



UNIVERSALITY *of the* ESSENTIAL  
*Ceramics by* Young Jae Lee

PUCKER GALLERY • BOSTON



PLATE  
calcite and nepheline syenite glaze  
4 x 19.5 x 19.5"  
YL217

COVER: PLATE  
calcite and nepheline syenite glaze  
3.5 x 20.5 x 20.5"  
YL216

ALL WORKS ARE STONEWARE.

# ECHOES *of* FORM

THE CERAMIST YOUNG JAE LEE WAS BORN AND raised in Korea and moved to Germany as a young woman in the 1970s. Today she is one of Germany's leading studio potters and enjoys a strong international reputation as well.

The quietude of Young Jae Lee's work belies the age in which we live. Our world bustles at an ever-increasing pace as we are encouraged — or goaded — to make the best use of our time. We find ourselves compelled to get more for less, to do the same amount in less time, or to produce more in the same number of hours for the same amount of pay. To be efficient, to cut waste, to multi-task, to utilize the latest “apps” giving us access to the most up-to-the-minute, targeted technological power — these are the skills that others admire and reward, and that build self-confidence as thoroughly competent citizens of the digital age. To make things simpler, quicker, and more direct is the hallmark of technology, but ironically, every little bit of time or space we save is immediately filled up by the next new electronic device or program.

It seems to me that the question should not always be, “How can we do more?”, but sometimes needs to be, “How can we do less?” Though we are obsessed with the desire to acquire more and to do more, we convince ourselves that if we desire only what can be attained legally and through our own hard work, it is not really greed.

Nevertheless, religious leaders throughout mankind's history have pointed out the unfulfilling nature of ceaseless desire. Jesus held up birds as models for living a self-sufficient life: “Behold, the fowl of the air — they sow not, neither do they reap.”<sup>1</sup> The Buddha identified craving as the only truly deadly sin, stating that the dissatisfaction emanating from desire is the root of all suffering.<sup>2</sup> How did he advocate for one to escape the clutches of unceasing desire? By renouncing desire and recognizing that all the universe

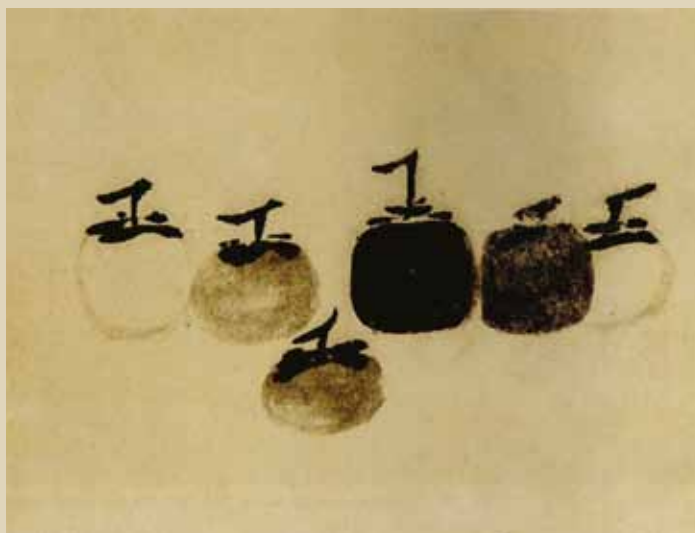
is essentially the same — in other words, by acknowledging that there is ultimately no advantage to be gained by striving.

The famous Chan (Zen) painter Mu Qi Fachang (ca. 1210–1269) illustrated this idea with his well-known ink painting *Six Persimmons*. The painting is composed of nothing more than six persimmons, with no base or background. However, Mu Qi has painted each persimmon so that it appears to be unique. Who has ever seen persimmons that look so different from each other? I am convinced that Mu Qi used outward differences in the appearance of the persimmons to point to their essential sameness: after all, no matter what they look like, they are all persimmons! The connection is, of course, that, according to Buddhism, all sentient (conscious) beings are essentially the same — there is no meaningful distinction between you and me, however different or separate we may appear on the outside.

It is of Mu Qi's *Six Persimmons* that I am reminded when I look at Young Jae Lee's ceramics. Many of her pieces follow the same basic format: plate, bowl, jar/vase. Lee makes no attempt to create markedly idiosyncratic or unique shapes, instead repeating the same or similar tried-and-true forms again and again. According to Maya Kirsten Stiller, the making of each vessel is for Lee an act of devotion.<sup>3</sup> What more wonderful devotional deed is there than to make something of both beauty and utility that can serve its owner for

a span of many years!

