

# Imaging to Dialogue with Sam

## Brief Induction to the Implantation of Chinese landscape Painting in Ceramic Creation

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In July, 2012, the 2nd Changchun International Ceramic Invitation Exhibition was unveiled in CAC Workstation in Jilin College of The Arts. As one of organizers of the activity, I attended the exhibition. 21 ceramic artists from 14 countries came to CAC Workstation one after another. When these artists passed by my workstation and noticed a group of ceramic work of landscape put on my worktable, they couldn't help stopping and watching these works. Because of language barrier, they only nodded approvingly and gave a thumb-up sign. (Photo 1)



(Photo 1)

Sam, a ceramic artist from New Zealand, looked at my works several times and kept taking photos with his iPad. With the help of an interpreter, he told me that my work must be a new ceramics type and admitted that there were some difficulties for him to understand such expression technique. Then, he enthusiastically showed me some photos of his hometown saved in his iPad. Those photos reflected the beautiful natural scenery of New Zealand. He suggested that I should create some type of works which is much closer to nature. After expressing my thanks, I told him that there were no counterparts in the reality for my works, which were the combination of Chinese artistic tradition with observation and reflection of the natural world. He nodded with partly

comprehension. Due to time constraints and language barriers, we could not further our discussion on such topic. After then, this topic continued to occupy my mind for a quite long time. (Photo2)

Two years quickly passed by without our knowing it. With my probe into the creative practice, I summarized some creative notion and expression techniques. Now I want to meet Sam and discuss the former topic with him, but circumstances change with the passage of time. One day, the idea that literally discussing the topic with Sam occurs to me. So I take my pen and elucidate the idea. Simply, my ceramic landscape works embed notion and techniques of Chinese landscape painting, reflecting the imagery characteristics in depicting mountains, rivers. The title, creative notion, observation methods and expression techniques of Chinese landscape painting and western landscape painting are quite different. Western landscape painting is rational and naturalism in terms of creative notion. Sketch is basic way to obtain expression techniques. What it expresses in painting is something seen by the eyes or touched by the finger, which means there is a counterpart in reality. We can find such characteristics not only in the western realist landscape painters' works such as Isaak Levitan, Courbet, but also in expressive, semi-abstract impressionistic painters' works including Cézannes and Van Gogh. (Photo3) While Chinese landscape painting is emotional and idealistic. Copying paintings is main method for those who want to learn Chinese landscape painting. Learners acquire a set of stylized techniques from their master. Then they express the subjective images obtained during their wandering the world, so there is a significant gap between what the Chinese landscape paintings reflect and what the true reality is. The landscape paintings of Wang Wei, Fan Kuan, Gong Xian, Zhua Da and other painters of ancient feudal dynasties of China provide such evidence. It is very difficult to find a corresponding landscape in reality for Chinese landscape paintings. (Photo4) So, from the very beginning, Chinese landscape painting is subjective, imaginary and humanistic. Nearly 2000 years ago, landscape painting appeared as an independent art form in China. From the first replenishing role for figure painting, it is a historical inevitability for Chinese landscape painting to grow into the most important art genre in Chinese history. Ancient Chinese landscape painters, especially those literati



(Photo 2)



(Photo 3)



(Photo 4)

painters, pursued the unification of Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism.

Either entering society to begin an official career or retreating to lead a secluded life was Chinese landscape painters' life philosophy. When in reclusion, they indulged in mountains and water, accompanied the clouds and smoking, and found pleasure in living in green mountains and listening to the gurgle of water. Their inter accomplishment rooted in the virtue of mountains and water laid solid thought foundation for landscape painting creation. (Photo5) In the forms of expression, due to the participation of intelligentsia from powerful families, the landscape painting gradually detached from local culture. As for perspectives, cavalier perspective featured by optical illusion was developed with the usage of moving view point. Moreover, aesthetic thoughts of scenery-making and the idea of men being integrated with the universe were evolved gradually. We can say with a degree of safety that the thought, emotion and wisdom of the Chinese have been infused into traditional landscape painting. The awareness of delights in mountains and the longing for pastoral life deeply root in the inner heart of the Chinese.

As my major is Chinese painting, I studied systemically the basic theory and techniques of Chinese traditional painting. Under the deep influence of Chinese traditional culture, I decided to create my own expression style based on profound traditional culture from the very beginning of my ceramics practice. After long period of experience, I discovered accidentally tree branch is a tool of very special significance for me. It's broken cross section is uneven and very like the tip of brush. Therefore, the effects produced by this tool are similar to those painted by the brush, which is most fundamental and symbolizing form language in landscape paintings. Thus, this tool makes the implantation of landscape painting in ceramic creation possible (Photo6).

Measures are taken to render such possibility into realization, which includes the following steps:

Step 1:--Transformation. That means transformation of plane landscape paintings into three-dimensional ceramic sculpture. Firstly, I make a landscape painting of rich and clear composition, and then I move the painting to the ceramics boy as the basic facade and reconstruct a three-dimensional reflection of the painting on the surface of ceramics works by the means of moving view point.

Step 2--Shaping. In this step, with the use of sculptural methods and some special expression techniques borrowed from Chinese ancient sculpture, shaping compromises



(Photo 5)



(Photo 6)

the following process: round carving, relief carving then line carving. Plane elements can be presented in the cubic shape and the shape with some optical illusion results.

Step 3: Applying the landscape painting's brush techniques to the ceramic sculpture. Such traditional painting techniques as "hook, cracked, point, and paint" are conducted on the ceramic body with the help of tree branch in stead of brush. By the technique of "hook", the body's line can be sketched with expressive edge. The texture of mountains and stones can scrubed by the technique "cracked". This technique can not only carry the properties of mountains and stones, but also can give a feeling of stylized beauty. The technique "point" can produce the effect of spot in variety of shape, size and density. The spots can not only represent some specific object such as sand, stone, tree etc, but also can express an abstract tone by the variety of density. The technique "paint" is appropriate for the imagine requiring plane treatment, such as clouds, water, pavilion etc. But for the application of brush techniques on ceramic body the difficulties comes from much attention must be paid to the expression of frame and rhyme of the plane line, as well as to the three-dimensional shape. Principles and methods for plane composition and three-dimensional composition are also adopted to make the work carry more modern sense. The rhyme of the work is achieved by the orderly arrangement of basic shaping elements. (Photo 7)

Step 4: Glazing. In order to keep the sharpness of texture of the ceramic body and maintain the brush-like tool's trails, the glaze should be applied as fewer as possible except that a bit of engobe or oxide is brushed on the high spot. The overall work is pervaded by the charm and artistic conception of Chinese landscape painting.

Step 5: Firing, which is the last procedure. With the purpose of to make the work bearing a sense of fire, the method of reduction firing is adopted. The firing temperature is 1200° C and the burning time lasts more than 10 hours. Firing is a hard and hopeful process. Looking at the finished works, I can not help but exclaim: "Oh, another mountain come to the world! This mountain originates from the great tradition and from the observation and reflection to nature."

Since much detail have been given to explain my creative notion and expression techniques, Sam, do you understand me? Your comments and suggestions are welcome. (Photo8)

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(Photo 7)



(Photo 8)