of the many trolley shuttle gas kilns firing in Jingdezhen. We fired our work in these kilns, sometimes to 1300C and sometimes to 1330C. They crash cool these kilns for brilliant colors, usually depending on how many large deity sculptures are in the load. The turnaround time is one day - loading to unloading.



Some of our pieces loaded in the "pipe gas" kiln which was delayed.



These pieces were fired with many dieties including Mao.



Big buddas, rams and round vases stacked with our flattened pieces.



Our farewell dinner with many of our Jingdezhen friends

Jingdezhen Special Ceramic Processes



Xu, Andrea, Carol and Jiangbo outside the Ancient Pottery Kiln Museum in Jingdezhen. We toured the facility and watched old techniques being demonstrated.



Bowls thrown off the hump of porcelain on a stick powered wheel.



After a brush of water the dry bowl is trimmed and footed.



One stroke and a twist applies a fine band all the way around the bowl.



Deft decorating almost like automatic writing.



Glaze painting on tile.



Thrown and trimmed ware awaits glazing on drying racks.



Dipping stick allows quick glazing of the outside of the raw bowl.



Bowl is dipped in glaze after being decorated.



San Bao boy having his breakfast. A pile of the "china stone" which will be hammered to a powder to be porcelain when mixed with kaolin.



China stone "pounders" site on the river in San Bao. We could hear them all night long every day.



The river water is directed to the water wheels



A view of the machinery of the pounders from above.



The spokes on the timber axel depress and release the pounder shafts as the axel rotates.



Tanks for hydrating the china stone.



Carol next to the pounding pit gives an idea of the scale.



Stone in foreground is broken with a hammer before chunks are put in pounder pits.



Water from split bamboo lubricates the axel bearing.

We had many underglaze cobalt decals made after looking through books of samples. They are printed on a small etching press.



The plate is inked with the cobalt glaze slip.



Decal sheet is ready for the press



Printed sheet is lifted from the plate



These are sample pots adorned with the decal papers

Takeshi took us to see some pottery factories which operate in the old National Porcelain Factory site.



The gate of the old factory site



One of the shuttle kilns with its load of tall fired vases.



Four workers shifting and pouring bodies of the slip cast vases.



Back breaking work to empty the large mold.



The split half molds have pipe handles for the four workers to move them to the drying area.



The molds and castings are dried with a charcoal in bucket heater.



Once removed from the mold the body is turned on a trimming wheel where it is brushed with water and a level joining surface is turned.



A cup of slip is applied to the top of the dry body. The two part joined jiggered vase tops are in the background.



The tops of the vases are jiggered.



These jiggered pieces are then paired up to form the vase top addition.



After placing the top on the base, the unit is trimmed to form a continuous curved join.



The trimmer carries the finished form to the drying area.

The vases were all raw glazed but decorated in a few different ways.



Underglaze decals were used on most, applied freely in a collage style to a pre moistened spot and then the wet paper removed.



Sometimes the deco was from a pounced template and then hand painted and at other times a carved deco was used.



They were all sprayed with glaze.
This exhaust fan was a joke.



The glazed ware was loaded on the
kiln very close together after the
bottoms were wiped.



Some of the finished vases await
transport to market.



This is a morning's production of the heavy
thrown and then trimmed vases at another
factory. They will put plastic tarps over
because of threatening rain.



Turned and carved tall vases in the
"heavy thrown" factory.



A typical ware cart with "straw shoes"
transporting porcelain in Jingdezhen.



Worker in slip cast jar factory cuts off flashing on cast lids.



Some small deity sculptures in our factory area.

The usual method of throwing pieces in Jingdezhen is to throw thick and then trim and join when almost bone dry.



Finished bottle vase after joining of two parts



Fast throwing of bottle vase.



Centering, coning and opening the clay quickly.



Heavy cylinder to be made into rounded vase shape.



Opening and refining the rounded shape.



Using a rib to expand the body.



Final shape and measuring of finished size.



Trimming the dry vase, both inside and out, in a trimming chuck.



Trimming the leveled join area for the addition of the top.



Slip added to dry body to adhere top section.



Thrown bottle top section centered on body in trimming chuck.



Trimming the joined contour.

The work going on all around the Pottery Workshop was mostly sculpture, making, firing and over-glaze painting. We learned a lot about the properties of the porcelain from watching these people and their work. Much of the mold work was transported in the raw state regardless of its incredible size.



Mao, the deity, comes in many different configurations, but this benevolent deity often starts with the same pair of pants sculpture section.



"Straw shoes" packing Lion Dog and Bird sculptures for transport to then be glazed with over-glaze enamels.



Larger than life, Kuan Yin, being worked on by Wan Li Ya's over-glaze enamel painter in another workshop.



Press molding a portion of Kuan Yin's body in plaster mold.

We were invited for lunch to San Bao at Jackson Lee's Pottery Center. We had purchased kiln shelves from Jackson last year and Richard had met Jackson in Ohio in 1999. We had a wonderful lunch and a tour of the facility, bought some tools and will in future exhibit in one of Jackson's shows in Jingdezhen.



The creek running through Jackson's compound.



One of Jackson's floor mosaics made from ancient pottery shards.



Jackson has many antiques in this beautiful rural setting. It is really a beautiful vista of old China.



An assortment of Jackson's kitchen ware production.



A few of Jackson's many collected Song dynasty antiques.



An anagama kiln ready for firing at San Bao.



Even the bathrooms were adorned with exquisite pots and flowers.



Old vase and ancient horse trough at Jackson's.



Another large antique vase from Jackson's collection.



View of Jackson's large wood-fired anagama.

Our landlord, Jiang Min Ai, made bamboo furniture and tools. Our last morning there, he made a traditional carrying stick, which he gave to Richard. It was fascinating to watch his skilled handling of this material.



He first sawed the ends of a piece of bamboo.



He used a draw knife plane to smooth the joins in the bamboo.



After eyeing the bamboo to get the shape to fit the shoulder, he split off about one third over the length of the piece.



He used the draw knife plane to refine the edges of the piece.



After cutting two notches at the ends, he tapered and smoothed the piece.



Jiang Min Ai looks up as he completes the carrying stick.



Blooming Azalea on the balcony
of the Pottery Workshop upper studio.