

Jingdezhen International Ceramic Biennale



New Talents' Best Chance

MARC LEUTHOLD

The Jingdezhen International Ceramic Biennale competition in its inaugural year attracted 2,344 entries from 32 countries. 206 of the entries were accepted, and the exhibition **formally opened on 28 February 2022**. Fifty-two of the 206 accepted works were awarded prizes.

Zhang Kun of China entered Portrait series and won the top prize of 30,000 euros. The recipients of the three silver medals (15,000 euros) were Gu Jinkang, Yu Chao, and Huang Shan. Bronze medals (7,000 euros) went to Lu Wei, Tan Danwu, Zhi Min, Tianye Dongxue and Ryan LaBar. In addition to the major prizes, 20 "Kito" awardees received 4,000 euros each, and 23 artists won Taoxichuan Emerging Artist awards, 3,000 euros each.

Nowadays, artists are numerous, with many talents chasing few opportunities. The large international biennials give every artist a chance for recognition and international visibility. The oldest biennial is likely the Faenza competition in Italy. Similarly, the United States has hosted an international competition for many years: the NCECA Members' Exhibition.

In the 1990s and later, new competitions opened up in Japan (Mino), Taiwan, (Yinge) and Korea (WOCEF and related iterations.) These three Asian competitions were welcome additions to the circuit of opportunities since they were more supportive with no application fees. In Korea and Taiwan, shipping is often paid for by the organizers and top awards have routinely been conferred on foreign artists. This kind of support is remarkable, especially if you consider that organizers must justify expenditures to tax payers. These venues provide an invaluable service to world ceramics culture and are crucial for young artists who likely may not have much support in their home country.

China, now newly rich and the world's cradle of porcelain culture for a thousand years, is offering new international exhibition opportunities for ceramists – with no application fees. This year, the Yishu-8 Foundation of Beijing is sponsoring its third

iteration of the Blanc de Chine competition – with prizes reaching 50,000 euros.

As mentioned, Jingdezhen Ceramic University (JCU) and Jingdezhen City hosted the first Jingdezhen International competition, The Spirit of Ceramics. This remarkable initiative occurred in a country that has sealed itself off from the world in order to cope with the Covid pandemic. Despite those challenges, Jingdezhen solicited, juried and awarded artwork featured in a massive multi-pronged public programme to promote the international ceramic arts.

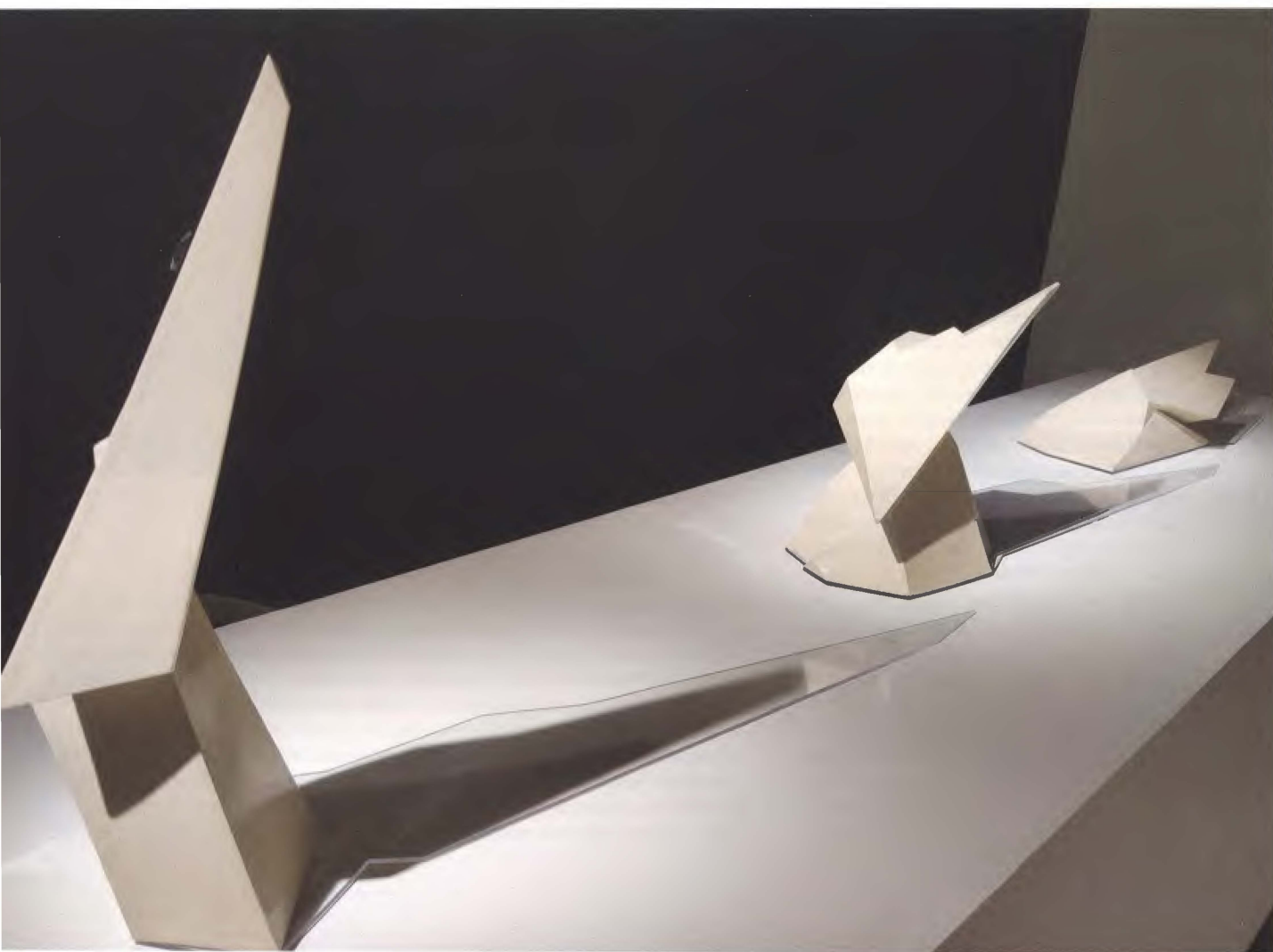
The centrepiece of the Biennial was a large exhibition in the new Jingdezhen Ceramic University (JCU) Museum. The exhibition consisted of the competition works in three large rooms and in a fourth room were works created by 80 leading artists from all over the world, forty of whom were Chinese. The artists who control the International Academy of Ceramics were well represented with ambitious works; however, mixed in were welcome masterworks by new voices.

