Raku: Traditions and Innovations

A Senior Honors Exhibition
by
Meredith McGriff

Vance Bell, Thesis Advisor

Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana

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Abstract

This thesis represents the culmination of my experiences as a double major in Ceramics and Japanese. As a Ceramics major, I was required to create a body of work for a senior exhibition. However, I felt it important that I utilize skills gained in both major areas, and therefore I chose to present the exhibition in both Japanese and English. This included creating a postcard for advertising the exhibition, as well as writing a brief history of Raku (the Japanese ceramic technique which I focused on) and an artist statement, all of which were displayed during the exhibition. The body of ceramic work consists of 11 handbuilt sculptural ceramic pieces fired in the Raku tradition. Each piece is titled in both languages, and during the exhibition all labels included information in both Japanese and English.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Vance Bell for being my advisor and always pushing me to do my best, Sadatoshi Tomizawa and Guohe Zheng for giving their time to help me with the challenge of writing in Japanese, my parents for their enduring love, support, and encouragement, my friends for keeping me sane when all the work seemed overwhelming, and of course, my many teachers and professors through the years who have taught me to love Japan, ceramics, and above all, learning.
Raku: Traditions and Innovations
楽焼: 伝統と発展
Meredith A.E. McGriff
メレディス・マクグリフ
Senior Thesis Show
卒業論文の発表

Atrium Gallery
Ball State University
April 24-28, 2007
Reception
Thursday, April 26, 4-6 p.m.
The History of Raku

Raku is a type of traditional ceramics which is unique to Japan. In the Momoyama era (15th cent.) a man called Senno Rikyo developed and spread the tea ceremony, which was based in Zen Buddhism. Senno Rikyu met the master potter Chojiro, and guided him in making teacups for the tea ceremony. Therefore, Raku directly reflects the ideas of the tea ceremony. Senno Rikyu was set up at Shurakudai, the mansion built for the statesman Toyotomi Hideyoshi. Because of Rikyu, Chojiro began using the earth that was used for constructing the walls of Shurakudai. It became that Chojiro’s pottery was called “Shuraku yaki chawan,” after the name of the mansion. Because of this, Toyotomi Hideyoshi gave Chojiro the honor of using the name “Raku.”

Traditional Raku is not formed using the wheel, but is created by hand and also by using a rib/spatula tool. While modeling, one tries to keep in mind the Zen idea of “mu,” or nothingness. Raku was used to make utensils for the tea ceremony such as teacups, vases, finger bowls, incense burners, etc. Black and red raku are the two kinds of traditional raku, and they are made using different clays. Raku is fired at a low temperature (1000'). The soft texture of the completed pot expresses “wabi-sabi,” Japanese the idea of beauty in simplicity.

Even now, raku continues to be made. There have been 15 generations of the Raku family. Raku has also spread far to foreign countries. In the 20th century, a potter named Bernard Leech went to Japan. He saw various kinds of traditional Japanese ceramics, and studied raku. After returning to England, he wrote books about Japanese ceramics and taught raku. Then, in America, the potter Paul Soldner read Leech’s books, and started making raku. One day, after taking the pot out of the kiln, he dropped it into combustible material. Since the pot was hot, the combustibles burned and caused the glaze to change color. He liked that unique brilliance, and henceforth always put his pots in combustibles – this process is called post-firing reduction, and it became the standard for American raku. American raku is much brighter than traditional Raku. Also, since Leech and Soldner didn’t know the tea ceremony, a variety of forms are made in the West. Raku has become very popular in the Western world. Today, in both Japan and America, raku is a famous ceramic art, and it is also an amateur’s simple ceramic hobby.
楽焼きの歴史

楽焼きは日本独特で伝統的な陶器です。桃山時代（16世紀）千利休は茶の湯を発展し広めました。利休は長次郎と言う焼き物師に出会って、長次郎は利休の為に茶の湯に用いる茶碗を造り始めました。それから、楽焼きは茶の湯の思想を最も直接的に反映しています。聚楽第は為政者豊臣秀吉によって造営されましたが、千利休もその屋敷を構えました。長次郎は千利休の指導により聚楽第を建造する際に使用された土を使いました。長次郎の焼き物は「聚楽焼き茶碗」と称されるようになりました。そして、豊臣秀吉から「楽」の印字を賜りました。

伝統的な楽焼きは軋轢を使わないで、手捏ねとへらで作ります。禅における「無」を含めて作ります。楽は茶碗や花入や水指や香炉など茶道具として使用されました。黒楽と赤楽は伝統的な楽焼きの二種類です。異類の粘土を使います。低温（1000度）で焼成して、やわらかい風合いで侘びさびを表現します。

