

NCECA 2015 National Juried Student Exhibition

NCECA 2015

... personally speaking ...

Evelyne Schoenmann

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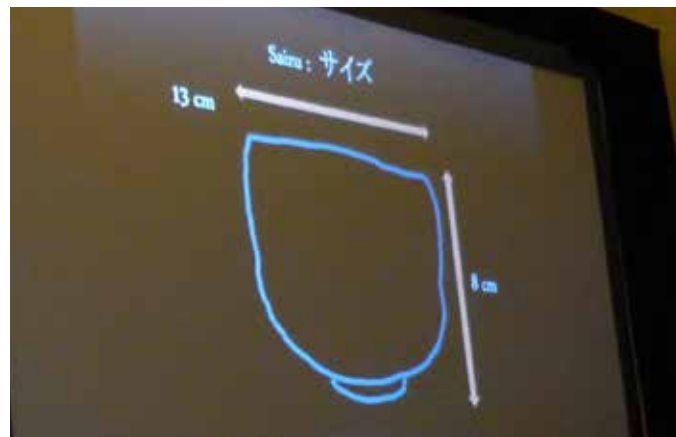


The acronym NCECA (National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts) has exercised a great attraction on me for many years, actually since I have been a ceramist. To actually go there was on my bucket list in capital letters. NCECA has its roots in the USA, which is why its annual congress always takes place in a different American city. As this is not exactly just around the corner for me, the desire to participate had been on my to-do list for some time. Two events in quick succession finally made my mind up to make my wish come true – my second successive win in an American competition and my election onto the Advisory Board of Potters Council of the American Ceramic Society, ACerS. And so there I was boarding a plane to Boston on a sunny day in March. The 49th NCECA congress was in the sedate town of Providence, Rhode Island, around an hour's drive from Boston, from 25 – 28 March 2015.

The NCECA stands for the worldwide furtherance and appreciation of ceramic art. On their website, for instance, it says, "We believe that learning through art touches lives and builds meaningful connections". This speaks from my heart, and I would like to play my part in it. But the NCECA congress also stands for four days jam packed with talks, committees, demonstrations and exhibitions, workshops, events and panel discussions. In addition, there are social get-togethers, meeting old friends and making new ones, talking shop, going on strolls around Providence together and much more. My colleague Jimmy Clark gave enlightening insights on exhibitions in his fascinating article on the 2014 NCECA congress. Now I would like to take you on a journey to the centre of the 2015 congress.

It really begins somewhat before the congress proper. In early March, I had received an invitation to the loading and firing of Chris Gustin's woodfired anagama/noborigama in Dartmouth, MA. After two weeks of uninterrupted, back-breaking stoking, shortly before the beginning of the congress, the kiln was opened and unpacked with the guests. In the immediate vicinity, in the Whale Museum in New Bedford, an exhibition was taking place where eight New England ceramists had entered into a dialogue with the exhibits in the Museum with their own work. After that, I found a workshop on the construction of woodfired kilns very instructive. It was given by John Baymore at Gorse Mill Studios in Needham, MA. I was also fascinated by the workshop at the same studio on making and firing traditional aka raku chawan. The intermediate firing in red-hot charcoal was new to me.

On the day of the official opening of the congress, a bitterly cold Tuesday



top - entrance to the National Juried Student Exhibition
centre - Gustavo Pérez demonstrating
bottom - chawan lecture



Lily Manoogian - K12 exhibition



van Albrecht

afternoon, I travelled to Providence with an NCECA old-stager, in a state of great excitement. I was kept entertained with useful information and anecdotes from previous congresses. After arriving at the congress centre, I immersed myself immediately in the hubbub, registered and took a look in the gigantic hall, where busy workmen were still busy setting up the sales and display stands for the art fair that was also taking place. The sheer size of the congress centre, covering three storeys with its numerous lecture theatres and exhibition galleries was overwhelm-

ing. Luckily the organisers had provided useful floor plans. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the organising team of the NCECA, especially Cindy Bracker and Steve Hilton as well as all the volunteers! They provided us with a wonderful experience. The Wednesday started for me at 7.00 a.m. with the annual meeting of the committee of the Potters Council. After that I allowed myself to be swallowed up by the densely packed programme of the congress, true to its motto, Lively Experiments. I had actually, rather optimistically, compiled my daily programmes from the

overwhelming range of events weeks in advance. But at the congress itself, I was regularly distracted from my plan... For instance, on the Wednesday, I was unexpectedly confronted with the choice of taking a shuttle bus to view some wonderful exhibitions outside Providence or to attend various artists' talks at the annual Gallery Expo. In the late afternoon, the Potters Council gave its traditional members' reception, which was very well attended this year again, and was also open to nonmembers. Following this, the official opening of the congress took place in the packed



