

# Belgium & Bottles & Boxes

By PETRA LINDENBAUER



Belgium once again was the destination for dozens of ceramists from all over the world. In September 2017, Lou Smedts organised and curated the World Ceramic Art & Craft Biennale in Vichte, a small town near Gent.

One hundred and four artists from a total of twenty-one nations each presented three of their pieces on the theme of Bottles & Boxes, the exhibition venue was the old church – the 12th century Oude Kerk.

Over the past eleven years, the philosopher and art historian Lou Smedts had placed CHAWANS in the spotlight in twenty-one exhibitions in all. For this exhibition, the participants were invited to explore a vessel that is not solely intended to contain tea. Bottles & Boxes – ceramics that offer space containing treasures or important things of personal value. An interesting theme that makes many things possible but also excludes quite a lot.

The solutions the artists came up with covered a wide range, from classic Taiwanese tea caddies to huge sculptures that can be opened.

As many ceramists from Taiwan were participating, the quality of the work was high, especially with regard to the firing technique: most pieces were woodfired without glaze. The ceramists Kuei-Wei Chang, expert for oilspot/temmoku glaz-

es, and Jui-Hwa Lin, owner of the Miaoli Snake Kiln, were both represented at the Biennale with their work. Mister Lin achieved a temperature of 1563°C in a woodfired kiln in 2014, earning an entry in the Guinness Book of Records, and the visitors were correspondingly impressed by his work.

Through the tea ceremonies, celebrated in dignified fashion by trained tea masters, there was an ongoing atmosphere of solemnity in the imposing church interior.

Parallel to the expo, there was a wide-ranging programme of events for visitors with a love of ceramics. At the Ceramic Movie Festival, the films shown included profiles of major artists and the film Journeys in Clay, covering the ceramics of an ethnic minority in southern China. The film document, Grand Feu, la Borne 1984 was also shown as was Kannenofenbrand on the subject of saltglaze.

In addition, talks by some of the participants gave visitors an insight into potteries and working methods in South Africa, Brazil, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Austria. And of course trips to Bruges, Ostend and the brickworks in Rupelstreek were on the programme too.

It must have felt like a home game for Lou and his team when they were organising this exhibition in Belgium after the last major chawan exhibitions had taken

place in Taiwan and then in Singapore.

For a new ceramics centre in southern China, run by Dolly Kao, Lou is currently setting up woodfired kilns that are to be fired at symposia that are to take place there in future. The good relations with China have been forged on countless trips there.

Work is already in progress now for the next major event in cooperation with the Chinese department of culture. It is to take place in Beijing in 2019 and it has already been announced that rooms in the Forbidden City and subsequently in Art Zone 798 are under consideration.

## **PETRA LINDENBAUER**

*works as a freelance ceramist in Austria. Besides her work in her own studio, she also takes part in international symposia and exhibitions.*

above - Doris Löffel, Belgium

opposite page:

left, top to bottom

- group photo
- Lou Smedts and Gerda Genijn
- tea ceremony with Kun-Shen Tsai
- Vortrag von Blayne Knox, S-Afrika

right, top to bottom.

- Nora van Driessche, Belgium
- Hsiu-Chen Lai, Taiwan
- Shu Ling Wu, Taiwan

