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YUN, SAUNG SOOK. Living Clay. (1973) Directed by: Gilbert Carpenter. Pp. 6.

The thesis consists of a number of masks and several free forms in clay.

This thesis was exhibited at the Weatherspoon Gallery of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro from January 20 to February 3, 1974.

On file in the Jackson Library of the University are 35mm color slides of the thesis.

LIVING CLAY

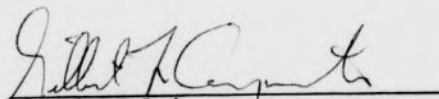
by

Saung Sook Yun

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts

Greensboro
1973

Approved by



Thesis Adviser

APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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December 5, 1973
Date of Examination

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the assistance of my thesis adviser, Professor Gilbert Carpenter, and the other members of my Thesis Committee; Professor Peter Agostini, Professor Ben Berns, and Doctor Carl Goldstein.

I also wish to thank my parents for their constant encouragement of my work from abroad. I would also like to express my appreciation to my brother, Tain Yun, for his support and assistance during my adjustment to America.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to Ms. Arlene Katz, for her constant interest in my work and her personal response to my art which is a poem included in this thesis, entitled "Masks."

LIST OF WORKS

- | | |
|--|-------------------------|
| 1. Landscape I
The Village of My Grandparents | Height 7 3/4" |
| 2. Landscape II - "Paju"
The Place of Farmers | Height 6½" |
| 3. Moving Landscape I | Height 7½" |
| 4. Moving Landscape II <i>[2 numbers 43]</i> | Height 6" |
| 5. The Movement I | Height 14", Width 15" |
| 6. The Movement II | Height 16½", Width 14½" |
| 7. Thunder on the Mountain <i>-Lacking</i> | Height 27", Width 16½" |
| 8. Buddha Masks, I and II | Height 9", Width 11" |
| 9. The Jolly Smile | Height 9½", Width 11½" |
| 10. The Sad Smile | Height 11¼", Width 9½" |
| 11. Sorrow | Height 9½", Width 11½" |
| 12. Sun | Height 11", Width 13" |
| 13. "oh!" | Height 10", Width 8½" |
| 14. Singing | Height 10", Width 10" |
| 15. Shouting | Height 9½", Width 11½" |
| 16. Young Man | Height 11", Width 9" |
| 17. Younger Brother | Height 9½", Width 9½" |
| 18. Old Monk | Height 10", Width 10½" |
| 19. "Stranger" | Height 11", Width 9" |
| 20. Mr. Park Chomji (Hero) | Height 12½", Width 12" |

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21. Mr. Park Chomji's Concubine Height 12½", Width 12"
22. "Listen to Me" Height 11½", Width 9"
23. Bride and Groom I Height 7½", Width 8"
 (My Sister Young Sook and
 Jai Hang Choi)
24. Bride and Groom II Height 5½", Width 6½"
 (My Sister Jin Sook and *Lacking*
 Young Lim)
25. Bride and Groom III Height 5", Width 5½"
 (My Brother Taijin and *Lacking*
 Yun Kyung)

INTRODUCTION

Through working with clay for about three years, I have become aware of the nature of this material and its wonderful plastic response when handled with love and care. Originally deriving from many centuries past, clay is the most abundant, ubiquitous, and accessible material on the earth's crust. Ceramics is the perfect combination of what the ancient Greeks regarded as the four elements of which the world was made. Ceramics is made of earth, shaped with water, dried in air, and made durable by fire.

Enjoying the versatility of clay, I tried to develop an idea of my potentials for free form in ceramic sculpture. Also I want to find a deeper spiritual content for my own life through the medium of ceramics.

LIVING CLAY

I created a number of masks working mainly with the ancient Oriental process of raku to produce unusual textures in clay. Raku has its roots in the philosophy and tradition of Zen Buddhism, stemming from a background of universal human experience.

I attempt through my masks to portray a full and varied range of human emotions and facial expressions. Using the different sizes of molds and then shaping the masks further to round or oval shapes, I designed facial features describing the expression I wish to evoke: carving the eyes and mouths, and forming noses with great care.

