



## The Chinese Clay Art, USA

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# Chinese Clay Art, USA

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"**CHINESE CLAY ART**" is a newsletter emailed to professional artists, curators, collectors, writers, experts, educators and students in the ceramic field, who want to know about ceramic art in China and things related. This newsletter will be a bridge between China and Western countries for the ceramic arts. Comments and suggestions are very welcome.

An earlier newsletter is on the Web at: <http://www.chineseclayart.com>

Chief Editor: Guangzhen "Po" Zhou

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## ***New Book and New Ceramic Art by Guangzhen Po Zhou***

The Artwork Exhibitions in San Jose and San Francisco

### **The Enamel Age-Shanghai Nostalgia, Ceramics by Guangzhen Zhou**

August 28-Sept. 3, 2010

August 27, 7-9 pm, Opening Reception

8:00 - 8:30 pm, Slides Lecture "Life and Art during the Enamel Age"

Address: **ClayGround**, 1155 S. De Anza Blvd., San Jose, CA 95129

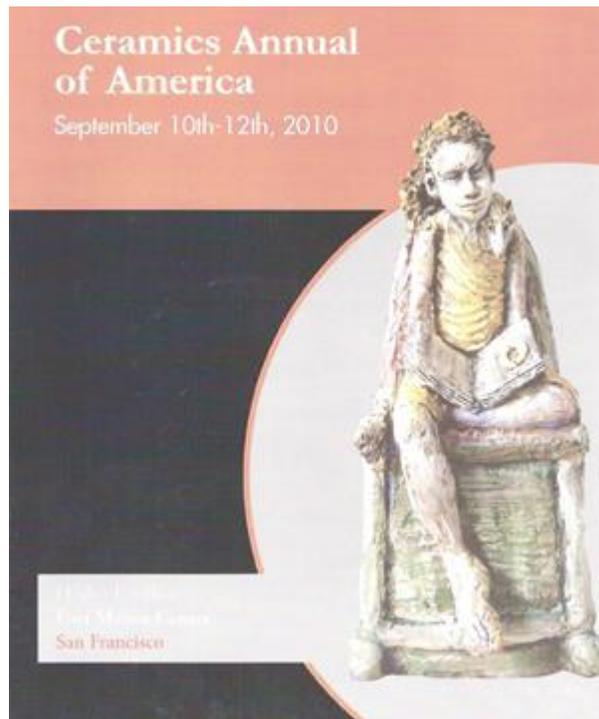
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The new book-autobiography by Guangzhen Po Zhou, titled *Carrying Clay Art on My Iron Shoulder* was published by Jiangsu Fine Art Publishing House in China with over 180,000 Chinese characters in April 2010. It is about the life and art of Guangzhen Zhou in both China and the US since the late 1950's. He hopes the book will be able to be translated in English and published in the US soon.

Guangzhen Zhou's early works were figurative and surrealistic. Due to the writing of his autobiography, many of his memories resurfaced. He decided to create these images out of clay as the illustrations for his new books, the series "The Enamelware Age, Shanghai Nostalgia." His new works are realistic, and techniques such as hand-building, pottery wheel throwing, underglaze, overglaze, decal transfer are used.

## Ceramics Annual of America (CAA)



September 10-12, 2010

September 9, 5-9 pm Opening Reception

Fri & Sat. 10am-8pm

Sun. 10am-6pm

Herbst Pavilion at Ft. Mason, San Francisco

website: [www.CeramicsAnnual.org](http://www.CeramicsAnnual.org).

Email: [CeramicsAnnual@gmail.com](mailto:CeramicsAnnual@gmail.com)

The Ceramics Annual of America is part of California's continuing legacy of excellence and innovation in ceramics. Our goal is to encourage the education and enrichment of the public, thereby promoting awareness of the ceramics community, cultivating a fertile art market, and fostering dialog between collectors and makers of contemporary ceramics. Ceramic artists, educators and collaborators, we are interested in sharing and sustaining connections with others worldwide.

The Ceramics Annual of America (CAA) is an ambitious new exhibition and fair spotlighting the quality and diversity of contemporary ceramics in the Americas. The Ceramics Annual of America, expected to be an unprecedented event, will provide a venue for regional and national artists working in the clay medium to show their work to a broader group of collectors.

Organized by the California Ceramics Cooperative, a group of invested regional ceramic artists, CAA will bring together an impressive number of the nation's top ceramic artists, instructors and collectors. Panel discussions, lectures, tours and demonstrations will be held throughout the exhibition, including a panel on regional ceramics featuring artist Ray Gonzales, curator of the Oakland Museum, Phil Linhares, director of the Richmond Art Center, Nancy Servis, and moderated by Susannah Israel. The fair will also include the historical exhibition, "Harold Paris' Walls of Mem", with a lecture discussion on the work from artist, Jim Melchert, and art historian, Peter Selz. This is a unique opportunity to see this work showed comprehensively in an exhibition environment. "Artistic childcare" will be provided by the exploratory ceramics program Kids N' Clay and is offered throughout the weekend.

