

ART OF TRADITIONAL CHINESE CLAY SCULPTURE FINDS ITS PLACE AT THE CHINESE DEPARTMENT

TKU Chinese Department celebrity, the traditional Chinese clay sculptor, Wu Rong-chi, who is also a grad student there, is a prolific artist. His recent works are several sculptures of Chinese historical figures that appeared in the stories of Bao Qingtian, Seven Xia and Five Yi.

Clay sculptures usually do not contain any frame of different materials. It is just basically, well, clay. It was a craft that was passed down from generation to generation, from father to son or daughter-in-law (but no daughters) in olden days. For instance, Wu learned his craft from his father who had learned his father, too. So, it has run in the family, the love of clay. Wu claims that it is not easy not to like clay, as once a clay sculpture is completed, it can withstand the test of time more than any other materials. He would love to pass down this wonderful art to anyone who is willing to spend years and devotion to learn this craft from the basic to full-fledge sculpturing.

Dedication and persistence, as he sees it, are needed for creating good works. He, as an example, started as a wood carver, but moved into clay with the sheer determination that he could make interesting human sculptures of lively features and expressions with this highly flexible and malleable material. Another reason for him to stay with clay is that Taiwan has become the last bastion of continuing with this craft as it was destroyed in China during the Cultural Revolution.

In safeguarding the continuity of this art, Wu has his personal studio at the Research Center for Visual Arts in Tamsui, and teaches it at two places—the Museum of the World Religions in Taipei and the Community

College of Tamsui.

At the moment, he is also working on several inspiring projects. One of them is his Master thesis, which is on the study of the various sculptures of the Goddess of Mercy. The other one is changing his personal studio to a College of Sculptures and Wood Carving. Finally, he will go to New Zealand for a solo exhibition sometime next year.

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Wu created a sculpture of Bai Yu-tang, a character from the stories of Bao Qingtian. With its lively features and smooth surface, Wu demonstrates his impeccable craft of clay.