

# For Love or Money: Joe Lung's Passion For Art Is Priceless

**J**oe Lung always wanted to become an artist, and immigrating to the United States has helped him fulfill his dream. His love for the creative process and appreciation for the fine arts has kept him committed to his creative work for more than 25 years.

Born in Beijing, China, Lung and his family fled the growing communist regime, just after World War II, when he was three years old. Lung spent his childhood in Taiwan and, at his family's insistence, earned a degree in civil engineering before traveling to the United States for graduate studies. Upon

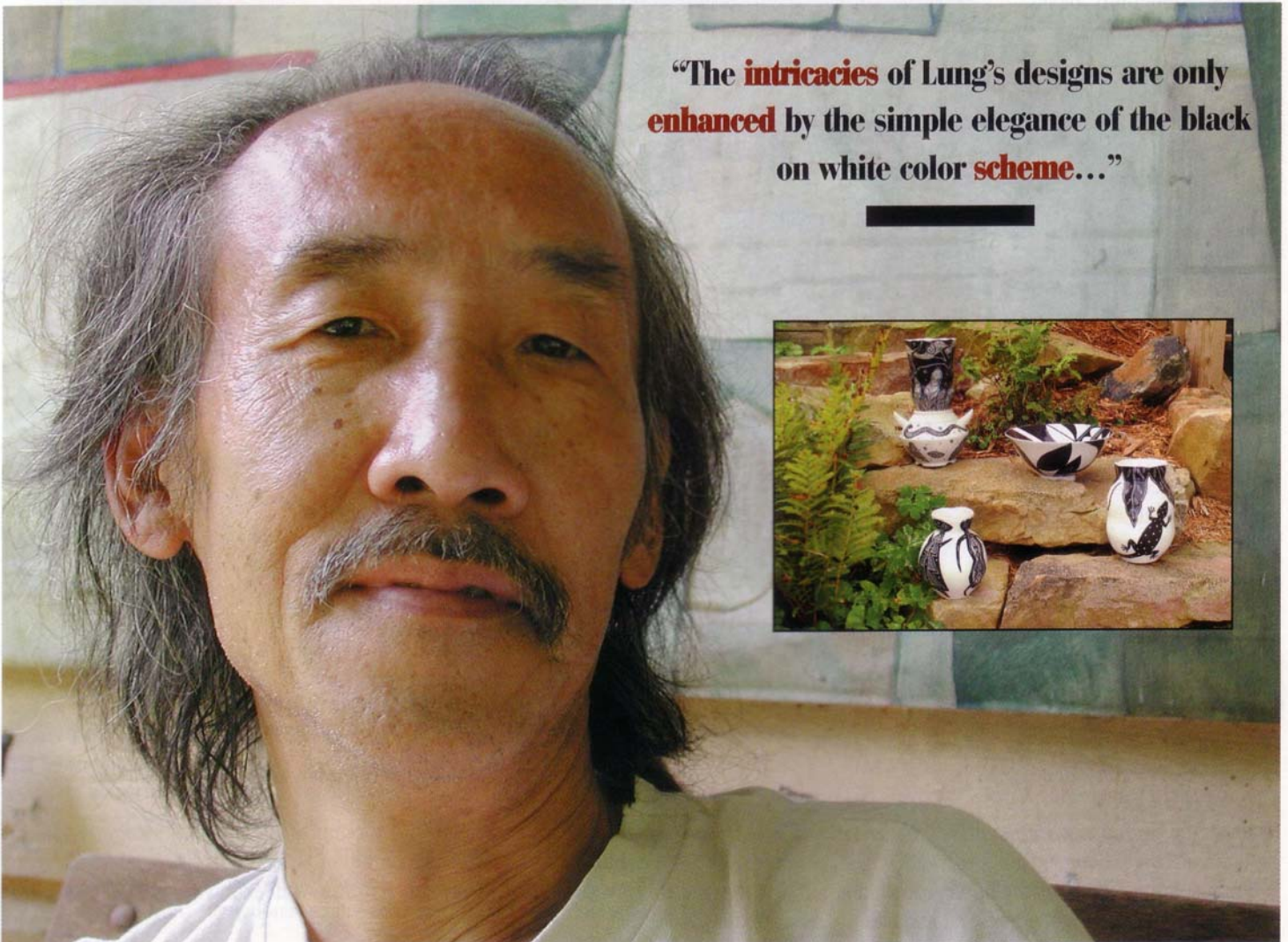
arriving at Missouri State University, Lung discovered ceramics and changed his major to art.

"I began doing what you could call traditional Chinese pottery," Lung says. "Gradually, my style changed to incorporate more Western influences. Now, nature's organic forms, including the human figure, are subjects for the decorations on my pots."