The inaugural exhibition is scheduled for September 2010 in Herbst Pavilion at Ft. Mason. Ft. Mason, as the site chosen for this event, embodies the essence of San Francisco-its nearness to nature, combined with the novel architecture, gives a nod to the past and offers a dose of the different. Ft. Mason is a major draw for national and international visitors to the city, while Herbst Pavilion, a 30,000 square ft. hall, can accommodate as many as 3,000 visitors.

There will be about 70 artists selected for this event, and there will be two pieces by Guangzhen Zhou in the show that titled: the Endless Banquet and the Chinese Calligraphy during the Cultural Revolution.

## *The Enamelware Age-Shanghai Nostalgia, Ceramic Art by Guangzhen Zhou*

Guangzhen Zhou's early works were figurative and surrealistic. Due to his writing of his autobiography (titled *Carrying Clay Art on My Iron Shoulder* published by Jiangsu Fine Art Publishing House in China with over 170 thousands Chinese characters), there were many images came out from his memory, he decided to create these images out of clay as the illustrations of his new book, the series of "The Enamelware Age, Shanghai Nostalgia." He was using the realistic artworks for imitating the typical objects of daily life over 30 years ago, and to represent the scene of Shanghai in that time.

It was also called "Iron Rice Bowl" for description of "The Planned Economy System" of that time. There were no plastic products in China at that time. The enamelware was very popular instead. In Shanghai, if someone assigned a job for working with any state run business will received a enamel rice bowl with his or her ID number printed. That is the title of "Enamelware Age" came from. "Enamelware Age-Shanghai Nostalgia" is reflecting the hard life in Shanghai before "the Reform and Open Door" policy. Guangzhen Zhou believes, all of these images are part of memories of whole generations the time they belong to in Shanghai. There are many stories behind these images. Guangzhen Zhou would like to express his memories of his childhood in Shanghai.

## *The Enamel Age*



The history of human beings has gone through the Neolithic Age of primitive society, the Bronze Age of salve society and the Iron Age of feudalism society. The system in China in the 1950-1980's may be called the Enamel Age.

During the Cold War, there were several socialist countries in the Eastern semi-sphere. China was one of these countries. The socialism system was also literally called "the Planned Economy", "the Rice in the Big Pot" and "The Iron Rice Bowl".

During that time, most manufacturing was under the control of the government and was distributed to everyone in limited quantities; People had to pay not only money, but also food or merchandise tickets to buy the commodities. All of living units and job positions were assigned by the government, which meant that people had no way to choose their place to live, no way to select their own

career.

From the 1950 to 1980's, enamelware containers such as enamel rice bowls, enamel mugs, enamel dishes and enamel washing bins were very popular in China. Enamelware is durable: if an enamel mug fell on the concrete floor, only a small chip might break off and people could fix it by using regular paint to touch it up. Enamel rice bowls were also used for cooking on stoves. The most important part about enamelware was that if anyone was assigned a job in a state-run business, he would be able to receive a set of white enamelware that included a rice bowl, mug and small dish with his working ID number printed in red.

There were no competitions, no personal desires for a better life, no individual lifestyle. The individual person was just one of the screws in the large machine of the revolutionary society. So enamelware represented not only the person's social status, but also the political classes and the cultural environment during that time.

In 1978, after the "Reform and Open Door" policy started, everything changed dramatically. Meanwhile, plastic-ware gradually replaced enamel products. The enamel age lasted only 30 years in China, but it deeply influenced several generations.

## *Chinese Calligraphy during the Cultural Revolution*



### **Installation**

About over 30 ceramic pieces in a variety of sizes on a ping pong table of 8' x 4';

### **Descriptions**

An installation of a scene of Red vs. Black in a ping-pong room at a school during the Cultural Revolution of China from 1966 to 1976. It includes realistic ceramic items that resemble actual objects from daily life during that time.

The ping-pong table is separated into two sides (4' x 4' each): A student (the red guard) was using the table on the left and a professor (the "nasty" intellectual) was using the table on the right.

On the left: A "Loyalty Pledge" had been written by the student right before his meeting to

swear in defense of Chairman Mao. The student was using a flat brush and liquid ink from a small enamel dish, and was writing on red paper in simplified Chinese with graphic style. There are objects next to the paper: a red book titled "the Quotations of Chairman Mao", a red guard's uniform (PLA military uniform), etc.

On the right: A statement of "Admittance to Guilt" was written by a professor right before a revolutionary people-organized meeting to criticize capitalism, where the professor may be removed from his teaching position to be a janitor instead. The professor was using a traditional pointed brush, with an ink stone and stick, and was writing on white paper with traditional Chinese characters. Along with the white paper, there are a tie-made mop, a broom, and many other objects.

