

Open studios – Artists in residence

dan kim



Dan Kim
photo credit: Jisup An

Born in Seoul in 1992, Dan Kim has been sculpting since an early age, collecting broken pieces here and there. He proceeds freely to create assemblages that he likes to observe as a blend of cultures. After several solo exhibitions, including Bulgassari, GCS Creative Studio, Seoul (2023); Pangaea, White Noise, Seoul (2022); A Warped Square, Galerie Tongin, Seoul (2020), he is preparing an exhibition at Nendo Galerie in Marseille in 2024, for which he produces new ceramic pieces during his residency at Villa Arson.

Gil Lekh: Can you introduce yourself? And tell us what you are doing at Villa Arson?

Dan Kim: I'm from South Korea. I studied ceramics, sculpture and painting in the United States until 2020. Now I'm interested in ceramics and based in Korea. Most of the time I'm an artist, but I'm also a curator. Today, I'm obsessed with texture in sculpture and how to mix subculture with mainstream culture. My main subject is: how can hegemonic culture survive with subculture? What is globalization? And how can I work with the dynamics of globalization? I'm here for an exhibition that will take place at Nendo Galerie in Marseille in April 2024. The sculptures will be moved from one location to another.

G. L.: Can you tell us about your research topic?

D. K.: It's a long story. My previous research I call "the blue glaze history thing". There are many periods of blue ceramics all over the world. Blue glaze is found in Turkey and China. Egypt used it first, and it's called "Egyptian paste". I had the idea of using all the blue ceramics from history and the world to make global sculptures. So how do you mix subculture with hegemonic culture?

When people break their ceramics, they throw them away. I always feel that these broken pieces are beautiful. These ugly things are always beautiful. So I collect them, from my friends, on the road, or people bring them to me. So I collect them and combine them with beautiful ceramic pieces from old jars, such as the Korean moon jars (Dal hangari), which are historical pieces, to combine them with broken ceramic pieces or to form characters. I wonder how they fit together.

G. L.: Does it make sense for you to mix these cultures?

D. K.: Yes, for example, disco came from a queer subculture and has now become mainstream. The meaning for me is: how can the subculture become a mainstream culture by mixing them together. I want people to see subculture as the best. People can get to know it, understand it, although I think people in the present don't give a damn about subculture, they don't want to know anything about it. At Villa Arson, I recover broken pieces and mix them with Hello Kitty, a pop figure. I'm currently going through this process. I often use figures like that.

In another sculpture, I used a very famous jar in Korea, and ceramic pieces that friends had broken. I collect them and assemble them into a sculpture in which I put my own glazes. As these are materials for my sculptures, if I collect figurative ceramics, then my sculptures will have this figurative side. If I pick up a cup or a bowl, my sculpture

will take on the aesthetic of a sculpture using everyday objects. In this way, my sculptures are always changing direction. It comes from Rodin's "marcottage": he uses a variety of materials to make figurative sculpture, using parts from several sculptures, which he then assembles. All the materials I collect are my materials. That way, I'm always changing combinations.

G. L.: Do you collect these bits and pieces in a sort of library, depending on the subjects you want to tackle?

D. K.: My sculptures don't have any rules, like the glazes, I mix them freely. Likewise with scale, I make large pieces. Ceramics are limited in size by the kiln and the hearth in the studio where I work. But the doors of exhibition spaces are also a limit. In this case, I assemble small pieces to make them larger.

G. L.: How do you work at Villa Arson?

D. K.: My studio isn't near the ceramics workshop, so the question arises of how to move these fragile pieces to the kilns. As the ceramics studio is in the school, and shared with the students, there are also special firing times. Conditions that would mean I'd only produce a few pieces. But as I'm preparing a solo exhibition, I've decided to produce a lot more!

G. L.: In Nice, what do you collect for your pieces?

D. K.: Here, students throw away pieces. Cynthia Tonnerre, who runs the ceramics workshop, saves them for me. Otherwise, I go to flea markets.

G. L.: Can you tell us about the materials you add to your ceramics?

D. K.: In my sculptures I sometimes use gold leaf, sometimes fabric or paper. Here, I'll only be using gold leaf. It's also something cultural because gold is a really high culture thing. I put it in small spaces between the pieces. I conceal the space using the gold. So I try to make the defective part into a mainstream area.

In fact, I like these broken pieces. Because each little piece has a story about its owner. It's funny because every time someone gives me one, they tell me a story: "this piece is from here, I broke it because...". Then they come to my shows to find their pieces.

I always like stories, so I like mixing cultures with others. The fabric I used in *Come to me* is a fabric with motifs by Matisse, the ones he created for Catholics. Here I followed his way of cutting, mixing it with sculpture. As for paper, in my 2023 sculptures like *Om Mani Padme Hum*, I use paper that comes from Korean culture. These are traditional dance votive papers used to pray to the dead.

G. L.: What do you do with these stories?

D. K.: In my piece *Hit My Butt With Flower*, there's this jug inscribed "happy wedding anniversary" with a date and the names of the bride and groom. I got it from a factory. The owner told me they made it and never got it back.

That suggests they split up or died. Still, this item dates from 1997, so it's old.

It's one of the best stories I've collected. Everything has a story.

G. L. : Is there a personal point of view you'd like to give about your work?

D. K. : With my work, I'd just like to say to the public, peace, love each other, don't say bad things to people in subcultures. There's no wrong way to do it. We need love. That's what my work is about.

Wednesday November 29, 2023

6pm – 8pm

Open studio Dan Kim - Studio 2

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