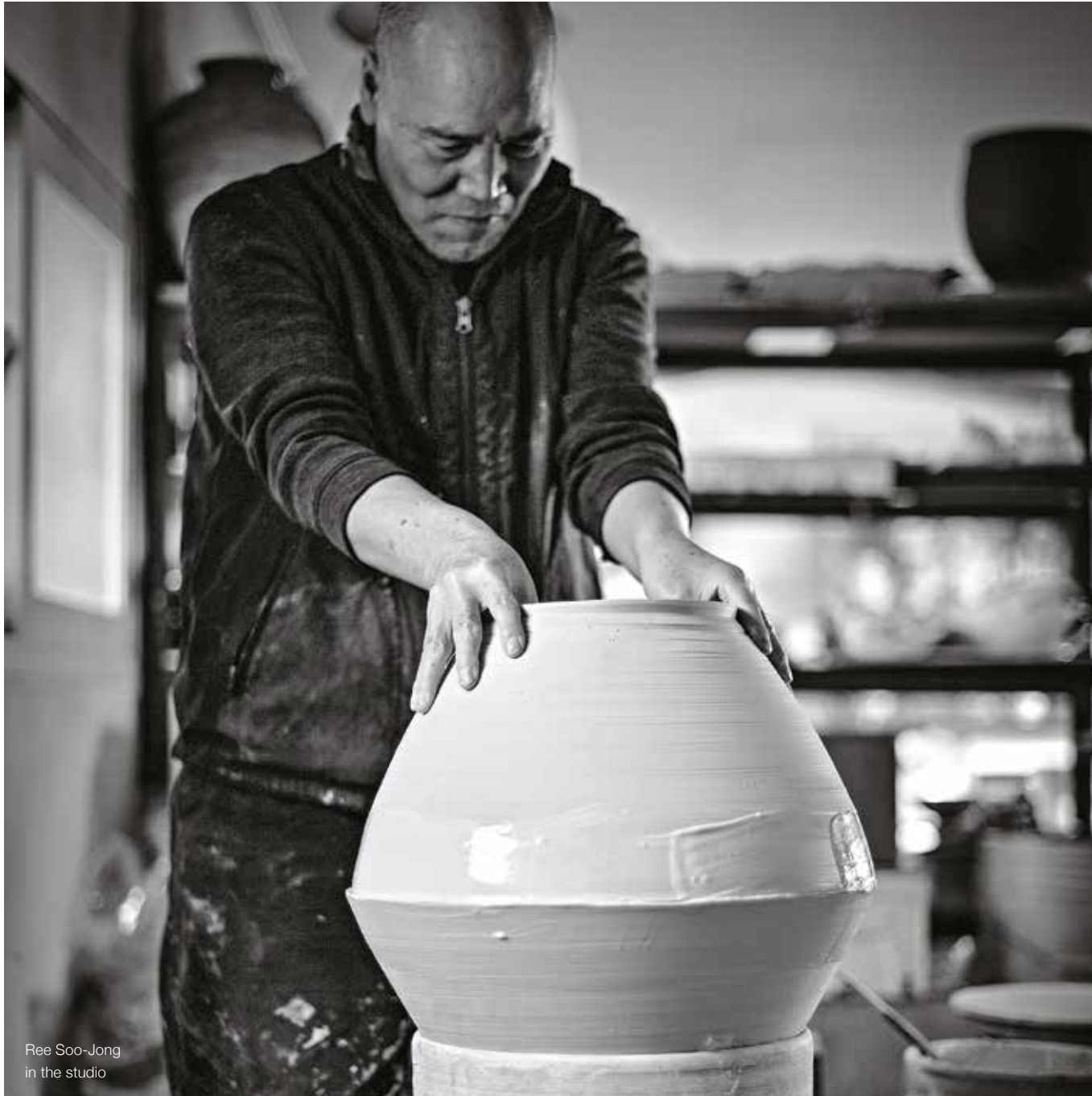


# Korean Ceramics



LONDON  
MESSUMS  
WILTSHIRE

REE SOO-JONG  
LEE HUN CHUNG



# Ree Soo-Jong and Lee Hun Chung

Curated by Paul Greenhalgh

Perhaps time is the single most important determinant in how we understand ceramic. It isn't just that the discipline has a dauntingly deep and pervasive history - we are aware of fired clay objects from as early as 29,000 BCE - but that we have superb examples of them, from then through virtually every age up to the present. The lasting power of fired clay is unique: no other art has a lineage as ubiquitous or intense as this. Inevitably then, it leans on all contemporary artists who seriously engage with it. Contemporary ceramic has to deal with an ever-present memory, one that cannot easily be elided, and this is an inescapable factor in its aesthetic make-up.