Created exclusively in black and white, Lung's work is stunningly detailed and elegant. Each one-of-a-kind piece is carefully shaped by hand using high-fire porcelain on

a wheel. Then, each piece is decorated masterfully with a black terra sigillata slip, using one of two techniques. In one method, Lung uses Chinese "sumi" brushes to paint the black slip directly onto a leather hard pot. In the other, Lung first paints the entire pot with the black slip and then uses the sgrafitto technique to carve designs through the slip, exposing the white porcelain beneath. "This creates a contrast of forms and lines, as well as black and white," Lung says. "The carving also creates texture on the pots."

The texture and delicate detail draw people to Lung's work. The intricacies of Lung's



**"The intricacies of Lung's designs are only enhanced by the simple elegance of the black on white color scheme..."**



designs are enhanced by the simple elegance of the black-on-white color scheme, but Lung admits that working in such simplistic detail can often be quite a challenge artistically.

“Because my work is now black and white, it can be a challenge trying to reach the balance and harmony of forms and lines,” Lung says. “This simplicity of color allows for more emphasis on the design itself and draws attention to the fine art of the design. Before that, there was more emphasis on the form of the pots and more interest in the glaze than in the decoration.”

Creating these exceptional vessels is not only a challenge artistically, but it is a challenge physically as well. Between handcrafting each pot and hand painting or carving each design, the process is quite labor-intensive. Because of the lengthy process and the uniqueness of each piece, Lung may only produce 100 pots per year.



*Joe Lung's love of nature is vividly expressed in each of his pieces. The silhouettes in his artwork represent different species of animals.*

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"I am not a production potter. I treat each of my vessels and platters as one-of-a-kind art pieces," Lung says. "Every pot is an individual idea, an individual visual image that is in my mind's eye before I begin to create it." Because Lung's pieces are one-of-a-kind and so few are produced each year, each piece is museum-quality and highly valued for the character each piece displays.

Callen McJunkin, owner of Callen McJunkin Gallery in Charleston, first discovered Lung's work through shows at the Huntington Museum of Art and The Cultural Center. "I came to know his work from a museum perspective, which gives it credence and authority," McJunkin says. "I was immediately struck with the shape initially because each piece is different with unusual openings. He uses a classical vessel or vase shape but does not repeat them."

McJunkin says that museum visitors are often tentative about touching the work, but with Lung's pieces, she insists. "Most people who come in are accustomed to the gallery culture that the work should not be touched, but if I see people admiring one of Joe's pots, and I happen to be nearby, I will suggest that they hold it," McJunkin says. "When I let people feel it, they are amazed by the texture, the feel of the porcelain beneath the slip. It all looks so fragile, and Joe has such a delicate touch for his work."

Lung invests a great deal of himself in each vessel, and this commitment is reflected in the final product. His love of nature is evident in his stunning silhouettes and exotic plants and animals, such as lizards, salamanders, frogs and snakes.

"No two pieces have exactly the same form, the same dimensions or the same decoration. That is my approach and my commitment," Lung says. "I may not produce a lot in a year, but I try to experiment, and I put as much creativity as possible into my work."

Lung's artistic skills have led him to achieve notoriety and success on a regional level. However, his commitment to the fine art disciplines has given him more than any recognition or financial gain. For him, artwork is something that is done to satisfy him, rather than others. "In order for artists to be successful, they must honestly follow their passion and vision, instead of following a current art movement or commercial fashion," Lung says. "To me, artistic success is not about financial wealth or name recognition but about experimenting and stretching creativity."

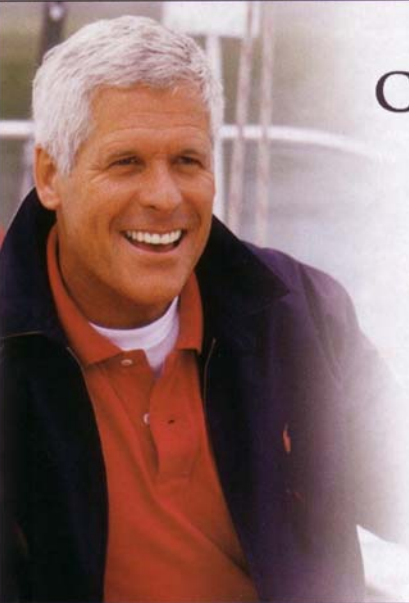
Unfortunately, exploration of the creative senses is something Lung does not believe society emphasizes. He feels the art community is becoming more commercial, with art schools placing more emphasis on graphic design rather than fine art. "You also see fewer and fewer young people studying fine arts, which is sad for society," Lung says. "People in general have less education, less understanding of art. Fewer people care about art. Art reflects the current conditions of the society—that is the artist's responsibility—to help people get an honest view of the human condition."

In addition to the Callen McJunkin Gallery in Charleston, Joe Lung's work is displayed online at MountainMade.com, at the MountainMade.com Artisan Gallery in Thomas, West Virginia and at the Taylor

Books Art Annex in Charleston, West Virginia.

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For McJunkin, each of Lung's pieces is a glimpse into his feelings at the time he creates the piece of art. "You can see the different moods that he is in when he creates each vessel, be it playful or sophisticated," McJunkin says. "His drawing skills are superb, and he has incredible patience."