



Gold Award 2018, *Spreading Wings Magnificently*, by Hsu Hsu-Lun

THE 7th TAIWAN INTERNATIONAL GOLD TEAPOT PRIZES

The Teapot as an Art Form

BY EVELYNE SCHOENMANN

On the island of Taiwan, acclaimed by the first Portuguese navigators as the Ilha Formosa and a stronghold of tea culture, there is a large number of generally small tea plantations in the central highlands, which with great ef-

fort produce the famous Formosa tea or the aromatic Oolong Tea, (Chinese for black dragon). It is a special pleasure to spend time in these tea plantations, allowing the gaze to wander over the sun soaked, short-clipped, lush green bushes

Tea plantation



while watching the pickers in their traditional wide-brimmed, pointed rice-straw hats as they harvest tea leaf by leaf from every single plant. Once you have seen how much largely manual work goes into every tea leaf, the high prices paid for rare varieties are no longer a surprise. The tea ceremony in Taiwan too is a special art form with the preparation of the tea subject to a strict ritual. Tea is served with every meal in Taiwan as well as in tea houses in town and country. Special tea deserves special utensils, which in Taiwan are usually designed carefully and artistically, which also applies to the lovely teapots, which are of the highest quality and long ago said goodbye to mere functionality. Today one can always recognise cultural influences in a teapot, along with careful attention to aesthetic aspects and personal creative concepts. Nearly every Taiwanese ceramist has made a teapot at least once in their life.

Of course one can cultivate the art of making teapots and invite international ceramists to compete with each other, for instance in a competition such as the Taiwan International Gold Teapot Prizes. The idea for this top-drawer competition came from Paul You (Associate Professor, Department of Ceramic Creative Design, Asia-Pacific Institute of Creativity). Primarily, Paul wanted to inspire Taiwanese artists to have new ideas, and to place the focus of interest on various forms of expression. Paul, who was also the president of the Taiwan Tea Art Culture Association, organised the first competition of this kind in 2008, in which 149 ceramists took part. For the 7th edition of this competition, the number has multiplied, with the basic idea having become something international. Six hundred and forty-two teapots from 22 countries, including 74 submissions from outside Asia, found their way to Taiwan in 2018 to compete for the attractive prizes. Yes, that is correct. For this competition it is not sufficient to submit a dossier of photos, you also have to send in the teapot! The fact that so many ceramic artists from all over the world still send their works to Taiwan says everything about the quality and standing of the International Gold Teapot Prizes. After all, the judges, who closely examine all the entries and even try them out to see if they work as teapots in everyday life, can make a much better judgement with the original actually before them. The number of prizes has thus increased



View of the exhibition



View of the exhibition

accordingly. In 2008 there were Gold, Silver and Bronze prizes as well as commendations and certificates for finalists. In the third year, the Judges' Choice Award was added. In 2018, the Collectors' Choice Award was introduced in addition. On the basis of museum curation, 47 collectors have the opportunity to make suggestions for prizewinners to the judges. Over the years, many prizewinners including the author of this article donated their teapot after the respective exhibition to the collection of the Taiwan Teapot Museum planned by Paul You. In the recent 7th edition of the competition, Professor Ge Jun, Master of Chinese Art and Craft, was the head judge responsible, and the director of the Tea Ceremony Institute Chen Yu-Ting was the judge for the Tea Masters' Choice. The eminently festive, exquisitely executed award ceremony took place in mid-September 2018 in the auditorium of the Farglory Museum in New Taipei. The Gold Award went deservedly to Hsu Hsu-Lun from Taiwan with his phantasy bird, Spreading Wings Magnificently. Silver was shared by Sha An Qiang and Lo Chi-Ming. The four Bronze Awards were also shared, by Chiang Hsuan, Lee Wen-Wu, Chen Yuh-Shyuan and Chen Jui-Yu. There were also ten Honourable Mentions, Judges' Choice, Tea Masters' Choice and Collection Awards. Yu Jan-Chi, director of the Farglory Museum, assembled the 197 prizewinning teapots from 2018 and a selection from earlier competitions to form a representative exhibition in the Museum



The Gold, Silver and Bronze winners with Paul You, Ge Jun and the director of the Farglory Museum, Yu Jan-Chi

itself. It is furnished in exquisite taste and met with great public acclaim. The participants of the IAC/AIC (International Academy of Ceramics) Congress were also able to admire the exhibition during one of the satellite events, the "Tea Party", organised around the exhibition spaces. At ten tea tables, tea masters from the Taiwan Tea Art Club gave an introduction to the tea ceremony, using elaborately made teapots from well-known Taiwanese ceramists, including Hsu Hsu-Lun, winner of the Gold Award.

Wherever visitors go, they see that Taiwan is a tea-drinking country with out-

standing ceramists. Taiwan is rightly proud of this. Teamaster Chen Yu-Ting says, "A well made teapot enhances the flavour of the tea." What is important are the correct proportions, the tactile qualities, the colour, the position of the spout, handle and lid, so it is a complete philosophy. The 8th edition of the competition is planned for 2020. Further details are available on <http://taiwangoldteapot.weebly.com/>

EVELYNE SCHOENMANN

is a ceramist. She lives and works in Basel, Switzerland and in Liguria, Italy.
www.schoenmann-ceramics.ch