

News & Retrospect

dition in their respective media. More importantly, they have made a conscious attempt at pushing those traditions in exciting and new dimensions." *Photo: John E. May.*

Eun-Sook Kim

by Irene Kim

Korean-born ceramist *Eun-Sook Kim* calls her career "ironic," explaining that she learned the value and depth of Asian ceramics only after emigrating, in 1963, to the United States. "I got interested in pottery here and learned my technique from Americans," she says. "As I learned more about ceramics, I learned that the history of Korean ceramics is very deep—and the information and inspiration I am able to draw from it mean so much to me, now."

Also ironic is the chronology of her career: having majored in English as an undergraduate at Ewha Woman's University (Seoul, South Korea), Kim did not begin her M.F.A. degree program at the University of Tennessee until 1987, at the age of 50, and then only after establishing herself as a local potter. "The school [U.T.] was rather reluctant to admit me, at my age," she confesses. "At first, there was some disagreement about whether I should be accepted as a graduate student." But finally they accepted Kim on the basis of her work.

Out of her campus studio came pieces reflecting traditions old and new, familiar and foreign. Kim centered her work around an old Korean card game, *Hwa-to*, in which 12 suits taken from nature represent the 12 months. In a thesis statement, she said that her use of this game is as a metaphor for life. The players take their chances on the luck of the draw and, at the end of the game, reckon up their relative success or failure. All of her thesis exhibition pieces shown at U.T.'s Ewing Gallery used the game's flowers, plants and animals as decorative or structural themes.

Various suits from the *Hwa-to* motif also adorned a tiled, 7-foot-tall gateway that symbolized the conflict and balance be-



Eun-Sook Kim with low-fired "Books"

tween opposites depicted in several of her works: old and new, East and West, life and death. Always intrigued by opposites, Kim placed a dozen pots, each bearing one of the suits, on one pedestal: these represented her career in pottery. On another platform, books and brushes made of clay symbolized her penchant for the academic study of art. The two pedestals represented the conflict between the two loves she has for art: the potter's desire to create, and the scholar's thirst for knowledge through study.

When asked about influences, Kim shakes her head. "There are just too many to name," she says, laughing. She does cite *Bo-jin Chen*, a staff member of the Shanghai Museum, China, for teaching her much about traditional Chinese painting. Former chair of the Ewha Woman's University ceramics department *Chung-Hyun Chow* was also instrumental in Kim's return to Korean-inspired works: "I learned everything about my inlay technique from Professor Cho," she says.

Perhaps the strongest single influence, however, were the Ong-gi potters of the South Korean countryside, who make gigantic pots, 3–5 feet in height, primarily for food storage and preparation. Kim, who visited South Korea in 1985 and again in 1986 to study the Ong-gi tradition, found that fewer than 200 potters of this type still

"Waiting for the Autumn," 55 inches in length, salt-glazed tiles in wood frame