An intriguing aspect of Young Jae Lee's oeuvre is the way in which perfection and imperfection are both present in the most subtle way. These are not the overtly distorted ceramics of anagama-fired stoneware — rather, they accept both perfection and imperfection. It reminds me of the equanimity of the tea master who supposedly made the poem: “In my little hut, whether



SIX PERSIMMONS  
Mu Qi Fachang (Chinese, ca. 1210–1269)  
Ink on paper



PLATE  
barium and feldspar glaze  
3.25 x 20.5 x 20.5"  
YL218

people come or not, it is all the same; in my heart there is no stir of attraction or disgust.”<sup>4</sup> This precept of non-attachment is what Buddhism, especially Seon (Zen), teaches most strongly.

Although their forms are often similar, by no means are Young Jae Lee’s pieces all the same. Each is as unique as the prayer breathed in the morning is different from the one that follows it in the evening. The glazes and modes of decoration used by Lee on her large platters have an invariable sense of calm repose, but each is compelling in its own way. A recurrent theme in the current group of plates is streaks or elongated forms running across the surface. These distinctive patterns give the impression of rain that has just begun, leaving streaks on a window or smooth stone. Some streaks seem to be seen from a few feet away; others best seen from close up. Their muted colors are harmonious and in no way jarring or overt. Other plates are decorated only with the crackle in-

herent in the selected glaze, which makes a fine motif on its own. Still others reveal only the variation that occurs naturally in the making process, as the glaze adheres more thickly in some places and less so in others.

In understated three-dimensional works such as those by Young Jae Lee, form and light play essential roles. Although her plates are all essentially large spheres, they vary considerably in depth and curve. This creates significant differences in how the light plays off of them, a phenomenon that was highlighted (no pun intended) in Lee’s recent installation exhibition “Vessels” at the Westphalian State Museum of Industrial Heritage in Germany. The installation featured a wide selection of her platters placed asymmetrically on the corrugated steel floor of an outdoor industrial apparatus. The strong shadows created by the un-tempered sun and the sharp lines of the metal structure generated a striking scene of arresting contrasts.<sup>5</sup>

The group of vessels that Young Jae Lee refers to as “spinach bowls” is varied, but in this selection has one notable constant. Each bowl displays a foot that is noticeably higher than those found on bowls ordinarily used in a Euro-American context. Traditionally, in Lee’s native country of Korea, a vessel with a raised foot indicated that it was intended for special purpose, such as presentation to a deity or an ancestor. Although these bowls may not have been made with such specific objectives in mind, their shape further emphasizes the spiritual relationships in Lee’s work.

Whether large plates, spinach bowls, or spindle vases (the

large-ish jars whose shape is reminiscent of abacus beads), each of Young Jae Lee’s works belongs to an eternal type, varying in only subtle ways. Through her work, with its focus on restraint and element, she encourages us to celebrate both the nuance of the individual and the universality of the essential.

—ANDREW L. MASKE

*Andrew L. Maske is Associate Professor of Art History at the University of Kentucky. His research focuses on Asian ceramics and their cross-cultural relationships.*



PLATE  
calcite, barium, and feldspar glaze  
4.25 x 20.5 x 20.5"  
YL224

<sup>1</sup> King James Version, Matthew 6:26.

<sup>2</sup> This concept is the foundation of Buddhist belief, as expressed in the “Four Noble Truths,” the most basic teaching of Buddhism.

<sup>3</sup> Stiller, Maya Kerstin. “A Synergy of Natural Balance and Ergonomic Perfection” in the exhibition catalogue *Bauhaus Meets Korea: Ceramic Works by Young Jae Lee*. Boston: Pucker Gallery, 2012, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Sadler, A.L. *Chanoyu: The Japanese Tea Ceremony*. Rutland, VT: Tuttle Publications, 2001 (1934), p. 105.

<sup>5</sup> LWL-Industriemuseum. *Vessels: Installations by Young Jae Lee* (Installationen von Young Jae Lee). Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Industriekultur, 2013.