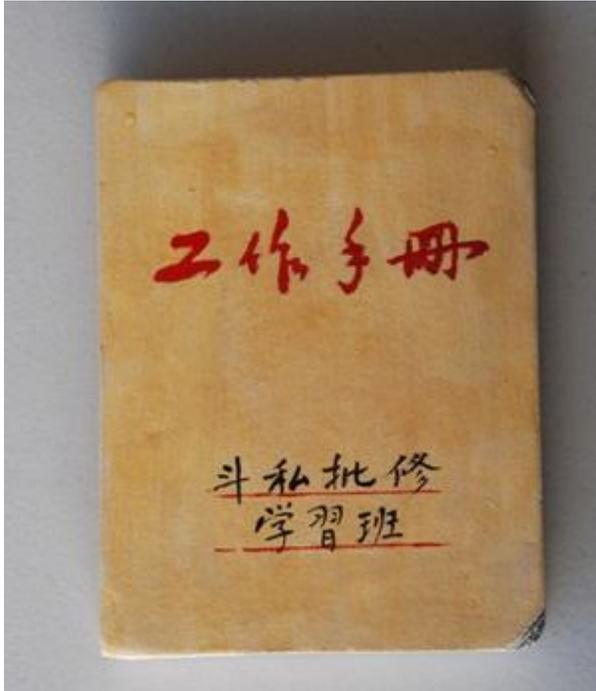
The artwork exposes the cultural side, the denying of the wealth of knowledge and the impact of society during the tragedy of the Cultural Revolution

### *The mop made out of ties*



During the earlier part of the Cultural Revolution, there was a revolutionary storm of clearing out all of the "monsters" and "demons"-so-called "forces of evil" in order to break down old thoughts, old culture, old customs and old habits; and to establish new thoughts, new culture, new customs, and new habits. The Red Guards of Chairman Mao searched the houses of the rich and anti-revolutionary families and confiscated anything anti-revolutionary, feudalist, capitalist, or revisionist.

My grandmother took out some expensive silk ties and made them into a mop.



Working Notebook with the hand writing of "For Group Study of Fighting Selfishness and Repudiate Revisionism".

Before the computer age, a notebook called "Working Handbook" was a very popular tool, used by all levels of people in factories or commercial companies, from lower-level workers to high-ranking officers. There was only one kind of notebook in the whole country.

During that time, at each working unit there would be many meetings or group studies for political purposes. It would consist of reading and discussing political articles from the newspaper of criticizing capitalism, or it could have been something like: "recall past suffering and think over the source of present happiness", or "fight selfishness, repudiate

revisionism".



### *The National Condition in that time (Enamel Spittoon with Wooden Lid)*

During the 1960-1970's, the white enamel spittoon was found everywhere in China before the Reform and Open Door Policy. From small towns to large cities, from department stores to factories, from office buildings to meeting rooms, the enamel spittoon was displayed, by stairways, by doors, or next to meeting room sofas.

Since the Reform and Open Door Policy of 1980's, spittoons have gradually disappeared and the national condition of China has drastically changed.

## *The Luggage for "Up to the Mountain and Down to the Countryside"*



In late 1968, Chairman Mao decreed that young intellectuals go to the countryside for re-education by poor and lower-middle class peasants. It was called "the movement up to the mountain and down to the countryside." Hundreds of thousands of school graduates went to the countryside from cities during the late 1960's.

Cotton blankets, straw hats, enamel washing bins and mugs were some of the most common items to be carrying with you by that time.

## *"Ma, Tai, Sao" series, (Aunt Ma, also means Shopping, Washing and Cooking)*



"Ma, Tai, Sao" is the Mandarin pronunciation for "Aunt Ma", and it also means "shopping, washing and cooking". The term was a joke for doing housework in Shanghai during 1960's to 1980's. At that time, it was six working days a week (Sunday off only). There were no refrigerators. People had to go shopping for food early every morning (fresh food could not be saved for more than few days). There were no washing machines - clothes, blankets, everything was hand washed. There were no gas stoves or microwave ovens. Coal-burned stoves were everywhere. The daily chores of shopping, washing and cooking burned most of a family's energy, but it was the lifestyle of Shanghai in that time.



### **To use one penny twice, 2010**

During that time, the income was very low, everyone was trying to save even one penny. The term "To use one penny twice" means both positive and negative.

### **My teapots collaborating with Yixing Artist Meiqun Gu are in the show at AMOCA**



In 2003, when Yixing artist Meiqun Gu was invited to the US for the teapot workshops in the US, I discussed with her about some kind of teapot series with contemporary concepts. I have drawn some sketches and Meiqun made them into the teapots with Yixing purple clay. The collaborated teapot series, "Biology", is now in the show at the American Museum of Ceramic Art in Southern California.

Biology, Purple Sand Clay Teapot

Designed by Guangzhen Zhou, Constructed by Meiqun Gu, 2003

### **Question and Answers: How to handle dried Yixing Clay**

**Q:** How can I use Yixing clay if it has already dried out?

**A:** There are no differences between "old" clay and "new" clay; but there are between wet clay and dried clay. If the clay just feels a little stiffer and too hard to work with, you may cover the clay with a wet towel overnight. You may be able to use the clay afterwards. If the clay is in a

bone-dry condition and the color has turned whitish, you have to leave the clay in water and let the clay absorb it. Then you let the clay dry a little until it is not as sticky. Please keep in mind that you have to use a mallet to pound or wedge the clay before using it in your artworks.

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