Nowhere is this sense of cultural memory more powerful than in Korea, which has been host to a vital ceramic culture for millennia, and at various points in that long history, has been thought to be unrivalled. It took celadon to heights that even the Chinese struggled to match, and for some of us, the painterly porcelain vases of the Middle Chosun Dynasty are among the greatest

achievements of world art. We understand as specific Korean contributions various types of relief and incised wares, and the magnificent form known as the moon jar. In one way or another, contemporary Korean practitioners have to deal with this giant, omnipresent heritage.

As with painting and sculpture, it isn't always a blessing. Grand canons have the power to stultify experimentation, and to intimidate artists into unnecessary respect and imitation. Nevertheless, the greatest art in the modern period - and especially the greatest ceramic - has been that which forms a relationship with the past - absorbing, commenting, challenging, and even denying its implications - in order to make art that moves us on.

Ree Soo-Jong (born 1948) has long been recognised as one of Korea's principal ceramic artists. Interestingly, while his output for several decades has essentially been about the vessel, in the extraordinary context he grew up in, his formation as an artist was quite different. His early reputation was driven far more by a sculptural approach to practice. Through the 1970s and 1980s, he developed



a wide repertoire of organic, raw, abstract forms, which occasionally tipped into architectonic structures. He also worked with the human figure. Vitally, he has always been engaged with painting and drawing, running this thread alongside his ceramic activity. He is the painterly draftsman par excellence, and in many respects, drawing underpins everything he does.

He occasionally worked with the vessel through his earlier career, but it was really only from the mid-1990s that he committed to it in an ongoing, obsessive way. Thus, he previously had a career of pushing, testing, experimenting, in which clay was moved through a wide repertoire of idioms, before the determination to focus this exploration on pots.

His work in the current exhibition essentially comprises of a number of groups, each of which is an essay on the moon jar. The artist doesn't say a lot in front of his work, but when I met him in his studio, he tellingly pointed out that traditionally, the rounded form of the moon jar was achieved by throwing two bowls, and then joining them together to create a spherical form. The join would be

smoothed out, to hide the process. Soo-Jong frequently exposes the join to make it a core element in the vessel. He then uses his extraordinary technical control to push the form into new terrain. His language of lines, splashes, drips, dints, tucks, dents allows him to transform the moon jar into an emotive arena, a site of unmediated expression.

One of the artist's great signature pieces is a tall white vessel derived from a moon jar, with a single dramatic gestural black brush mark across its face. It is a spectacular, existential statement about the fusion of past and present, and a quintessentially Asian – Korean approach to the painted vessel. A sublime level of confidence brings thrown form and painted surface into unison, and painting and pottery become the same thing.

This method and philosophy of the painted vessel was known to Europeans by the later 19th century, but it was most effectively brought to Europe by Bernard Leach and Shoji Hamada, who worked together in Japan. They returned to Britain in 1920, exactly a century ago, and profoundly impacted Western studio ceramic. So the

visual language at work in Soo-Jong's moon jars is now a truly international idiom. But few have ever practiced it like this: he has taken the idiom, and brought it profoundly into the 21st century. His moon jars are among the greatest pots of our times.