In addition to this flagship event, there was a ceramic tile painting exhibition in a museum complex in San Bao. One of many



Zhan Kun, **Grand Prize**

Melting Light, Gabriele Resmini and Luca Pellegrino.





Blooming Monument, Xiaodan



Portraits, Luo Xiaoping

outstanding pieces was the work of Zhan Wei's *Flying Straight Down Three Thousand Feet*, 100 x 80 cm.

Yet another venue offered an exhibition of contemporary Italian porcelain curated by Mateo Zauli, Director of the Carlo Zauli Museum in Faenza, Italy. A standout piece was *Melting Light* by Gabriele Resmini and Luca Pellegrino.

Another dimension of the events was the launching of the Ceramic Road International Education Alliance. This will be a worldwide initiative, spearheaded by Jingdezhen Ceramic University (JCU), the world's largest ceramic education institution. The Alliance will be supported by Belt and Road, the Chinese government project that has been compared to the American-sponsored Marshall Plan that assisted Europe after WW II. The Ceramic Road inaugural included lectures such as Felicity Aylieff's balanced articulate thoughts about the pros, cons and challenges of virtual teaching. Aylieff teaches at the Royal College in London.

The jurying of the exhibition was supportive and inclusive. All types of ceramics were included: vessels, and objects, installations, collaborations, mixed media, found objects, videos and even interactive works that encompass Nicolas Bourriaud's theory of Relational Aesthetics. Chinese artist Lu Bin's *Memorandum* fell in this latter category with attendees asked to sign a work with brightly coloured media. Xiaodan's *Blooming Monument* was a performative piece that incorporated a suspended spinning ceramic bone hanging in front of the artist and over a large rusted metal plate on which she painted the



Four Celestial Gods, Zhi Min

numbers of people sickened by the Covid pandemic – over 500 million.

The installation works were perhaps the most impressive. To mention a few, Zhi Min created the most dramatic piece of the exhibition. *Four Celestial Gods* was usually the first image featured in attendees' private social media posts: a huge celadon "U" created from hundreds of porcelain horns attached to an armature.

Jacques Kaufman's porcelain steam-roller resting on thousands of crushed porcelain shards was titled *Pillar*. Luo Xiaoping shared a magnificent wall mounted piece that consisted of dozens of sensitively rendered relief portraits accompanied by one silenced masked portrait – a powerful statement about control



Bridge of Life, Zhu Legeng



Takeshi Yasuda



Turn-Back, Ilona Romule

Zhang Kun, the grand prize winner, offered a series of faces with prominent eyes created from thousands of small tiles, reminiscent of artist Chuck Close's paintings. Most of the larger works were contributed by Chinese artists who had the home-court advantage. And these works included many surprises: The Bridge of Life by Zhu Léngeng was a full-size bridge over which viewers could walk.

Another remarkable piece, Huang Chunmao's Sir John Mandeville's China Room, was viewed only

through peepholes, revealing an elaborate life-sized gilded palace room made of glittery ceramics with mirrored walls. These unusual works complemented some outstanding objects.

Small and white, an untitled work by German artist Heide Nonnenmacher is a wonder of non-objective beauty.

Ilona Romule's Turn-Back, a cast form with painstakingly applied china paint decoration reveals the power and electricity of her coupled figures (see image). Three Serbian artists were represented: prize winner Velimir Vukicevic and two of his former students, Lanna Tikvesa and Ljubica Knezevic. Canadian artist, Paula Murray's Still Breathing was awarded a prize. Several USA expats also exhibited, including Ryan LaBar (bronze award) and Ryan Mitchell. Another foreign prize-winner was Mark Goudy, FR.

The chief organizer and curator of the entire Biennial was artist Lv Pinchang, the President of Jingdezhen Ceramic University. (Chinese family names precede the given name – alternate spellings are Lu and Lyu.) Mr Lv exhibited an installation piece, Chinese Expressionism No. 44 Treasure Appraisers, consisting of three representational bronze figures squatting while studying huge piles of ancient shards.

Mr Lv is an academically trained sculptor who earned an undergraduate degree at JCU and was for many years Dean at the Central Academy of Fine Art in Beijing. In every facet of the Biennial, President Lv shared the spotlight with hundreds of artists present in every event of the Biennial. Mr Lv has previously served on juries for Blanc de Chine and Korea's WOCEF, so the excellence of this Biennial is not surprising.

Artists, take note that this competition is artist-centered and truly supportive. Twenty-five percent of successful entries received awards. Remember too that there were no entry fees and the organization took responsibility for return shipping.

Exhibition website: <http://www.cjicb.com>

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MARC LEUTHOLD

is an artist and professor who seeks cross-cultural collaboration. He has been invited to make art in many locations. His work is in many museum collections including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.
Leuthold's website: www.marcleuthold.com



photos - Marc Leuthold

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