

XIAOPING LUO – (1960 -)

Xiaoping Luo stands between two cultures: his native China, where he still maintains a studio and works and Gilbert, AZ, where he lives with his wife, artist Junya Shao, and their young son, and has an active career as both a studio artist and frequently invited guest teacher. His roots are in the ancient pottery tradition of the Yixing region of China, and he is still noted as a maker of Yixing teapots using the well-known local clay. It is his sculpture, however, that has defined his work for much of his career. Using slab construction he creates large figures, some easily recognizable and some not; some forming part of a series, such as the “Time Square” series, in which he addresses what he sees as the problems of the world, while others are simply figures, explorations of the human body in all its variety and emotional states. More recently he has been producing a series of “Playing Cards,” porcelain slabs that feature the traditional “Bicycle” theme on one side and on the other incorporate the image of a well-known individual into playing card format. Like his “Time Square” individuals, the individual “cards” can be assembled and re-assembled in a seemingly infinite number of configurations, each one opening a new dialogue about the human condition. “...Xiaoping...re-posit(s) centuries-old Chinese artistic traditions of art within contemporary forms, techniques, and ideas. This artistic shift coincides and collides with world affairs, creating a dramatic stage from which the artist unfolds his singular vision.”¹

1. Peter Held. “Luo Xiaoping: Time Square Series.” In Luo, Xiaoping. *Time Square*. Tempe, AZ: Arizona State University, 2003.

ARTIST’S STATEMENT – XIAOPING LUO

“...I prefer to use symbolic elements that the public has become familiar with but may also have multiple meanings. My strongest personal preferences are for people who are popular and fashionable but I have combined all these elements ...to speak to a cross section of the public.

I have left the traditional artistic techniques that I have used in the past in order to create what I hope to be a very clear and direct statement about my world views. The world at this time is complicated. I would like to address the issue that there are people worldwide who have played a role in creating this complex world. This is what I have in mind about my latest art work.”¹

1. Xiaoping Luo. “About Xiaoping’s Playing Cards.” Excerpted from email from Junya Shao and Xiaoping Luo dated January 13 2007.

RESUME – XIAOPING LUO

1960	Born, Jiangxi Province, China
1983-1987	B.F.A. Sculpture, Jingdezhen Ceramics College, Jingdezhen, China
1987-1992	Instructor, Architecture Faculty, Tongji University, Shanghai, China

1992-present	Studio artist: Xiaoping Studio, Yixing, China
1994	First prize, Third prize, Two Prizes of Selected Works, National Ceramic Art Competition, Beijing, China
1996	Hirayama Prize, Sino-Japan Friendship Association
1997	Minister of Culture, Japan Prize Excellence Prize, First National Ceramic Art Exhibition, Shanghai, China Founder, President, Yixing Ceramic Art Association, Jiangsu Province, China
1997-1998	Deputy Secretary General, Sculpture Professional Committee, National Arts and Crafts Society of China
1999	Award of Excellence, Second Capital Art Exposition, Beijing, China
2000-present	Studio artist, Gilbert, AZ Third Prize, Second of the Stone Sculpture Competition, China
2003	Best of Show, All Arizona Clay Exhibition, AZ The Juror's Award, National, The Contemporary Art of Tea II

BIOGRAPHY – XIAOPING LUO

Xiaoping Luo is a citizen of two cultures whose art encompasses a much wider stage. Born in Jinangxi, China, he studied sculpture at Jingdezhen Ceramic College, Jingdezhen, China, earning a B.F.A. degree. Following graduation he began teaching at Tongji University, Shanghai, China, continuing with his own sculptural work as well. After five years, he resigned from the university to pursue his ceramics career full time, setting up his Xiaoping Studio in Yixing, China, an area of China famous for ceramic art and in particular for the ancient tradition of Yixing teapots made of the local clay. In school Xiaoping had studied Western art forms, but once he settled in Yixing, he turned to the traditions of Chinese culture and religion for his inspiration, producing a body of Taoist-inspired ceramic sculpture fashioned from the Yixing “Red Jade” stoneware. He began using slabs to create his sculptures and concentrating on the spirit of the figure rather than classic proportional harmony, working with the clay instead of trying to dominate it. By the mid-1990s Xiaoping’s work was receiving national recognition and awards, and a documentary was made about his work. In the late 1990s Xiaoping was appointed Deputy Secretary General of the Sculpture Professional Committee of the National Arts and Crafts Society of China and also founded and was named President of the Yixing Ceramics Art Association. He began to receive international attention and chaired international exhibitions, bringing his work to the attention of the larger art world and introducing him to other artists and cultures. As Xiaoping began spending more time outside China, he moved away from the classical traditions and was drawn to explore new directions with his art. By 2000 he was splitting his time between China and the western world, ultimately settling in Gilbert, AZ, with his wife Junya Shao, a ceramic artist noted for her exquisite Yixing teapots. Xiaoping also makes the traditional Yixing teapots but it is his sculptures for which he is most widely known. Today he divides his time between his Arizona home and studio and his Chinese one, working as a studio artist and giving workshops and classes.

