



HADRIAN MENDOZA

Introduction

Ceramics is a craft that has been tied in to daily life since it was first discovered. You take the Earth and you adjust it with water, air and fire. I find it awesome that one can take a natural material such as clay and use the elements to create a piece that can last centuries. The essence of the material sends me back to nature as I am inspired to search through history and at the same time discover the future. The historical ties ceramics has with humans is evident in archaeology through discoveries worship idols, functional wares and burial jars. I find a balance between the past and the future, where my pieces can speak to a wide audience.

Building a Community

Since 2007, I have been building a community of ceramic artists from the Southeast Asian region through organizing a series of conferences that build unity among contemporary ceramists. These conferences occur every 2 years and have been held at The Ayala Museum (Philippines), Fule International Ceramics Museums (China), and The Workhouse Arts Center (USA). The latest event will return to the Philippines in December 2016 at The Ayala Museum. These conferences have been financially supported through grants provided by The Toyota Foundation Japan, The Ayala Foundation, The Asian Cultural Council and Futo Industries. Through these gatherings that include an exhibition and workshops with lectures and demonstrations, the ceramic artists share their ideas and knowledge of the craft. This interaction contributes to the mixing bowl of cultures that is fostered at SEAPOTS' events. This ongoing project is important in connecting artists, scholars,

philanthropists, gallery owners, curators and students to create a synergy and community that transcends national and cultural boundaries.

Work Philosophy

My art is rooted with historical references to the past in dialogue with topics relevant to contemporary views applicable to the present society. I work in 2 ways: through an intuitive process and a structured method. I believe that creating in both ways allows my work to evolve and to be in the moment. The surface treatment reveals an expressionistic feel with quick strokes and movements that are evident with marks from my fingers and simple wooden tools. I like to have my fingerprints visible in the clay. I believe that working through intuition evokes raw feelings evident in the finished product. Improvisation plays a big role in my creative process, creating first and letting ideas develop and evolve. A piece can change directions at any given moment in the creative process. Intuitively, my hands move with the clay as they create.

I believe it is also important to work with an organized plan and carry out a message or vision in a controlled process. This method allows me to develop more concrete pieces and installations that can make political and societal statements. Working this way can be boring at times, since you have to follow a specific method throughout the entire creative process.

Homage to Philippine Idols

As an artist who works with clay, I have done a lot of research out in the field and in the studio seeking a connection to the past and how it can relate to the present. Pottery is one of the oldest art forms, possibly the second form of art discovered after cave paintings. I always pay homage to my past by recreating pieces that are important in the history of Philippine ceramic and craft.

I've frequently reworked the Manunggul Jar and the Bulol. The Manunggul is the prized piece of ceramic in the Philippines. It was discovered in Manunggul cave in Palawan, Philippines during 890-710 B.C. It is considered a national treasure because it is widely acknowledged to be the Philippine's finest pre-colonial work of art. It is used as a burial Jar as two figures on a boat sit at the top of the lid to represent the soul's journey to the afterlife. The Bulol is an Ifugao rice god made of narra wood. They are carved in pairs by farmers and are believed to bring good fortune of bountiful yields of rice. The expression on the Bulol's face is that of a trance, looking into the future with a muted mood.

In my journey through clay, 2004 was a year to start paying homage to my ancestors and a time to reclaim my culture through these types of studies. Born in Manila, Philippines and educated in the US, I hold a dual citizenship from both countries. I have lived in both places throughout my life and absorbed the culture from two countries located on opposite ends of the globe. After moving back to the

Philippines in 1997, I made deliberate attempts to put heavy cultural undertones in my work with images, themes and moods that originated in my place of birth.

I started my series of the Manunggul Jar in 2004 and have revisited it from time to time since then. I have recreated the piece as a circle placed on top of a vertical cylinder. On top of the whole sculpture sits the boat with 2 figures, with their faces wrapped in cloth that run around the forehead and also wraps underneath the jaw. The circle is shaped like a doughnut in which the middle is an empty space. This interpretation is quite different from the original jar, which functions as a burial jar that will be filled with the deceased's body along with items they owned that were found valuable such as ceramics and precious stones. They believed that these material goods would be taken with them into the next life. In my version, the empty ring represents that all material goods remain in this life. What we take with us are the positive things we have done for others while on Earth and we leave everything that is material.

In this same year I also created my first Bulol rendition. To me, the piece is a symbol of hope and belief that the future holds positive things despite any uncertainty of its outcome. With the Bulol, I focused on making changes in 2 ways: by altering the body's position and by breaking the piece down into parts and focusing solely on the face. The challenge in creating this piece is using simple marks to create deep and meaningful gestures and expressions in parts of the face, specifically to the eyes and the mouth. This series became an exercise of using efficient and minimal imprints to achieve a powerful piece despite its simplicity. Altering the body also makes a significant alteration on the message of the piece. I've made the body lean back and forth and even curved it into a full circle. Curving the torso into a circle symbolizes continuity and repetition of the past finding its way into the present. A body leaning forward gives it a stronger gesture of looking forward into the future, with hope of good fortune.

