

Chinese folk art work—Chinese Clay Sculpture

Because of studying abroad, I was learning about a variety of Western art forms : European painting, the North American performing art, ballet, opera and so on. However, this field guide is another thing that I would like to introduce some art works different from Western art, which is a typical Chinese traditional folk culture.



In folk area China Clay Sculpture usually called "colorful clay" or "mud play." It originated in Fengxiang, Baoji. Popular in Shaanxi, Tianjin, Jiangsu, Henan and other places. It was selected into Chinese Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2006, categorized into the Folk Art.

The reason I want to introduce Chinese Clay art works is it represents the China skills quintessence. The most intriguing thing is the sophisticated craftsmen could transform this ordinary earth into beautiful and delicate art works.

Chinese Clay Sculpture is various images of folk arts and it used clay as a raw material, pinching into many shapes only by hands. It usually shaped into some figures and animals. Because its making material is very accessible, cheap and natural, clay sculpture has a very broad application and marketing in China.

After the folk clay works in Ming and Qing dynasty, colorful clay works won the favor of the most people, especially with Tianjin "Ni Ren Zhang" and Wuxi Huishan clay. Chinese Clay Figurines has been long out of the China, becoming the messengers and foreign cultural exchangers across the world, even more and more countries and people have accepted and loved it. Although the value of clay cannot be classified as containing the high-tech or not, it does light a new bright factor to our life. Unlike the serious and rigid art works, colorful clay is simple, intuitive and vivid one having a sense of intimacy. Besides that, clay figurines have a high collective value. That means each piece of works is a hand-made style, unlike current modern art works that exit the problems of copy, reproduce and piracy infringement. Every figurine is a unique one in the world. People who own one of the clay art works will give themselves a sense of achievement. Compared with other traditional arts forms, oil painting, paper-cut, embossing and other arts, clay art has a strong visual impact. Because of its three-dimensional feature, audience could appreciate it from different angles, thus this art form is more close to people's lives.



Tianjin "Niren Zhang"

Clay art can be traced back to China dating back four 4000-10000 years ago in Neolithic period. There are many prehistoric cultural

underground archaeological discoveries: “pottery pig”, “pottery sheep” with around six to seven years history that comes from Zhejiang Hemudu Cultural Relics; Xin Zhengpei Li gang culture, comes from Henan, unearthed ancient pottery wells, pottery pig and sheep head also has about seven thousand years history. All these artworks can be confirmed to the early stage humans hand-made kneading artworks. Following the long history river, dates from Neolithic period, Han Dynasty to Qing Dynasty even to 1940s, the development of Chinese clay art works has never stopped.



Wuxi “Huishan Niren”

The function of clay sculpture has changed from one era to another, such as in Han Dynasty, it were used as a grave goods. Later it was used to tiny children toys. With the rise of the incoming of Taoism and Buddhism, many clay artworks were applied into multi-deification enshrined activities, made into some celestial beings and figure of Buddha putting into Taoists or temples. With the prosperous development, the purpose of making clay changes from purely non-profit or self- sufficient use to some commercial application. There are many people specialized in making clay figures, clay Buddha heads sold as commercial products to gain financial security for their families. After the Yuan Dynasty, going through the Ming and Qing Dynasty, clay artworks are still circulating in the

society, especially small clay artwork, both used in ornamental furnishings and entertainment function. In ancient China, before the invention of high-tech games, various clay figures are the good accompany for every child.

Typically, the most famous clay artworks are distributed in these three areas: Tianjin with “Niren Zhang”, Wuxi with “Huishan Niren” and Dunhuang with its “Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes”. I will introduce each of them specifically in the following part.



Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes

Interestingly, the artisan themselves do not realized the value of these artworks until these works have been widely circulated in the world and praised by public. Colored clay works reflects the Chinese people folk wisdom, and those lovely and figurative images of folk clay works became a good method to record ancient marketplace of life in China.



Nowadays the rapid development of high technology impelling citizenry returns to the pursuit some special natural and primitive art works. Therefore, selling and collecting clay works become a new fashion habit, reflecting one's distinct personality taste. A good thing is this trend in favor of the inheritance and development of Chinese folk culture.

(all the image information search from Google)

Reference:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zl0949fTX6Q&list=PL73105AB91DB11DD9&index=7>