

# Ceramics

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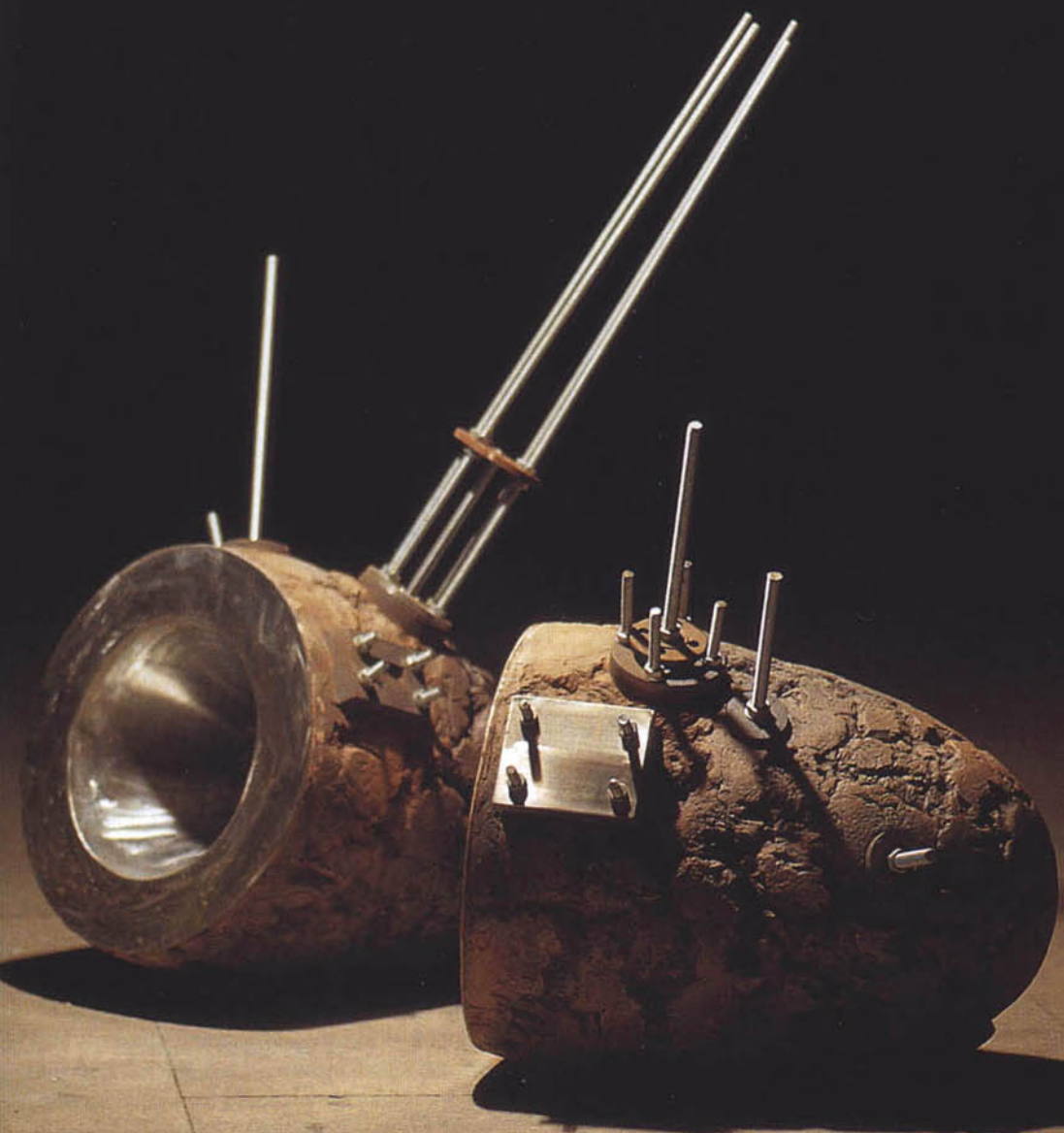


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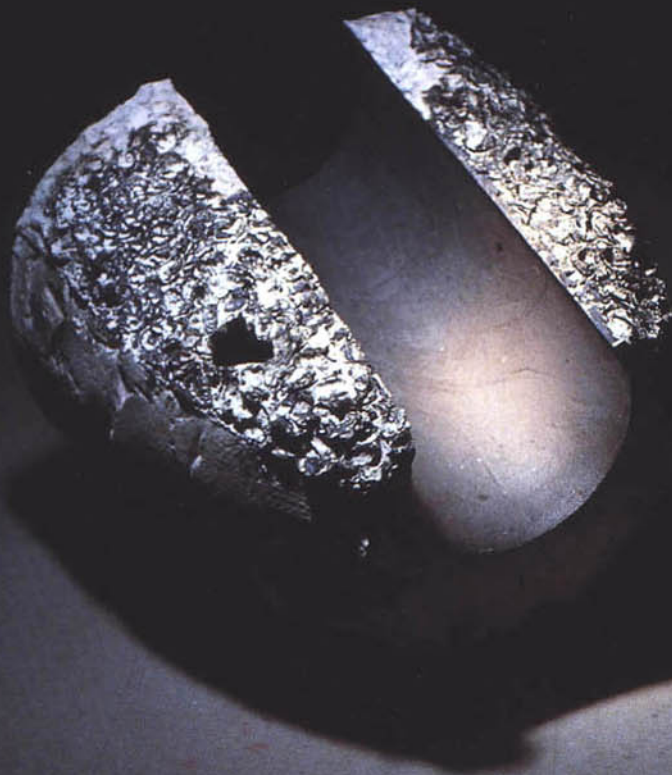
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Lu Pinchang  
A Matter of Space

*Article by Marvin Sweet*



*Geometric Space #3*. 2003. Ceramic. 110 x 70 x 69 cm.