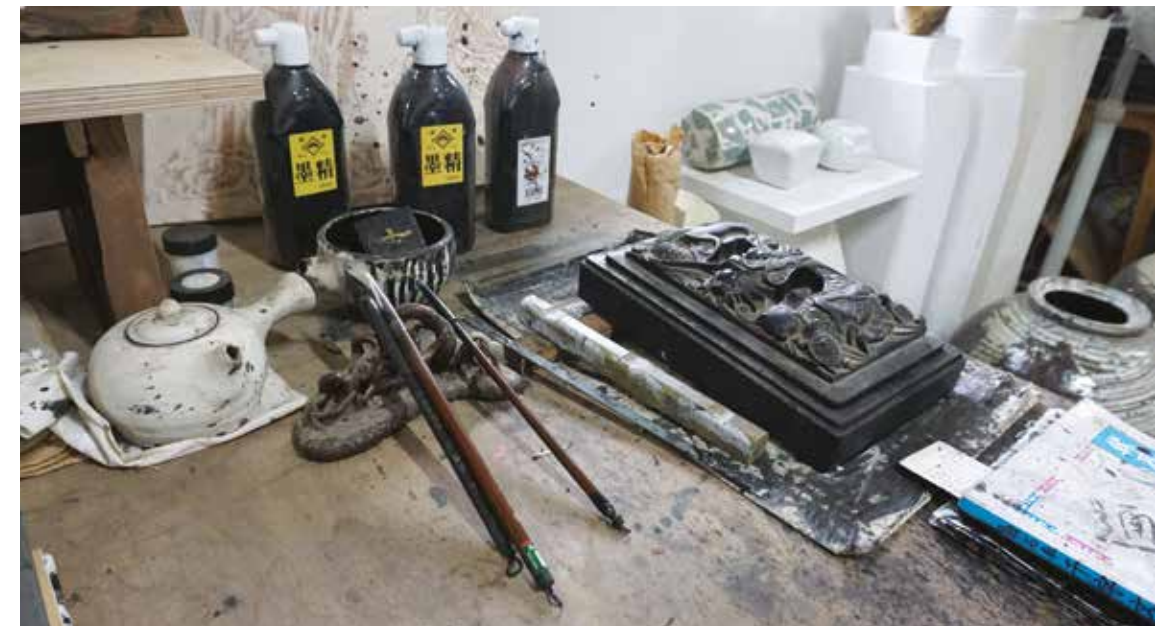
Ree Soo-Jong knew Hamada. Much like the Japanese master, there is a profound straight-forwardness in his vision of practice. Art historian Choi Gong-Ho commented that Ree Soo-Jong does not use exaggerated rhetoric when he talks about his works. This implies that he thinks that true works of art are created when working with clay with your own hands rather than playing with words. He believes a day's physical labour is far more honest than ten seemingly great concepts. So, he says, working is his life.

He is acutely aware of global developments in artistic practice, and of the ideas that underpin it. But his life is squarely based in making things.