Work by
 above - Susan Harris
 left - Janet McPherson



assembly hall. Keynote speaker was Dr Frederick Douglas Opie, who spoke about the history of eating habits, cooking and of course of tableware. In the second part of the evening, the so-called Randall Session, the brilliant string quartet ETHEL performed and received thunderous applause for their outstanding show. In case you have not yet heard of ETHEL, it is worth finding out more!

Things really began to move on Thursday and Friday with talks and demonstrations, well organised bus trips to further exhibition tours in and around Providence, panel discussions, etc. A few examples:

- Half-hour demonstrations from people like Gustavo Pérez, Linda Christianson, Robert Lawarre III, Martha Grover, Winnie Owens-Hart, Tara Polansky, and many more.
- Talks such as the packed lecture by Heidi McKenzie, or Marc Leuthold's wonderful slide show on Ceramic Art Leaving the Ghetto. Dr Gary Branfman pointed out the dangers of bad hand positions when throwing; John Baymore gave an introduction to the demanding and subtle requirements of chawan teabowls.
- Talks about glazes, the tea ceremony in China, experiments in low firing techniques, kiln maintenance, risks and considerations when setting up your own studio, the potential of digital school rooms, Deconstructivism, etc. – a truly huge range of subjects.
- On the ground floor, the accompanying ceramics fair took place with far more than a hundred booths from various universities and international schools of ceramics. Ceramics magazines were also represented, including our own NEW CERAMICS / NEUE KERAMIK. I should also mention the countless suppliers of clay and glazes, tools and machines ranging from wheels, clay mixers and pugmills to kilns – so it was a real shopping paradise for ceramists.
- Among the many exhibitions, the following should be spotlighted: the Gallery Expo in the congress hall, the NCECA Biennial, the 23rd annual Cup Exhibition and Sale, the Gerry

Williams Exhibition in Newport and the national Student Juried Exhibition at the Sol Koffler Gallery. At least thirty of the over 100 NCECA exhibitions took place in Providence itself.

- Past Masters, a commemoration of recently deceased colleagues like Don Reitz, Norm Shulman, Gerry Williams and Lidya Buzio, was highly emotional as many of us had known the deceased well for many years.

I would like to draw particular attention to the 18th K-12 exhibition with work from children in nursery school to 12th grade. Incredibly impressive work was on show from young artists between 5 and 18 years of age. The work was judged by various organisations and the young winners were awarded generous grants for their further training.

In the evening there was entertainment such as Steve Branfman's Clay Stories, where well-know ceramists and members of the audience recounted their own personal five-minute clay tales, many of which were hilarious. In a video recording, the legendary Robin Hopper also gave us a story. Then a few of the attendees mounted the stage with their musical instruments to perform at the 5th Annual Potters' Jam Session.

Saturday began in a somewhat more downbeat mode as we all knew that we would soon be saying goodbye to the friends we had met again as well as all the new acquaintances from all parts of the world. In addition, the return of the snow dampened the mood of the participants. But before departure, personal and highly committed speeches from six emerging artists were to be heard. One of them, Roberto Lugo, received a standing ovation from the enraptured audience when, looking at the potter's wheel, he emotionally expressed his conviction, "this machine kills hate". Ceramic legend Jack Troy brought proceedings to a close. In a humorous and personal talk, Troy made the audience laugh and cry once more by reviewing a rich life for and with ceramics – and then, suddenly, it was all over. Embraces left and right, "We'll meet again soon, won't we?", and the first attendees were already leaping up to catch their flights home, taking them to all points of the compass. What remained was the wonderful feeling of having been to a family celebration where simply everything had been right.

Have I infected you with NCECA fever? In 2016, the 50th conference will be taking place in Kansas City from 16 – 19 March. I would love to see you there!

www.nceca.net

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Work by
 above - Jeremy Randall
 bottom left - Roberto Lugo
 bottom right - Gerry Williams