By working in light of symbolic cultural icons, one can discover their roots and at the same time reinterpret their traditional beliefs and meanings to create pieces relevant to the present day.

Inspiration from Other Cultures

To enhance my knowledge of the craft, I draw inspiration from historical practices from different countries. In Japan, there is a technique called Kanazawa-Haku that incorporates epoxy, lacquer and gold leaf to cracks on a fired ceramic piece. Cracking is the biggest enemy of a potter and may suggest an error in the firing or technical process. Japanese potters have found a way to highlight these cracks and bring out the beauty of a split in a piece by filling it with epoxy, then applying lacquer and finally a thin layer of gold leaf on the surface. The result of this process would be a golden line similar to the movement of a lightning bolt or the roots of a tree. This creates a strong contrast with the earth toned clay or shiny glaze. In this present day where natural resources are diminishing and there is an increase in

awareness for the environment, I believe it is important to save selected cracked pieces and bring out the beauty of a mark that is a result of technical or material error. As an artist, my pieces with gold leaf remind me that I am not perfect and that beauty too can be found in an imperfect object. The search for the ultimate crack continues, and as my friend and fellow potter Jon Pettyjohn says, "I've never met a crack that I didn't like."

I also draw inspiration from the Korean method of coil and throw. This technique allows me to make large jars where I start from a bowl form, then add thick coils of clay to the lip when the bowl has hardened. The coil is then raised to continue the form. This process is repeated until the desired shape is achieved. From contemporary Korean potters, I have also learned techniques using different parts of the palm to yield differing results.

Africa also provides a wealth of inspiration for my works. I have studied African masks made of wood and incorporate the simple lines and curves that render eyes and other facial features. I find this very similar to the Bulol rice terrace god in the way simple marks can create a strong expression on the face. By embracing other cultures I am able to understand the similarities between historical objects and the likeness between human beings as well. I have also used the ritual of scarification on faces that I create, designs specifically from Nigerian tribes. I now understand that beauty can be appreciated by respecting and learning the historical relevance of customs practiced in other cultures.

Phases of Faces

I have always incorporated the human face into my pieces. I believe this is an effective way of making a connection with a wider audience and captivates them as they reflect on their features. The audience finds a connection related directly to themselves or their family and friends. In 2012 I started making globular heads that hang on the wall. The faces rendered on these wheel thrown circular forms have evolved from abstraction to a realist approach.

The first series I created was inspired by the Bulol which has a peaceful gaze. Then they evolved into abstract marks that represent specific facial features. For example, a fork dragged across the cheeks resembles wrinkles and age. I then made different features to resemble different cultures. These were then installed on the wall in circular form with a diameter of eight feet. Titled Circle of Friends, it puts forth a message that despite our physical differences, we are still one community. The individual heads may differ in features, but the pit fired finish of red, black and white unify the composition and erase these physical boundaries.

In 2015, I created a series of heads titled Warriors. These hung on the wall an inch apart in 2 rows. They all had different colored hair with various lengths and quantity. Their faces are glazed with distinct colors to represent different skin tones. Each piece has varied septum piercings using porcelain clay to resemble bones that

were used in tribal piercings. Warriors carries a strong message of globalism. Despite our racial differences, there is a global movement that unifies us in the piercing culture that thrives throughout the world. This culture has no prejudice of age, gender or race.

In November, 2016 I created a wall installation of 200 heads of varied sizes that are randomly installed on a wall with dense and sparse placement among the heads. The placement is similar to looking at the stars where there are tight clusters and lone ones that have abundant space around them. The differing sizes create depth within the placement of clusters. Each face has sharp cheek bones and other facial features which give them a gaunt and tired look. They all stare straight ahead at the viewer and have a dark and gloomy mood. Their lips hint at unhappiness and their brows have frowns that reflect the current mood of the Filipino people. This piece is titled Pusher, and is a political statement referring to the current situation in the Philippines in which president Duterte has supported civilian extrajudicial killings of drug users and dealers. This has opened a gray area in which killings have been rampant and have exceeded 3000 deaths during his first 6 months as president. Victims include and are not limited to addicts, family members, drug pushers and innocent bystanders.

Within the Contemporary Ceramics Scene

Ceramics in the present can be in the form of a mural placed in buildings and homes, sculptures for museums or platters destroyed and hung on the wall. But a potter always has the option to go back to the craft's roots and create functional wares meant to be used in daily life. I play somewhere in between the craft and the art. I enjoy creating simple pieces that function at a dinner setting, and at the same time create sculptures that are rooted in concept. Going back and forth between the two creates a balance to develop the conceptual and technical aspects of this material.

Final Thoughts

My works have a recurring theme of globalism and transnationalism as they reach a wide audience. They seem familiar to the viewer and can be translated in various ways. With all the different cultures that I interact with, it is important for me to let these experiences fuse into my work and way of living.

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hadrianmendoza.com