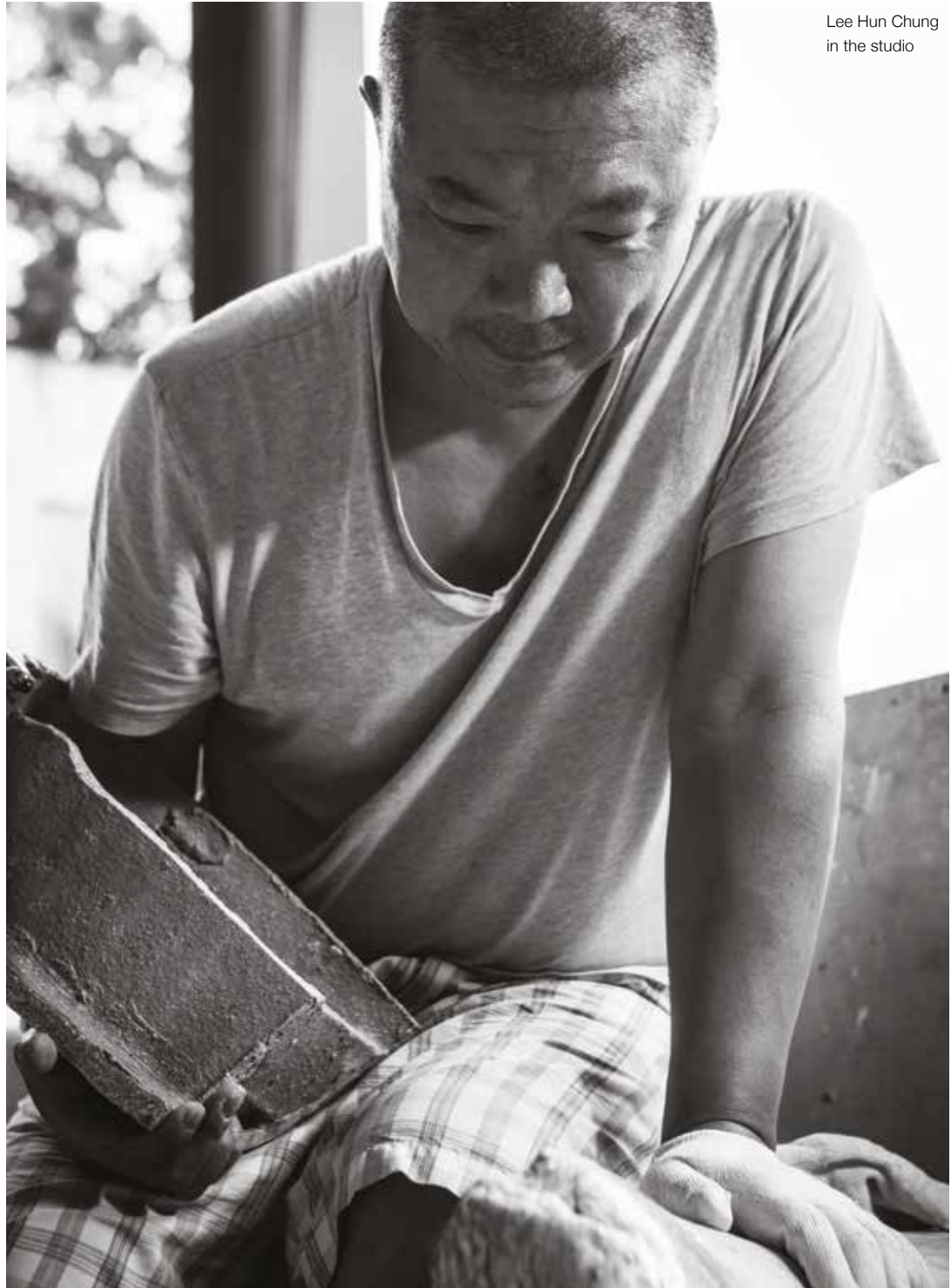
This sense of artisanship, of doing, seems to be part of the Korean attitude to culture. Lee Hun Chung (born 1967), describes his attitude to practice in much the same way as Soo-Jong. He tells us that I like people who think with their hands and talk with their hands, people who genuinely think of the works themselves as goals.

A kind of physical cognition: not a denial of ideas, but rather, an assertion that they cannot exist in isolation from the object. The role of the individual artist is to expose ideas through materials.

A generation younger, Hun Chung's national reputation is as an artist who has engaged with conceptualist approaches to practice. He often works with large-scale installations, that deliberately confound any demarcation between the various disciplines. Art critic Chang Dong Kwang tells us that "Lee is a potter, sculptor, designer, architect, painter, installation artist, poet, and labourer, because he is full of raw human character". He also







Lee Hun Chung  
in the studio



refuses to acknowledge any meaningful space between abstract and figurative art. Much of his work is multi-media, with large-scale ceramic sculptural forms at the heart of things. Running through all of this, is a socially-engaged range of imagery. The artist tells us that: “it feels good to live as an artist as a member of society, no more, no less”. His work resonates with what he finds around him, and is driven by an ongoing commentary on life. While there is subversive wit at work, the overwhelming feel of the whole is invariably of a joie de vivre, a gladness to be around, and alive.

As part of this creative vortex of activity, the artist still engages with the vessel, and ceramic as a material of architectonic and design potential. Over the last period of years the artist has developed an extraordinary range of furniture, effectively by expanding the role of the thrown vessel. His chairs, stools, tables and daybeds are created from modeled and thrown ceramic. Large

vessels become stools, or the support for a daybed. He uses the related technology of cast and polished concrete to create the flat planes to make the furniture work. More classically, large planters fill interior space, and function as major features in interior space. This work is the core of the current exhibition. And interestingly, he is still engaged in production pottery, running BADA, a company that produces a range of wares for a wide audience.

The Korean ceramic scene is one of the brightest and most complex in the global arena, and it remains at the heart of the national culture. The country boasts impressive ceramic theme parks, and it isn’t by chance that the world’s most important regular international gathering of ceramic art is the Gyeonggi International Biennial, near Seoul. When we peruse the work of these two extraordinary masters, brought to England in quantity for the first time by Messums London, we realise why.