PLATE  
 calcite and nepheline syenite glaze  
 4.25 x 20.25 x 20.25"  
 YL219



PLATE  
 calcite and nepheline syenite glaze  
 2.75 x 20.5 x 20.5"  
 YL220





PLATE  
calcite and nepheline syenite glaze  
2.5 x 20 x 20"  
YL221



PLATE  
wollastonite and feldspar glaze  
4.5 x 20 x 20"  
YL222

PLATE  
 calcite and nepheline syenite glaze  
 3.75 x 20.25 x 20.25"  
 YL223



PLATE  
 calcite and nepheline syenite glaze  
 4.5 x 20 x 20"  
 YL225



PLATE  
 wollastonite and feldspar glaze  
 5.25 x 19.25 x 19.25"  
 YL227



PLATE  
 wollastonite and feldspar glaze  
 4.25 x 19.25 x 19.25"  
 YL228



PLATE  
barium and feldspar glaze  
5.25 x 19.75 x 19.75"  
YL226



PLATE  
calcite and nepheline syenite glaze  
3.25 x 20 x 20"  
YL231





PLATE  
barium and feldspar glaze  
5.25 x 19.5 x 19.5"  
YL236



PLATE  
talc and feldspar glaze  
4.5 x 19.25 x 19.25"  
YL230

PLATE  
wollastonite and feldspar glaze  
4 x 19.5 x 19.5"  
YL233



PLATE  
wollastonite and feldspar glaze  
4 x 20.5 x 20.5"  
YL232

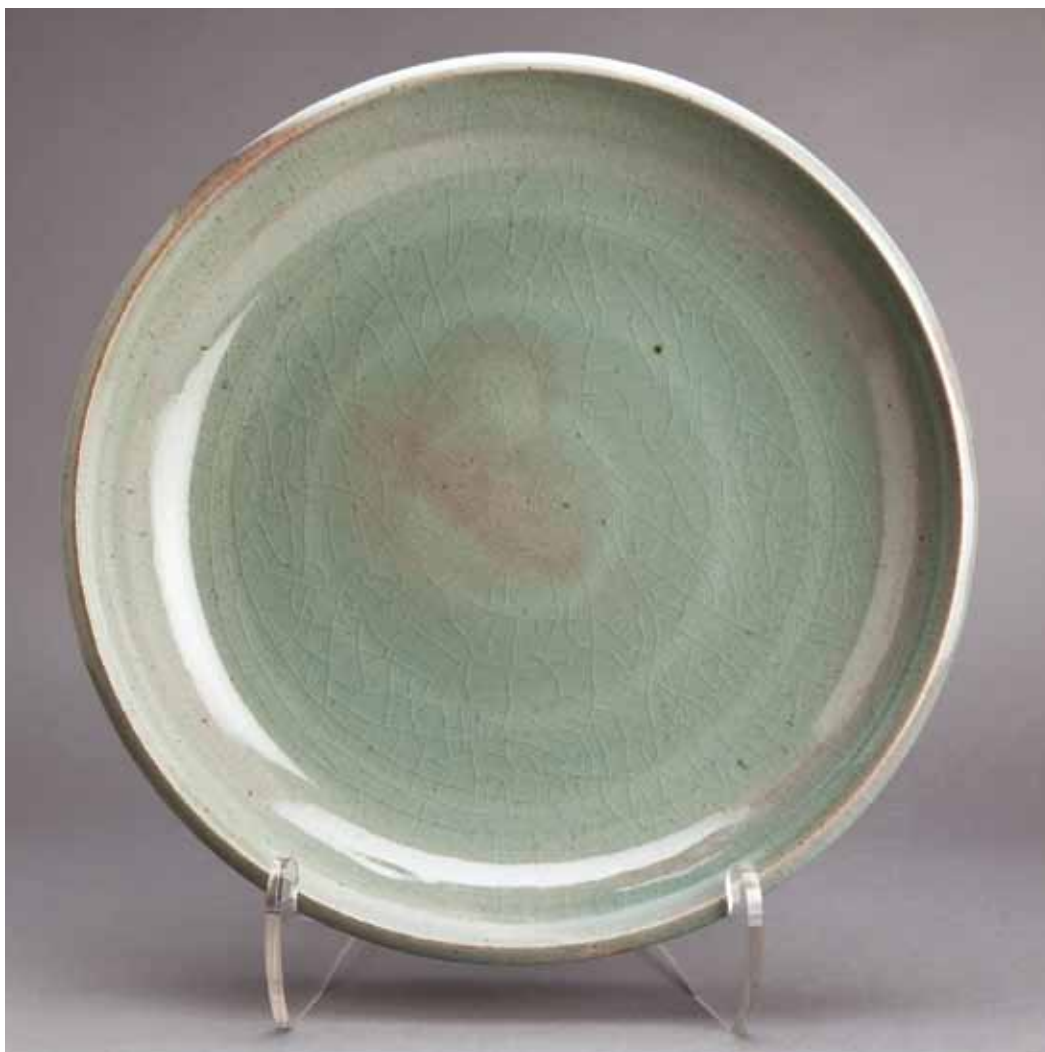


PLATE  
barium and feldspar glaze  
5.25 x 19 x 19"  
YL234



SPINACH BOWL  
barium and feldspar glaze  
3.5 x 5 x 5"  
YL242



SPINACH BOWL  
spodumene and feldspar glaze  
3.5 x 4.5 x 4.5"  
YL245

SPINDLE VASE  
wollastonite and feldspar glaze  
12.75 x 13.25 x 13.25"  
YL211



SPINDLE VASE  
talc and feldspar glaze  
13 x 14 x 14"  
YL215



SPINACH BOWL  
copper and  
feldspar glaze  
3.75 x 4.25 x 4.25"  
YL244



SPINACH BOWL  
calcite and  
nepheline  
syenite glaze  
3.5 x 4.25 x 4.25"  
YL243