**L**U PINCHANG HAS ALWAYS SET HIS SIGHTS HIGH. For him blazing new frontiers and discovering new pathways is standard practice. At the dawn of the new millennium, China's ascent into modernity is hurtling at breakneck speed. Lu Pinchang is travelling in its vortex. His accomplishments as an artist, teacher and writer have thrust him to the forefront of China's modern ceramic art movement. His latest and arguably his most important work represents China's proudest moment, the first successful launch of a manned rocket. China's space program has become a source of growing national self-confidence while garnering much sought-after international stature. The launching of a manned rocket makes China only the third country in the world to claim this extraordinary technological achievement. Taking his cue from the Chinese space agency who named its space craft *Shenzhou*, meaning Divine Vessel, Lu Pinchang responded with his *Space* series.

Over the past 20 years Lu Pinchang's career has freely flowed back and forth between his abstract symbolic creations and his skill as a realist figurative sculptor. He has executed dozens of public

commissions creating statuary of China's most important political and military heroes. His masterpiece in this milieu, *The Big Sword*, received the gold medal award at the art exhibition in commemoration of the 55th anniversary of the victory of the Chinese people's war of resistance against Japan. Installed at a two-acre site in Beijing, it took five years to complete 38 allegorical monoliths which depict the Rape of Nanking. Between December 1937 and March 1938, nearly 400,000 Chinese men, women, children and prisoners of war were slaughtered by the invading troops. Records indicate that of the 400,000 who died, 80,000 were women and girls who were raped. Most victims were mutilated, beheaded, burned, bayoneted, disemboweled or buried alive. With powerful realism and sheer force of repetition, Lu Pinchang proved equal to the challenge of memorialising this holocaust of Chinese history.

Professor of art and vice dean of the sculpture department at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, he is author of the books *Chinese Contemporary Ceramic Art*, *Modern International Sculpture* and *Art of the Mural*. His accomplishments reflect not only his



Lu Pinchang. First Beijing International Art Biennial, China, 2003.

talents and ambitions, but what is achievable within liberalised China. He had grown up during darker days. At the height of the Cultural Revolution his father, a college professor, was banished to the countryside for 're-training'. This circumstance led Pinchang to be schooled at home. In 1977 after 11 long horrific years, the Cultural Revolution ended, signaling the re-opening of the universities. At age 15, Lu Pinchang was fully prepared to take the college entrance examinations. Accepted to the foremost school for ceramic arts, in China's porcelain capital, he graduated from the Jingdezhen Ceramic Art Academy at age 19. Upon graduation his alma mater awarded him a professorship, the youngest person ever so named. While teaching undergraduate courses, he began graduate school receiving his Master of Fine Arts degree in 1988. Recognized as an innovative educator, he was named national teacher of the year in 1992. This was followed by a state council grant given to outstanding scholars in the arts and sciences. It allowed him to pursue extensive field research seeking out the relics of ancient cultures and the folk arts of China's remote northwest provinces

with travel to the great ceramic centres at Yuxian (Henan Province), Dehua (Fujian Province), Yixing (Jiangsu Province) and Ningguo (Anhui Province). The results of his investigations led to several series beginning with the *Freehand Brush Work* series, followed by the *Grotto* series and the *A Fu* (Fat Man) series. All of these works mix and amalgamate the varied artistic languages, techniques and folk culture symbolism gleaned from his research.

Seeking to portray his country's newly-won source of prestige, Lu Pinchang began the *Space* series. His *Space Planes* and *A Plan Into Space* suggest space capsules, nose-cones and satellites. They are a celestial armada executed in roughly textured clay with applied glass buttons and steel fabricated by the artist. The *Geometric Space* series is more subtly abstract. These objects look like they might have been brought back from deep space, alloyed in a distant place. More like cracked open meteors with galvanised interiors, their density has been lightened by this action. The openings do not reveal an interior so much as give us a glimpse into their cores which are metallic, reflective and filled with light.



*Space Plane #3. Clay, steel, glass. 55 x 55 x 105 cm.*

*A Plan Into Space*, exhibited at the first Beijing international art biennial, earned him the show's outstanding art award. Striking in their physicality, it seems they landed just in time for the exhibition. When presented in ethereal lighting, they become capable of carrying us up in a trajectory towards the reaches of outer space. The true function of these dream vessels is best understood by way of their

symbolic value. They capture and record a direct moment of present day China revealing today's reality along with the aspirations of people who now dare to speak to the Heavens.

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Marvin Sweet teaches ceramic art at the University of New Hampshire, USA. In 2003 he was a visiting professor at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. Caption title page: *Space Planes #5 and 6. Clay, steel. 66 x 52 x 170 cm.*