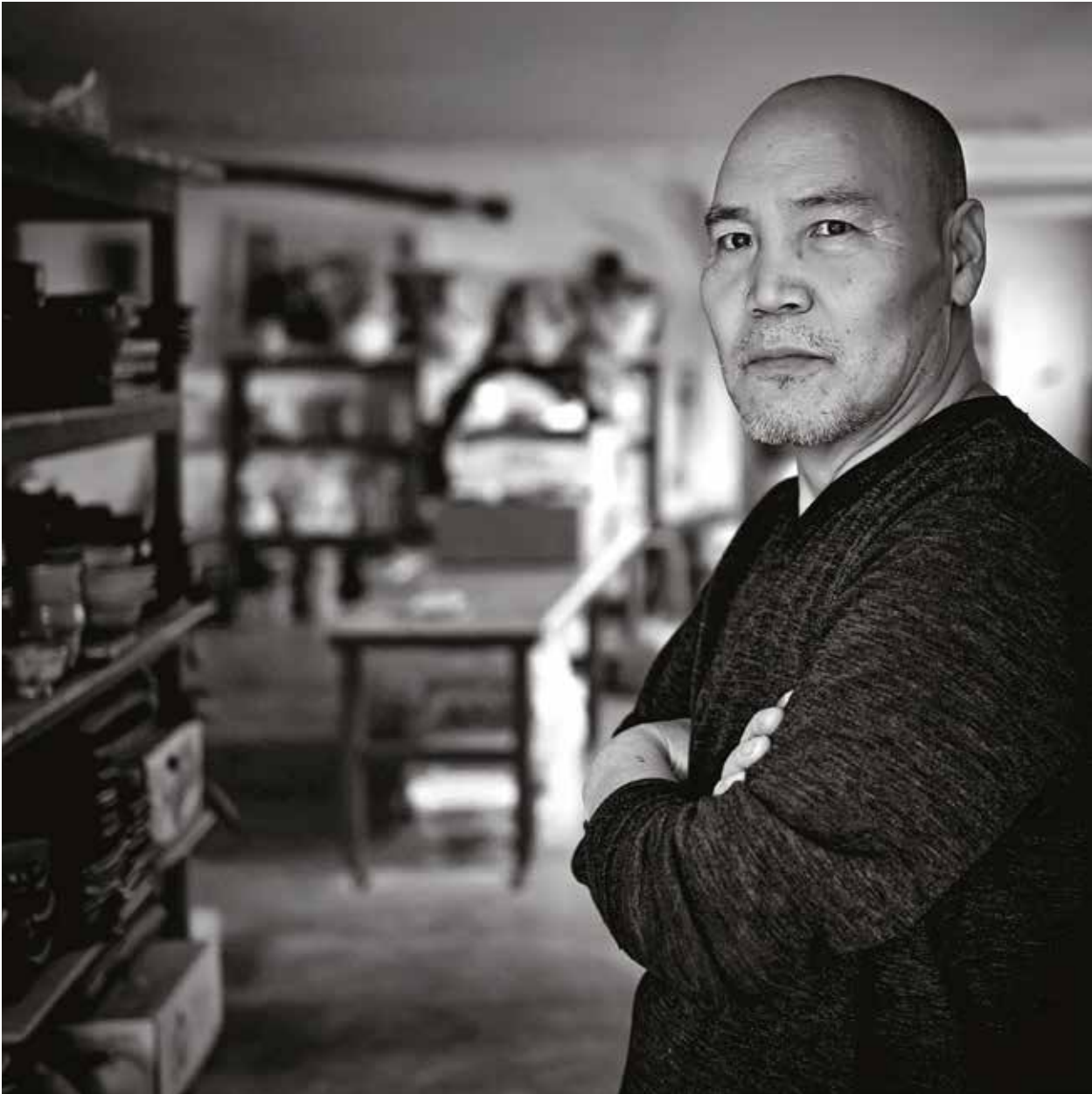
# REE SOO-JONG

**1948** Born in Seoul  
**1971** B.F.A Hongik University (Major in Ceramics)  
**1978** M.F.A Hongik University

- COLLECTION**  
The Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park (Japan)  
Taipei City Museum (Taipei)  
Victoria and Albert Museum (London)  
Royal Ontario Museum (Canada)  
The National Folk Museum of Korea (Seoul)  
Hongik University Contemporary Museum (Seoul)  
E-Land Group (Seoul)  
Sungkyunkwan University Museum (Seoul)  
Milal Museum (Seoul)  
National Art Museum of China (Beijing, China)