今でも、楽焼きは焼かれています。現在の楽家は初代長次郎以来15代目にもなります。楽焼は広く海外にも普及しています。20世紀、イギリスからバーナード・リーチと言う焼物師が日本に行きました。色々な伝統的な陶器を見たりして、楽焼きも勉強しました。イギリスに帰った後で、日本の陶器の本を書いたり、楽焼きについて教えたりしました。それから、アメリカではポール・ソードナーと言う焼物師がリーチの本を読んで、楽焼きを焼き始めました。ある日、焼き物を窯から取り出して、可燃物に落としました。焼き物は熱いですから、可燃物を燃やして、釉薬の色付けになりました。彼はその特異な光沢を大変気に入って、以来いつも可燃物に落とします。これは「ポストファイアリングクリアキシオン」と言います。そしてその製法はアメリカの楽焼きになりました。アメリカの楽は日本の楽焼きより明色です。リーチとソードナーは茶の湯知を知っていませんでしたので、欧米で色々な形状を発展しました。欧米で楽焼きは受けが良い焼き物になりました。今楽焼きは有名な陶芸で、素人の手軽な趣味に成っています。
When I was young, I was introduced to two concepts which greatly influenced my art. The first concept is Japanese aesthetics. At only 13 years old, I had the opportunity to travel to Japan, and I immediately fell in love with the language and culture. As my interest in art has developed, I have also been drawn to Japanese aesthetics. The second concept which influences my work is Celtic design, particularly the knot work. It began with a simple school assignment to create a Celtic knot, but I soon found myself almost obsessively sketching these designs. I am still fascinated by the challenge of creating one infinite, twisting, overlapping line, and I often attempt to achieve the same types of curves and connections in my ceramic work.

Both Japanese and Celtic art have a strong connection to nature, and it is possible that part of the reason I am drawn to these cultures is because I enjoy the outdoors. My pots, therefore, are based on natural forms such as flowers, birds, water droplets, and the human figure. My goal, however, is not to recreate these natural forms, but to capture the beauty of their curves. I feel that the soft clay is a very sensual medium, and with it I desire to create gentle, subtle, and sensual forms. I have chosen to focus on coil building because I want to explore the many possibilities of similar yet unique asymmetrical forms I can create. I feel that coil building is a very enjoyable, meditative process.

While working with the clay, I am careful to create smooth curves and intentional creases. The firing process I have chosen, however, has an opposite atmosphere of excitement and uncertainty. I enjoy the fact that I can choose a particular glaze knowing the general colors and surfaces it is capable of producing, and yet still not knowing exactly how the smoke will interact with each particular pot in the post-firing reduction process. I am also very interested in the differences between Western cultures and Japanese culture, so the two different glazes that I use in my work often represent that dichotomy. As a double major in Japanese and Ceramics, I believe raku firing is the perfect culmination of my studies, because I can combine my love of Japanese culture, art, and language with my artistic endeavors in clay.
楽焼き：伝統と発展
美術家の声明書

私は若い時に私の美観に影響した二つの概念に出会いました。その一は日本の審美学です。わずか１３才の時、日本に行く好機がありました。そして、日本語と日本文化が好きになりました。美術に興味が増すにつれ、日本の審美学に強く惹かれた。次いで、私は若い時ケルトの美術も好きになりました。中学でケルトノット（結び目のデザイン）を書く宿題があり、私はそのノットを書くことに取り付かれた。今でも無限なので、もつれた、重なり線を書く難題は楽しいです。ノットの線のように陶器の曲面と係り結びを作りたく作りたいです。

日本とケルトの美術は自然界と強く結びついています。そして、私も戸外が好きですから、日本とケルトの美術が好きなのかかも知れません。それから、私の陶器は花や鳥や雲や人体のような形状を造形します。でも、その自然界の形状を模写したくありません。その代わりに曲面の美意識を取り込みたいです。私はやわらかい粘土は肉感的と感じているので、やわらかくて肉感的な形状を作りたいです。アシンメトリックデザインの多様な同様を使いたいから、ろくろより手で作るのを選びました。手で作るのは楽しくて、思索的だと思います。

形状を造形する時、曲面と皺をじっくり作ります。でも、楽焼きを焼く時の雰囲気はとても豪快で不明です。釉薬の基本色は知っていますが、毎回楽焼きを焼いて、各種各様な釉薬が色付きました。私はその不明なもののが好きです。私は欧米の文化と日本の文化の違いが主な興味です。それから、二つの釉薬はその違いを表現します。私の専攻は日本語と陶器なので、その二つの楽しい点を組み合わせられますから、楽焼きは絶好な企画だと思います。
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