

In Studio with Marc Leuthold

Marc Leuthold, Professor of Art, is extremely interested in cross-cultural issues. The Far East, Africa and the Mediterranean have influenced his work, and also socio-critical occurrences have a distinct voice in his installations. His intricately carved wheels are present in many of his works and we talk, among other things, about how they are made.

Evelyne Schoenmann

*M*arc, let us begin with your impressive socio-critical installation "Torture". I must say I admire your statement and your courage. Can you tell us about the historical background of this work?

My courage?! Edward Snowden is the courageous one. I understand he is still living in the airport in Moscow. That is certainly an ironic situation: an American patriot seeking asylum in Russia. Jan

Because there was so little time to create such a piece, I did all the research and preparation before I left for Sydney. Once in Sydney, I created a calendar and so I knew what I would have to do every day. Sydney College of the Arts is a premier art school. It was a pleasure to be there.

In the past you made other large scale installations like "Offering", "Longhouse", "Field", "Phong's Table". Just to pick one, because it's my favourite: who is Phong

was created in China at the Fuping Museums. And this piece directly responds to Chinese culture, particularly the burial sites.

In one of your many installations, in "Fault", we see large painted circles and other patterns on the floor, surrounding your ceramics objects – like mandalas. What is the story behind this work?

I created "Fault" for the Mark Pot-



Guy at the Sydney College of the Arts encouraged me to apply for a Research Fellowship at her school. In the application, I detailed my interest in creating that viewer-activated installation. During my 19 day visit in Sydney, I raced the clock to finish and install the artwork – with wonderful support from Jan Guy, Clive Cooper and Liam Garstang. Gallery Director, Nicholas Tsoutas prioritized the installation and so he was a key person as well. Many people attended the opening and it was a marvellous experience.

and what is on the table for him?

Phong Bui is the founding publisher and editor of the Brooklyn Rail, New York's premier journal for contemporary art and criticism. Phong included my work in Irrational Profusion at the MO-MA's PS1 Art Museum. Phong selected 12 sculptures for this first and only clay exhibit at that Museum. I decided to create a piece, "Phong's Table" with those 12 sculptures in homage to Phong.

And, oh yes, I forgot about "Field". It

ter Gallery in Watertown, CT in early 2008. And there was "Four Times" at the Schein-Joseph Museum at Alfred University. Earlier text based installations include "Hints" at the University of North Carolina in 2000 and "The Man who Eats Green Apples" featuring a poem by Korean ceramist, Sung Jae Choi. This last piece was installed at the Banff Centre in Canada in 1993. Another important collaborative installation was at the Chateau de la Napoule in France, also in 1993. This installation was titled "Toward a Nouvelle

Ancien Regime” and artist Mario Cutajar collaborated in the creation of that piece during our fellowships at the Chateau. I enjoy these sorts of multi-media collaborative pieces because they encompass a wider and more complex conceptual vision.

About “Fault” now: every piece in the show is cracked and damaged in some way – hence the title Fault. Artist Dawn Clements and I covered the floor with paper. With the lights out and with my eyes closed, I painted the floor with Sumi ink. I created this piece out of despair about the American electoral process.

You once said that what we ceramists are doing is a kind of alchemy: we make something out of nothing. I like that!

Yes, we make art from dust. Ceramics, though not fully accepted by the art world as a medium for creative expression, is one of the most ancient and primordial modes of expression. It records everything we do to it. It is perhaps the

We can see carvings, mostly in cone or wheel shaped forms, in many of your objects. In our preliminary talk you told me that it saddens you that people see you almost only in context with your famous wheels. How do you see your art evolving?

I think the themes and topics and formal qualities of the installations suggest my deeper interests and concerns. Art is a voice or a message. The evolution is determined by circumstances and opportunity – it is difficult to predict these. Mario Cutajar in his essay, Marc Leuthold’s Good Form, has observed that the wheels are objects of contemplation – “rather than yield a singular meaning, they draw attention to the instability of association and the circular restlessness of obsession. They are abstract cogs designed to engage the senses and propel the machinery of the mind.”

Would you explain the steps to one of those wheels just the same?

the works in soda, salt, and/or anagama kilns. I embrace all kinds of clay bodies and glazes and kilns and firing methods. After the piece emerges from the kiln, I think about presentation. Sometimes I present the work in the context of an installation or accompanied by a text. Sometimes I present the work as a solitary object, perhaps even mounting it on a base – in the spirit of the Rococo French who mounted Chinese porcelains on ormolu bronze bases. While the forms are generally related, each piece is unique.

Recently you gave lectures at NCECA and at the Oldenburg Ceramics Fair. What can we see next from Marc Leuthold?

Next spring I may be leading a class at China’s finest art school, the Central Academy of Fine Arts of Beijing. With any luck, there will be more exhibits. I’d like to exhibit more in Germany. I find the people there to be very interesting. Of course China is always in my hopes and dreams too.



photos – Eva Heyd

most tactile and sensitive medium. It is everything and yet it is nothing. What other material is so thoroughly fundamental yet so ignored?

I’d love to know your opinion about art critique.

Critics play a key role in educating the public and calling attention to overlooked artwork. If they do their job well and pick wisely, they play a valuable role in the art world.

I create a form to carve with wet clay. These forms are often thick and massive. When the clay is leather-hard, I carve it with a regular paring knife. Holding the knife at opposing angles, I can remove V-shaped slices that radiate from a starting point. Then I dry the sculpture slowly and then I do further subtractive work and refining at the stage before setting the work in the kiln. The works are then fired very slowly to a lower temperature. Sometimes the pieces are finished after that first firing. Other times I apply glaze and/or fire

Marc Leuthold
www.marcleuthold.com
 New York, NY, USA

Evelyne Schoenmann's next interview will be with **Alberto Bustos, Spain**. Evelyne Schoenmann is a ceramist. She lives and works in Basel, Switzerland, and Liguria, Italy
www.schoenmann-ceramics.ch