A member of International Academy of Ceramic/IAC

- SOLO EXHIBITIONS**  
**2019** Angukdong Byeolgung KNUCH (Buyeo)  
**2017** SEIN Gallery (Seoul)  
PiaoPiao Gallery (Taipei)  
**2016** Yu Hyeon Dang KNUCH (Buyeo)  
**2014** Gallery 3 (Seoul)  
**2013** ZIEN ART SPACE (Yongin, Korea)  
**2011** Gallery Date (Pusan, Korea)  
Gallery Dam (Seoul)  
**2008** Tong-In Auction Gallery (Seoul)  
Song ART Gallery (Seoul)  
**2007** Gallery Dam (Seoul)  
Seoul Open Art Pair (Seoul)  
**2006** Tong-In Auction Gallery (Seoul)  
Gallery Dam (Seoul)  
**2005** Gallery Ban (Busan)  
Yesong Gallery (Daegu)  
Tong-In Gallery (New York)  
**2004** GaNa Art Center (Seoul)  
**2003** Seomi Gallery (Seoul)  
JoHyun Gallery(Busan)  
Namoo Gallery (Seoul)  
**2001** YuRie Gallery (Fukuoka, Japan)  
GaNa Art-Space (Seoul)  
**1998** MokKumTo Gallery (Seoul)  
**1997** To Art Space (Seoul)  
**1995** To Art Space (Seoul)  
Woowon Gallery (Seoul)  
**1994** Gallery Pusan (Busan)  
**1993** Sungdam Art Gallery (Seoul)  
Sampoong Gallery (Seoul)  
**1990** To Gallery (Seoul)  
**1988** To Gallery (Seoul)  
**1987** To Gallery (Seoul)  
**1986** To Gallery (Seoul)  
**1981** Kwanhoon Gallery (Seoul)