While Xiaoping moved away from Chinese traditions, he retained the contemplative and spiritual qualities he had found in his classical studies. His subject matter also shifted from ancient religious figures and sages to the contemporary world, and what he found there troubled him. "What is happening to the world?" he asked in the "Artist Statement" to the "Time Square Series." "...we human beings are a miniscule part of this planet, a tiny molecule in the vast universe... In this ever-changing world, we... feel lost and exhausted...we don't know who is right or wrong."¹ Xiaoping found some resolution, if not a solution, by creating a series of 20 figures representing the world leaders of the time (2003.) Constructed of Yixing stoneware and U.S. earthenware, their features are distinctive but their stature and clothing are identical. Dressed in traditional Tang clothing the leaders come together in Xiaoping's assemblages as they probably never will in life. "They may never be able to agree with each other, and that is acceptable. We may never know their true thoughts, but it does not matter. On the stage of the 'Time Square' we are only striving for one joyful smile before we leave for home; for one last sweet dream."²

Similarly in his more recent "Playing Card" series, Xiaoping again uses the images of well-known individuals, drawn this time from a much larger group: actors, athletes, models, singers in addition to politicians, both living and not. The cards are made of Jingdezhen porcelain, the backs of the cards having the traditional "Bicycle" image and the front incorporating the portrait of the particular individual into playing card format. As in the "Time Square" series the images are easily recognizable but have been altered to reflect the personalities or interpretation of the person. Also like the previous series, the individual pieces can be changed around, the particular grouping changing the meaning of the total piece. Thus, for example, a house of cards can be constructed or the individual "cards" can be set up in game formation or even arranged in a domino style. In each case, the relationship of the individual card to the other cards changes the meaning, inviting an ongoing dialogue between the viewer and the work.

It is easy, when viewing Xiaoping's work, to get lost in the images and to overlook the superb level of technique he brings to his work, but to do so would be a mistake. From his stunning Yixing teapots with their classic imagery drawn from nature to his contemporary sculptures, each step of the process, from the choice of the clay to the method of firing, to the detailing and finishing, reflects the preciseness of his training in technique. Although Xiaoping makes full use of the technical advances available to art – utilizing Photoshop, for example, to alter the images for his playing cards and then making the images into decals – it is his command of the medium that elevates his work to its high level of ceramic art. "I am not seeking fame, " Xiaoping said, "nor do I desire fortune. I am simply an artist. I cannot change the world. I can only strive to contribute to a small part of it."³

In addition to the numerous public commissions and exhibitions, both group and solo, of his work, Xiaoping Luo's work is included in the White House Collection of Craft, Washington, DC; The Art Gallery of Alfred University, Alfred, NY; the DeYoung Museum, San Francisco, CA; and the Arizona State University Ceramic Research Center as well as many others both domestic and international.

1. Xiaoping Luo. *Time Square*. Tempe, AZ: Arizona State University, 2003: np.
2. Ibid.
3. Xiaoping Luo. "Artist Statement." <http://asuartmuseum.asu.edu>

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY – XIAOPING LUO

Books and Catalogs

Luo, Xiaoping. *Time Square*. Tempe, AZ: Arizona State University, 2003.

Peterson, Susan. *Contemporary Ceramics*. New York: Watson-Guption Publications, 2000.

_____. *The Craft and Art of Clay*. New Jersey: Pearson Education, 2003.

_____. *Working with Clay*, 2nd ed. New York: Overlook Press, 2002.

30 Ceramic Sculptors. Davis, CA: John Natsoulas Press, 2005.

Periodicals

Brown, Glen R. "On the Paradox of Looking at Chinese Ceramics Today." *Ceramics (Sydney, Australia)* no. 55 (2004): 34-39.

_____. "Xiaoping Luo's 'Time Square.'" *Ceramics Monthly* 52 no. 2 (February 2004): 39-42.

"China." *Art in America* 92 no. 6 (June/July 2004): 124-149, 191, 193.

Ha Jin. "The Censor in the Mirror." *The American Scholar* 77 no. 4 (Autumn 2008): 26-32.

Luo, Xiaoping. "A Potter's Journey." *Ceramics (Sydney, Australia)* no. 38 (1999): 41-43.

Mansfield, Janet. "Editorial." *Ceramics (Sydney, Australia)* no. 65 (2006): 2.

Raymond, Sue. "The Archie Bray 2006 International: Helena Montana's Summer of Clay." *Ceramics Technical* no. 24 (2007): 86-89.

Stephenson, John. "Luo Xiaoping: work on the Scholar's Desk." *Ceramics (Sydney, Australia)* no. 47 (2002): 65-67.

Vanesian, Kathleen. "Luo Xiaoping: Ceramics Research Center, Arizona State University Art Museum, Tempe, AZ." *American Craft* 64 no. 2 (April/May 2004): 72-73.

GALLERY REPRESENTATION – XIAOPING LUO

Xiaoping Pottery Store, <http://www.cactustech.com/XiaopingStore/Xiaopingcategory.php>

WEB SITES – XIAOPING LUO

<http://www.cactustech.com/XiaopingStore/Xiaopingcategory.php>

Web site for Xiaoping Luo and Junya Shao

<http://asuartmuseum.asu.edu/2003/xiaoping/timesquare-gg.pdf>

“Time Square” exhibition at Arizona State University

<http://www.madison.com/tct/features/stories/index.php?ntid=33219&ntpid=2>

Kevin Lynch. “Ceramic Men Show Sculptor’s Humor.” *The Capitol Times*, Madison, WI. March 23 2005.

http://www.mendocinoartcenter.org/PSS_Cart.54.LassoApp?category=176%3ACeramics&feature2=Summer&skip=10

Mendocino Art Center workshop with Xiaoping Luo and Junya Shao, “Yixing Teapots and Sculpture.”

<http://www.theclaystudio.org/exhibitions/past/teapots.php>

“Yixing Teapots,” exhibition curated by Xiaoping Luo

June 2009