

# International CHAWAN Project – Anniversary!

# EXPO

Evelyne Schoenmann



be a follow-up exhibition. This encouraged him to plan a new exhibition and to alter the concept slightly. Ceramists applied to participate with photos of three chawan. Solely on the basis of these photos, Lou decides whether to accept or reject a piece for the exhibition. He looks for character in the chawan, an individual style and a love of the object. In other words, chawan with a soul. He has also followed up his idea of exhibiting chawan in museums. “In museums? What an unrealistic idea”, many people thought. Just imagine: teabowls made by ceramists who are still alive being exhibited in spaces where usually only the works of very famous, often dead artists are displayed! But once again, the enterprising initiator of the project was assisted by his tenacity. He got in touch with museum directors all over the world in order to present his idea to them. The result once again proved Lou Smedts right: in every Belgian ceramics museum, but also in France, the Netherlands, Croatia, the USA, South Korea, Japan, Singapore and Taiwan, chawan exhibitions have taken place.

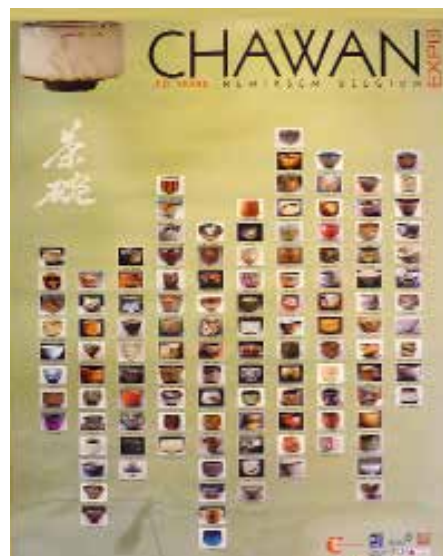
What precisely is a chawan and what distinguishes it from a normal teacup? Chawan are formed by hand in hours of contemplative work, or perhaps a little more swiftly on the wheel. The clay body, form, width of the upper rim, the weight, etc. must all lie within given limits. The teabowls are glazed by hand, often based on traditional Japanese models. After that they are usu-

A teabowl, and that is supposed to be art? “Er, no thank you”. Ceramist Lou Smedts, professor of ceramics, heard this response frequently when he started toying with the idea of a Chawan Expo several years ago and tried to encourage other ceramists to take part. Being stubborn, this likeable Belgian did not allow himself to be discouraged by this degree of scepticism. Unswervingly, he got the International Chawan Expo Project up and running. In 2005, the 17th century abbey, Sint Bernaerds op Scheldt in Hemiksem, Belgium, opened its doors to the first exhibition of the Chawan Project. Sixty-eight

ceramic artists from 16 countries took part in the exhibition. The response to this exhibition was overwhelming, which was answer enough to the initiator of the project as to whether there was sufficient general interest in an art exhibition with teabowls.

Subsequently, both participating artists and people interested in the tea ceremony asked Lou Smedts if there was to

above Preparations for the tea ceremony  
 centre Exhibition space in the abbey  
 right Exhibition poster





Alvin Tan Teck Heng speaking about the basics of chawan

worldwide interest? He says, “More and more people are recognising the value of traditional techniques. Our Chawan Project is intended to be like a stone that is thrown in the water. The waves are to release creativity, make more ceramists produce chawan and study the way of tea. I am convinced that it is a positive process. We need more respect and harmony in the world.”

[www.ceramicartproject.com](http://www.ceramicartproject.com)

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ally fired in the raku technique or in a tunnel kiln that is fuelled with wood in a firing lasting several days. So every single chawan is unique. During the tea ceremony, it is of the greatest significance to admire the teabowl at great length, its uniqueness and its beauty, before one drinks from it. This is why, when a chawan is being made, great attention is paid to shaping the lip, the beauty of the glaze and the tactile qualities. Tea culture originated in China. Later it was also introduced to Japan and today it has become a global culture. Chawan are used in the sophisticated, traditional Far Eastern tea ceremony. The rituals of this tea ceremony are hundreds of years old and follow fixed rules. The tea ceremony is a ritual gathering that can last several hours. The principles of harmony, respect, purity and calm are the fundamental values. The tea ceremony is not only maintained as a form of contemplation but it is also an art form, where the irregularity, imperfection but also the entire uniqueness of the individual vessel are important characteristics. “The less perfect it appears, the more honest the object is.” (Arhoj)

September 2015: once again, ceramists from all over the world have assembled at the St Bernhard's Abbey in Hemiksem, Belgium. This time, the tenth anniversary of the Chawan Project is being celebrated. Along side a large number of ceramists and other interested people, the mayor, Luc Bouckaert and the local dignitaries from Hemiksem at-

tended the opening ceremony. Guest nation at the anniversary exhibition was Taiwan, whose ambassador in Brussels honoured the Chawan Expo with his presence as well as with a speech. The ten days of the exhibition were not only filled with countless visitors but also with excursions and master classes for the 36 chawan ceramists who stayed in Belgium for the duration of the exhibition. The excursions took us to places where Belgium's rich history in ceramics could be experienced. And there was no shortage of delicious food or the famous Belgian beer. The socialising initiated new international friendships and deepened existing ones. In the three master classes, we learned new things about ash glazes (Lou Smedts), oil spot glazes (Kuei-Wei Chang), large-scale vessels and carving (Alvin Tan Teck) and ecological wood firings (Jui-Hua Lin). Yu-Ting Chen and Mei Lan Hsiao also gave us an introduction to the tea ceremony.

What started ten years ago and was only realised thanks to Lou Smedts' stubbornness and perseverance has now become an international success story. Ten years are a long time for an art project. So as it has been proved, it must be good to survive over this period. In total, 18 chawan exhibitions have been organised over the past ten years and there is no shortage of enquiries from interested exhibition makers from all over the world directed to the Chawan Project organisers. How does Lou Smedts explain this great

Masterclass on throwing large pots with Alvin Tan Teck Heng



Evelyne Schoenmann shows her chawan



Interested visitors at the tea ceremony