Chulhwa Buncheong, 2006  
Ceramic  
25 x 25 x 27 cm



**Moon Jar, 2012**  
Ceramic  
40 x 40 x 51 cm



**Moon Jar, 2012**  
Ceramic  
37 x 37 x 51 cm





**Moon Jar, 2019**  
Ceramic  
51 x 51 x 45 cm



**Moon Jar, 2019**  
Ceramic  
50 x 50 x 51 cm





**Moon Jar, 2015**  
Ceramic  
45 x 45 x 49 cm



**Moon Jar, 2015**  
Ceramic  
47 x 47 x 45 cm



**Moon Jar, 2015**  
Ceramic  
43 x 43 x 43 cm

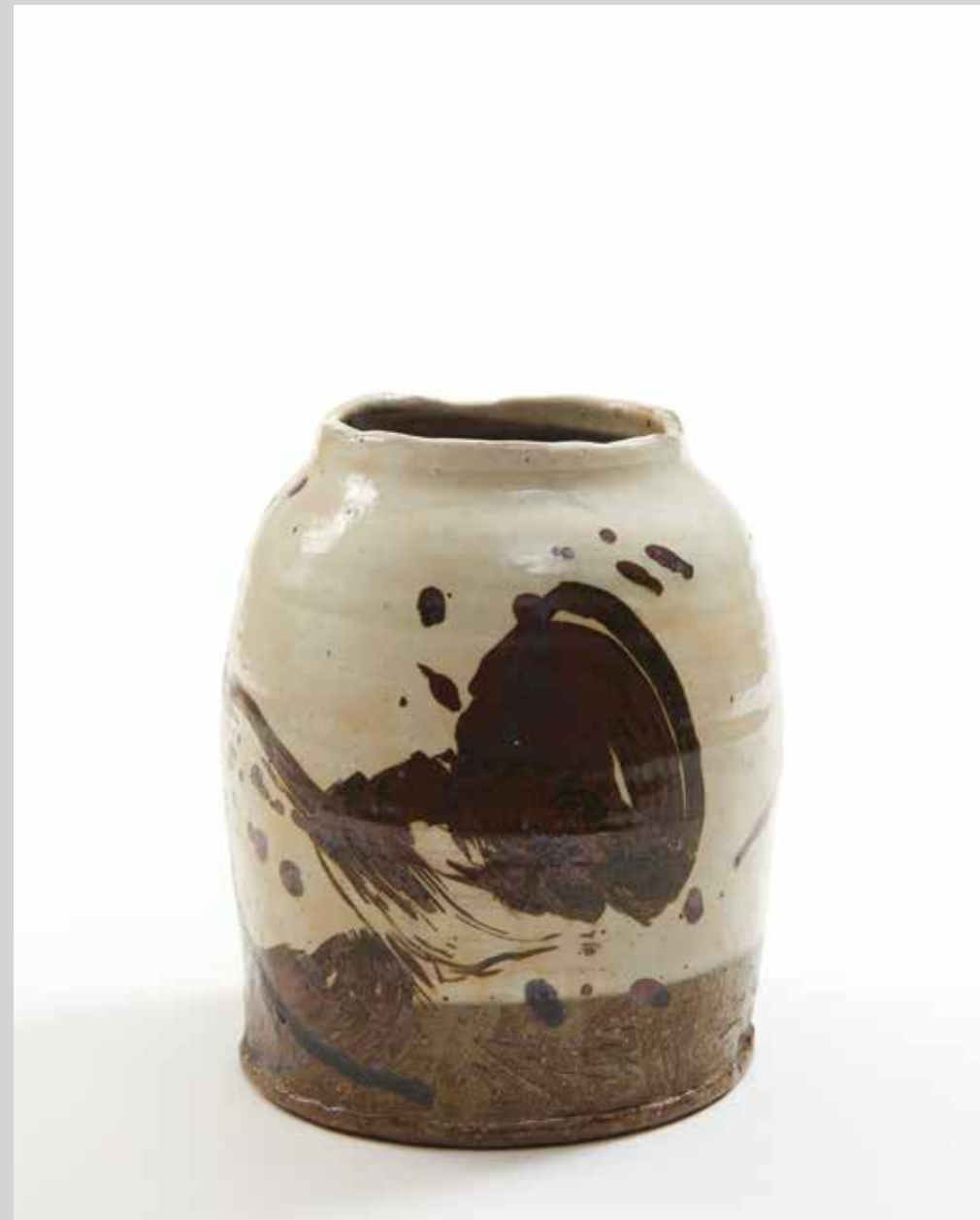


**Moon Jar, 2015**  
Ceramic  
37 x 37 x 40 cm





**Chulhwa Buncheong, 2006**  
 Ceramic  
 20 x 20 x 26 cm



**Chulhwa Buncheong, 2006**  
 Ceramic  
 24 x 24 x 27 cm

# LEE HUN CHUNG

**1967** Born in Seoul, Korea

## EDUCATION

**2007** PH.D Architecture Kyung-won University,  
Kyungki-do, Korea  
**2000** Art Forum 2000 as a Head Jury, Perm, Russia  
**1995-96** San Francisco Art Institute as a  
Teaching Assistant  
**1993-'95** M.F.A. Sculpture, Graduate School at San  
Francisco Art Institute, San Francisco, U.S.A  
**1991-'95** M.F.A. Ceramic Sculpture, Graduate  
School at Hong-ik University, Seoul, Korea  
**1991-93** Hongik University Ceramic Research  
Center as a Researcher  
**1986-91** B.F.A. Ceramic Sculpture,  
Hongik University, Seoul, Korea

## SOLO EXHIBITIONS

**2019** ILWOO ART Space, Seoul, Korea  
**2018** Sophis Gallery, Seoul, Korea  
**2017** Avenuel Art Hall, Seoul, Korea  
Lotte Gallery, Busan, Korea  
L153 Art Company, Seoul. Korea  
**2016** R and company, New York, U.S.A.  
**2015** Gallery Artside, Seoul, Korea  
**2014** Park Ryu Sook Gallery, Seoul, Korea  
**2013** One and J Gallery, Seoul, Korea  
**2012** R20th Gallery, New York, U.S.A.  
**2011** ilwoo Space, Seoul, Korea  
**2010** Lee HWAIK Gallery, Seoul, Korea  
**2009** idm Gallery, Busan, Korea  
**2009** MSU Copeland Gallery, Bozeman, U.S.A.  
**2009** On the Table, Daegu, Korea  
**2008** Seomi & tuus Gallery, Seoul, Korea  
**2007** Park Ryu Sook Gallery, JeJu, Korea  
**2007** SP Gallery, Seoul, Korea  
**2006** U-Ri-Gu-Rut RYU, Seoul, Korea  
**2006** Kangha Museum, Yangpyeong  
**2005** Venezuela Caracas City Hall,  
Caracas, Venezuela

## SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

**2019** KIAF, Coex, Korea  
**2019** Art Mining-Korean Craft Exhibition,  
palazzo Litta Milano, Milano, Italy  
The Segye Times 30th Ceremony “With  
Project”, Seoul Art Foundation Gallery,  
Seoul, Korea  
**2018** Craft Trend Fair, Coex, Seoul, Korea  
S.O.F.A.,Chicago, U.S.A.  
KIAF, Coex, Korea  
Salt, The soul of color flavor and style,  
National Folk Museum of Korea, Korea  
4 Artist Exhibition, Seo Hwa Gallery, Korea  
**2017** KIAF, Sophis Gallery, Coex, Seoul, Korea  
Craft Climax: Gyeonggi Contemporary Craft  
2017, Gyeonggi Museum of Modern Art,  
Ansan, Korea  
Design Art Busan, F1963, Busan, Korea  
A Joy of Spring: Scenery, Blossom and  
Delicacy, National Folk Museum of Korea,  
Korea Woven Forms, Palazzo Benzon,  
Venice, Italy  
Design Days Dubai, Dubai, United Arab  
Emirates  
Between Serenity And Dynamism: Korean  
Ceramics, La Triennale di Milano, Milano,  
Italy/Korean Cultural Center UK, London, UK  
**2016** connected object, gallery Kiche, Seoul, Korea  
Craft Trend Fair, Coex, Seoul, Korea  
spring, The trinity & metro gallery, Seoul, Korea  
Korea Crafts & Design, Munich, Germany  
**2015** Korea International Art Fair, Art side Gallery,  
Coex, Seoul, Korea  
Korea Now!, Musee des Arts Decoratifs, Paris,  
FranceThree Korean Contemporary Sculptors,  
Edwin's Gallery, Jakarta, Indonesia  
Three Korean Contemporary Sculptors,  
One Pacific Mall, Jakarta, Indonesia  
Time After Time, Insa Art center, Seoul, Korea  
Design Miami Bazel, Bazel, Switzerland

G Seoul Art Fair, DDP, Seoul, Korea  
Traditional Craft with Design, Gana Insa  
Art Center, Seoul, Korea  
**2014** Moon, Art First gallery, London, U.K  
Boundless Seas: BADA, Space Cotton  
Seed, Seoul, Korea  
Nidana, Coex, Seoul, Korea  
KIAF, Park Ryu Sook Gallery, Coex,  
Seoul, Korea  
An Autumn Scene, Lotte Avenuel,  
Seoul, Korea  
Design Miami Bazel, Bazel, Switzerland  
Design Miami, Miami, U.S.A

## FELLOWSHIP/AWARDS

**2005** Seoul Metropolitan mayor Award  
**1995-96** San Francisco Art Institute Scholarship  
**1992** Seoul Contemporary Ceramic Contest,  
Special Selection Award

## SELECTED COLLECTIONS

Jinro Foundation on Culture, Seoul, Korea  
Archie Bray Foundation Center, Montana, U.S.A.  
Niagara Gallery, Australia  
Hongik University Contemporary Museum,  
Seoul, Korea









**Day Bed, 2019**  
Glazed Ceramic  
73 x 149 x 77 cm





**Planter, 2017**  
Glazed Ceramic  
54 x 49 x 72 cm



**Planter, 2017**  
Glazed Ceramic  
51 x 51 x 96 cm



**Macaroon Stool, 2016**  
Glazed Ceramic  
49 x 49 x 41 cm



**Stool, 2012**  
Glazed Ceramic  
77 x 39 x 22 cm





**Mushroom Stool, 2017**  
Glazed Ceramic  
49 x 49 x 55 cm



**Table, 2018**  
Glazed Ceramic  
102 x 64 x 24 cm



**Surfing Boat Table, 2019**  
Ceramic, Concrete  
177 x 70 x 26 cm





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