The round masks tended to have pleasant expressions ranging from the jolly smile of the Buddha figure to the placid grin of the second type of round masks. The next series of masks are the tiny round faces based upon my impression of the traditional bride of my country. These fragile and demure expressions embody their highly respected virtues of shyness, quietness, and passivity. The top knot on the center of the forehead of these masks symbolizes the traditional headgear worn at the wedding ceremony. This headgear is a small black, red-lined bridal crown with beads and jade ornaments.

The large oval masks tend to demonstrate more disturbing qualities. Their expressions are more dynamic. They include grief, sorrow, shouting surprise, or a quieter meditation.

The five medium-sized masks were made in Memphis, Tennessee, during the summer of 1973 when I was learning a new technique in a salt workshop. I was curious to see if salt texture would be as effective as my previous use of raku method. Again the expressions vary from mild pleasure, to the tender smile of a Buddha figure to shock and finally to anger. I employed different techniques for working in salt ranging from the heavy salt texture of the greenish-tan mask to the smooth mask which was created by covering the salt clay body with porcelain slip and transparent slip glazing. Highlighting the facial features (the ears and the upper triangle), I left the salt body uncovered.

Masks are unlike any other theme of art. They deal with different aspects in the life of man.¹ I found working with masks highly rewarding because I am fascinated by the reflection I can see of a person's inner character in their face as well as being able to read the quality of the person's life experience etched upon their features. To me my masks are living creatures with histories all their own.

¹The mask in the exhibition called forth the poetic response included here on page 6.

My next series of works are the assemblages of human organs and portions of the body. Observing the collapsed shapes of pieces I had created on the wheel, I was particularly fascinated by the richly diverse shapes that were formed when functional objects like bowls lost their shape and were transformed into interesting new objects. This gave me the idea to work on a composition consisting of these formerly rigid shapes that I had squeezed into something possessing a more fluid, softer movement. In these compositions I used a theme of the human anatomy to integrate the different pieces that seem to flow into one another and to pulse together. The idea that these are more natural forms created by the distortion of the more regular shapes molded upon the wheel has much to do with my use of them to portray the naturalness of the human organism.

In discussing my third set of pieces I will describe how using the same technique in working with the clay still permitted me to evoke two different kinds of feeling. I pushed down a slab of clay into a round receptacle forcing it to wrinkle and curve by itself. After it was leather-hard dried I removed it and fashioned a bottom for the piece and then placed the form upsidedown.

The older pieces, made by a raku method in Chapel Hill's 1972 summer workshop, are reminiscent of a landscape in my native Korea: a mountain dotted by small thatched roof huts of the Korean pastoral scene. Farmhouses are generally found fitted snugly into the folds of hills. The curved

roofs suit themselves well to the contours of the mountainous landscape. The two attendant pieces are smaller hills also with these houses perched upon them.

The more recent pieces, using a similar technique, have a different feeling. Fluidity and movement is achieved through the placing of the small clumped pieces flung together and seemingly flowing down the sides of the basic shape. Here the clay's feeling is softer, the folds and the fluidity of the darker mass both work to stress the paradoxical quality of the hardness of the ceramic medium and the softness of the impression it gives. I am involved in demonstrating the actual physical 'feel' of the clay, more than just its visual qualities in these particular pieces. I consider the expressive inflections of shape, texture, color, and design, but concentrate mainly on the tactile value of my ceramics.

MASKS

Hear Us!
 We are storytellers,
 Mouths flung open,
 Ears distended
 Nostrils flared.
 We speak of past experience,
 Inward vision.
 Hear Us!
 We can tell you of the news you seek,
 (We speak of journey.)
 Come inside the pits we have for eyes
 And tell your story:

Today you were married-
 (Your eyes cast down, a new beginning
 You left your mother's house)
 Today your father died-
 (Anguish ribbed your face to furrows
 You cried till morning.)
 Today you sat beneath a lotus tree-
 (Watched the swing of constellations piece together)
 Today you smiled-
 (A wind blew from the sea
 Smell of salt and coral washed ashore.)

Can you see the purpose of the
 Faces cast?
 Refracting sharp toward you
 The mirror
 The mirror
 Look in and See
 Out.
 Set the figure to your own
 Story.

A. Katz