Testing the boundaries of ceramic art
with ceramics

Chuan Kiu-hong sees contemporary ceramics as an experimental ground for re-examining the traditional medium of clay, and his works often span a variety of media, from sculpture, ceramics to sound. On display is "Lushan", a work that breaks away from the audience's general perception of ceramics. Through the form of a mechanical sculpture installation, the artist attempts to transcend the conventional boundary of ceramic art.

The true face of Lushan

"Lushan" simulates a lurking beast with a kinetic installation which rises and falls slowly before the audience, like a monster breathing. A large piece of fabric goes up and down, accompanied by the rise and fall of the Yixing ceramic tiles attached to it. Caught between what they can and cannot see, in a state of cognition and non-cognition, the audience finds themselves face to face with an indescribable horror. But if you take a closer look at the true face of "the monster", you will discover the truth — it is nothing more than a giant ballon, the kind often used as decoration on festive occasions, hidden beneath some tiles and cloth. Ironicaly, it can also excite fear when it shows up covered with seemingly fearsome scenes, looking completely different.

This one-of-a-kind experience, Chan hopes that viewers can reflect on the true nature of fear, and how it might just stem from our own minds.

Made with Yixing clay, the tens of thousands of scales on the monster's back are hand-drawn, piece by piece, onto the fabric. Chan boldly uses Yixing clay for his work, experimenting with the traditional material for something other than functional ware. From searching for the right spoons and ladles to use as moulds, getting the Yixing clay slip just right for casting, to the complicated processes of casting the mould, overdrying and firing. It shows that Chan is willing to break the tradition of ceramic traditions. At the same time, it reveals the infinite possibilities that ceramic art has to offer once it enters the realm of contemporary art.

The power of collaboration

Chan's creative partner is fashion designer Ken Hung. Using off-white fabrics with different thicknesses, patterns and textures, he created a large patchwork and skillfully sewed an abstract 'landscape' onto the mottled material, taking inspiration from natural motifs commonly found in visual art. Ken's knack for textiles, expert tailoring skills and aesthetic sense in non-ceramic fields not only helped to express the three-dimensional image of the monster the artist envisioned in a layered manner, but also added a deeper philosophical meaning behind it. At the same time, he helped solve a lot of the problems Chan had with the materials and production process. "Lushan" is indeed the perfect example of "collaboration". On one hand, the fabric hides a secret underneath, hinting towards a "monst" in an abstract manner while magnifying the audience's shared perception of fear its incomplete form leaves space for the audience's imagination, allowing them to complete the image of the monster hidden within their own minds. On the other hand, the ceramic parts are not there to take over the body of the work; they have even withdrawn into the 'decorative' part of the fabric. But every tiny tremor of the ceramic scales verifies the monster's existence, deceiving the audience into associating the heaving breathing with an unspoken "fear". Here, the art of ceramics and textiles go hand in hand — without one or the other, the work would be incomplete.

Are you ready to face this humongous beast — a reflection of what is hidden within your own subconscious?
在文化社會學文本中，神怪異獸是反常事物的合理與想像，其實體並不存在，它代表著一切非理性力量的總合。文化人類學、民俗學則可引證神怪異獸是先民們為氣候變異、災禍預知、社會秩序以及超自然現象的合理化解釋。因此，「怪獸」包含著對當下的集體恐懼情緒。

分析心理學的創始者榮格形容恐懼是對自身、事物或環境的懼懼，長久存在於人們日常壓抑或無法接受的自身性格黑暗面。這種黑暗面演成了榮格所描述的「陰影」，是集體潛意識中一具影響性格的「原型」，各種「原型」會在夢、幻覺、幻想、恐懼、精神病症中無意識地投射出來，成為人類心理及情緒上的共同意識。

神怪異獸自古是陶瓷藝術的主要題材：商周時代的粗陶獸形塑像、西晋的青釉神獸形尊、唐代的三彩鎮墓獸、宋代《營造法式》所記載的 IMAGES 與蹲獸、以至近代日本的鬼瓦……從型達意，由意生神，從神怪異獸的產生與演變，反映出當時的社會狀態，人心所向。

In cultural sociology texts, mythical beasts are considered to be interpretations and imaginations of abnormal and extraordinary matters. They do not exist in physical form, and represent the consolidation of all irrational powers. From cultural anthropological and folklore perspectives, beasts and mythical creatures have always been used as rational explanation for weather changes, disaster predictions, social order and supernatural phenomena. In this sense, beasts comprise the collective fear at a given moment.

Jungian analytical psychology described fear as self-doubt or triggered from unknown matters and environment man encounter. The suppressed and denied fear exist and accumulate in man’s dark side of the personality, reinforcing the “Shadow” archetype in the collective unconscious of man-kind. Different “archetypes” manifest unconsciously in dreams, hallucinations, fantasies, and neuroses. Fear then becomes a shared psychological and emotional conscious.

Mythical beasts have been a recurring theme for ceramics since ancient times: from pottery animals of the Shang and Zhou dynasties, the Western Jin dynasty celadon ritual vessels in the shape of sacred beasts, the tomb guardian figures in sancai (tri-colour) glaze of the Tang dynasty, and the Kalavinka and crouching beast figures depicted in the Song dynasty architectural manual Yingzao Fashi to modern Japanese onigawara (“ogre tile”). Form conveys meaning, and meaning gives birth to spirit; the emergence and transformation of gods and mythical beasts reflect the social conditions and mentalities of the population of its time.

The artwork “Lushan” focuses on this everyday non-existence. Over ten thousand scales, moulded by the negative spaces in spoons and ladles, are attached to a piece of ordinary fabric as big as 30 square metres in size, which is then laid over a huge festive balloon. With each breath it takes, it grows into an enormous creature of nothingness.

Perhaps everything and nothing exist in this age of unease. Perhaps you already fear when you question the reason for fear itself.

關於陶藝家
About Ceramic Artist

陳翹康
Chan Kiu-hong
Chan Kiu-hong obtained his Master of Fine Art from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University in 2009. Besides teaching part-time at the Hong Kong Art School, he constantly searches for possibility to expand the creative boundary of ceramics by merging with other multi-media contemporary art forms such as sculpture, installation, environmental and sound art.

關於創作伙伴
About Creative Partner

熊銘健
Ken Hung
Ken Hung was a graduate from the Bunka Fashion College, Japan. After graduation, he returned to Hong Kong and set up his own brand. Ken is well known for his enthusiasm in promoting sustainable fashion culture.