

April 2021 – The Art & Culture Interest Group Visit to Yingge Ceramics Museum’s 2020 Taiwan Ceramics Biennale Exhibition, Fu-Guei Restaurant and Tai-Hwa Pottery

A Springtime Day of Art, Culture, Enjoyable Dining and Friendship

Text: Sue Babcock, Images: Jessica Liu Chia

There is something energizing and special about a springtime gathering of friends. Chairwoman Jessica Liu Chia and her Arts and Culture Interest Group created such a moment for WTIC members and guests, as they gathered at the Yingge Ceramics Museum to view the *2020 Ceramics Biennale Exhibition*.

During the Qing dynasty (more than 200 years ago), immigrants to Yingge discovered that Yingge clay was highly suitable for making pottery. Today, tucked away in a sleepy artisan enclave southwest of New Taipei City and bordered to the south by the Dahan River, Yingge has become an international hub for fine ceramics and craftsmanship. In fact, it is the largest ceramic production center in Taiwan with close to 900 ceramic-related businesses in the area.

The Yingge Ceramics Museum

When we arrived at the side entrance of the Yingge Ceramics Museum, we were warmly greeted by museum personnel and divided into pre-arranged tour groups with Mandarin and English speaking guides. Each guide was well-versed in the history of the Yingge Ceramics Museum (YCM), its permanent collections, preservation of Taiwan’s ceramics culture, promotional education programs and the *2020-2021 Ceramic Biennale Exhibition*.

It was interesting to learn that in 2004, the Yingge Ceramics Museum accepted the task from the National Museum of History in Taipei to organize the *Taiwan Biennale Exhibition*, which at that time was only for Taiwan artists. Since then, it has reached out to the international community greatly enhancing its status and reputation as a leading professional museum dedicated solely to ceramics and international cultural exchange.

The 2020 Taiwan Ceramics Biennale Exhibition jury panel, we were told, had received 732 entries from 58 countries. It was the highest number of entries that

were competing for the NT\$1 Million Grand Prize. The international jury panel consisted of members from France, Indonesia, Japan, Taiwan and the United Kingdom.

We were taken to the third floor's special exhibition area, where *the 2020 Taiwan Ceramics Biennale Exhibition's* 109 outstanding jury-selected ceramic pieces awaited us. Each piece was carefully arranged with strong consideration given to the viewers. Their themes represented a wide range of creative interpretation reflecting social issues impacting our rapidly changing world. The exhibition floor plan design allowed us to have ample 'space' to pause, look, reflect and perhaps be stimulated by our own creative responses, as we stood before favorite pieces.

Before we knew it, it was time for lunch. With lingering 'goodbyes' and sincere expressions of appreciation to our tour guides and museum staff, we boarded our bus and headed to the Fu-Guei Art & Culture Restaurant. We arrived at the restaurant in record time. For some of us, it was our first visit.

The Fu-Guei Art & Cultural Restaurant has a lovely gallery and exhibition area on the first floor, with its restaurant on the second floor. Moderate lighting, exquisite art installations, comfortable seating areas, well-prepared, delicious and artistically presented luncheon sets, with ceramic serving and dining utensils by well-known artists, added a special cultural ambience to this luncheon.

Old Yingge Street

Feeling well-nourished and relaxed, many of us decided to use our 'after-lunch-free-time' to explore the studios, ceramic and porcelain shops, along Old Yingge Street. Since there were not many tourists and because the street is designed only for pedestrians, it was a leisurely, non-rushed and fun looking and shopping experience. There were two things in particular that caught my attention that I would like to explore on a return trip; taking a ceramic or beginner pottery class at one of the shops offering them and to explore the historic Guzao Kiln. This kiln site and exhibition offers an interesting history of the Taiwan pottery industry and Yingge ceramics.

Tai-Hwa Pottery, Gallery and Museum

The last special activity of our cultural day trip to Yingge was the visit to Tai-Hwa Pottery, Gallery and Museum. We were graciously welcomed and escorted to an

upstairs Gallery filled with breathtaking displays of exquisite and delicately painted, glazed porcelain pieces...each piece, an example of flawless and outstanding craftsmanship. We were drawn to pieces where glazes resembled watercolors. This technique was due to efforts from local Taiwanese artists to create painted colored porcelains, which consequently led to the establishment of the Tai-Hwa Ceramics Learning Centre and the Craftsman Studio at Tai-Hwa headquarters in Yingge, in 1995.

International and Diplomatic Acclaim

Over the years, Tai-Hwa Pottery has continued to be on the cutting edge of innovation. Forming alliances with businesses and different industries, in order to find new markets, has been a success. For example, ROC overseas embassy and consulate official dinners feature Tai-Hwa's exclusive "*Excellent Esthetics*" (2015) a customized blue-and-white porcelain tableware design.

As the afternoon light began to wane, it was time to board our bus for the last time and return to Taipei. It had been a full day of cultural activities, fun and friendship. Jessica Liu Chia and your team, we thank you for organizing such a memorable *Art & Culture* special event.