SPINACH BOWL  
copper and  
feldspar glaze  
3.75 x 4.5 x 4.5"  
YL241



SPINACH BOWL  
barium and  
feldspar glaze  
3.75 x 4.5 x 4.5"  
YL240



SPINDLE VASE  
talc and nepheline  
syenite glaze  
12 x 13.25 x 13.25"  
YL212



SPINACH BOWL  
calcite and nepheline syenite glaze  
3.5 x 4.5 x 4.5"  
YL238



SPINACH BOWL  
wollastonite and feldspar glaze  
3.75 x 4.75 x 4.75"  
YL237



SPINACH BOWL  
calcite and nepheline syenite glaze  
3.5 x 4.5 x 4.5"  
YL239



SPINDLE VASE  
talc and nepheline syenite glaze  
13.5 x 14.5 x 14.5"  
YL213



SPINDLE VASE  
talc and nepheline syenite glaze  
12.75 x 12.75 x 12.75"  
YL214



## YOUNG JAE LEE

### *Biography*

- 1951 Born in Seoul, South Korea
- 1968-72 Studied at Academy of Fine Arts in Seoul
- 1972-73 Internship with Christine Tappermann in Wallrabenstein, Germany
- 1973-78 Studied ceramics at the Münster University of Applied Sciences in Münster, Germany  
Studied form and design with Erwin Schutzbach at the University of Applied Sciences in Wiesbaden, Germany
- 1976-77 Internship with Ralf Busz in Friedrichsfeld, Germany
- 1978-87 Established atelier near Heidelberg, Germany
- 1984-87 Artistic and scientific assistant at the University of Kassel in Kassel, Germany
- Since 1987 Director of Keramische Werkstatt Margaretenhöhe GmbH in Essen, Germany

### PRIZES

- 1980 Frechener Kulturstiftung, First Prize
- 1981 Bampi-Preis, Osnabrück, Second Prize
- 1989 Bayerischer Staatspreis, Gold Medal
- 1997 Hessischer Staatspreis (for Keramische Werkstatt Margaretenhöhe), First Prize
- 2001 Bayerischer Staatspreis für Gestaltung (for Keramische Werkstatt Margaretenhöhe)  
Dießener Keramikpreis les Must de scènes d'intérieur, Septembre
- 2005 Hessischer Staatspreis (for Keramische Werkstatt Margaretenhöhe)

### PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

- Baden State Museum, Karlsruhe, Germany
- Cologne Saint Peter Art Center, Cologne, Germany
- Grassi Museum/Museum of Arts and Crafts, Leipzig, Germany
- Hetjens Museum, Düsseldorf, Germany
- Keramion, Frechen, Germany
- Museum of Applied Art, Frankfurt am Main, Germany
- Museum of Applied Art, Gera, Germany
- Museum of Arts and Crafts, Hamburg, Germany
- Museum of Asian Art, Berlin, Germany
- Museum of East Asian Art, Cologne, Germany
- Museum of Fine Art, Boston, Massachusetts, USA
- Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania, USA
- Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich, Germany
- St. Clare's Church, Nuremberg, Germany



PLATE  
talc and feldspar glaze  
4 x 19.25 x 19.25"  
YL235

CREDITS:

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PUCKER  
GALLERY

ESTABLISHED 1967 BOSTON

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Please visit [www.puckergallery.com](http://www.puckergallery.com) to view current and past exhibition catalogues, experience audio tours, and subscribe to the *Artwork of the Week* e-mail list.

GALLERY HOURS

Monday through Saturday 10:00 AM to 5:30 PM

Sunday 10:30 AM to 5:00 PM

We offer one free hour of validated parking at the 200 Newbury Street Garage. The garage driving entrance is located on Exeter Street between Newbury and Boylston Streets. The nearest MBTA stop is Copley Station on the Green Line.

Pucker Gallery is a member of the Boston Art Dealers Association and the New England Appraisers Association.

UNIVERSALITY  
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*Ceramics by* Young Jae Lee

*Dates:*

1 March through 30 March 2014

*Opening Reception:*

1 March, 3:00 PM to 6:00 PM

*The artist will be present.*

*The public is invited to attend.*

PLATE  
talc and feldspar glaze  
4.5 x 18.75 x 18.75"  
YL229

