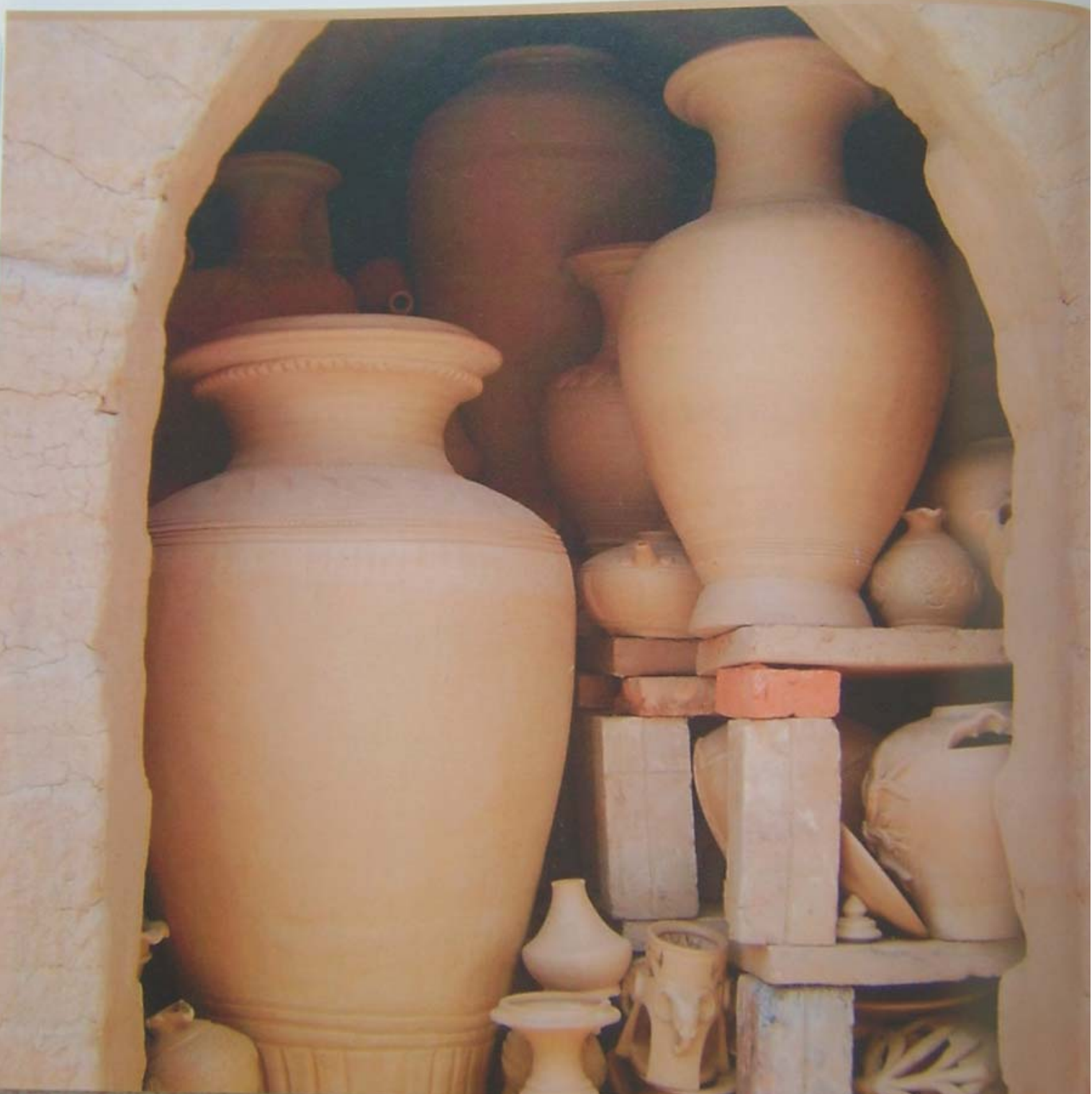


CRAFTS

# Khmer Ceramics

The first fire art; complicated technique but with endless possibilities



## What are ceramics?

The art of ceramics is an ancient art with the oldest known pottery being produced in Japan around 14,000 B.C. Nearly every civilization around the world has used ceramics in one form or another. One exception being Pacific island societies who seem to have lost the knowledge of the technology as they colonized the Pacific Ocean's islands. The creation of ceramics is a complicated process, which demands at least five years of training to have a complete understanding of this fire art.

Once one has the knowledge possibilities are endless; from the toothpick holder to huge jars, cups, plates, vases, bas relief, bottles, sculptures and all of these can be produced in a range of styles from stoneware, Raku, soda glazing, terra siggatta, macrocristallisation,.... endless!

*"Humility and wisdom are the only necessities to make ceramics; all the rest can be found in your environment."*

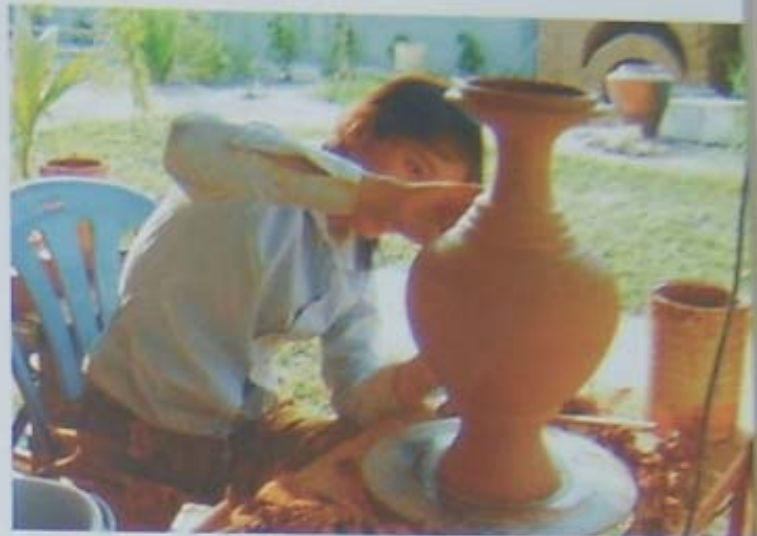
As we have seen, the technology for ceramic production was discovered thousands of years ago and it has been passed down until today. It can even be found in all modern electronic devices such as your computer's micro-processor. Without ceramics we would have no cell phones or computers!

## Center for Khmer Ceramics Revival

Before opening the center, Serge Rega worked for two years, laying the ground work for the Centre for Khmer Ceramics Revival. Serge explored the whole of Siem Reap Province testing soils from all over and undertaking thousands of experiments. Many people told Serge that 'the earth of Siem Reap was not appropriate to make pottery'. But, Serge believed the people of Angkor were smart and if they had installed kilns in the region during the time of the Angkorian empire, the materials needed for ceramics must be still be available. Indeed, kaolin clay is available and all the other necessary minerals too.

The Center was open in October 2006 with the vision to share the science of ceramics with all interested people. A visit to the Center allows one to view the workshops and understand the long and precise process needed for making ceramics.

As Serge says, "If you come at the good time; you can see a



firing, a kiln at 1300 degrees Celsius is an impressive spectacle; it inspires humility.”

The Center was set up to provide information for all but also to provide something beneficial for the local community such as:

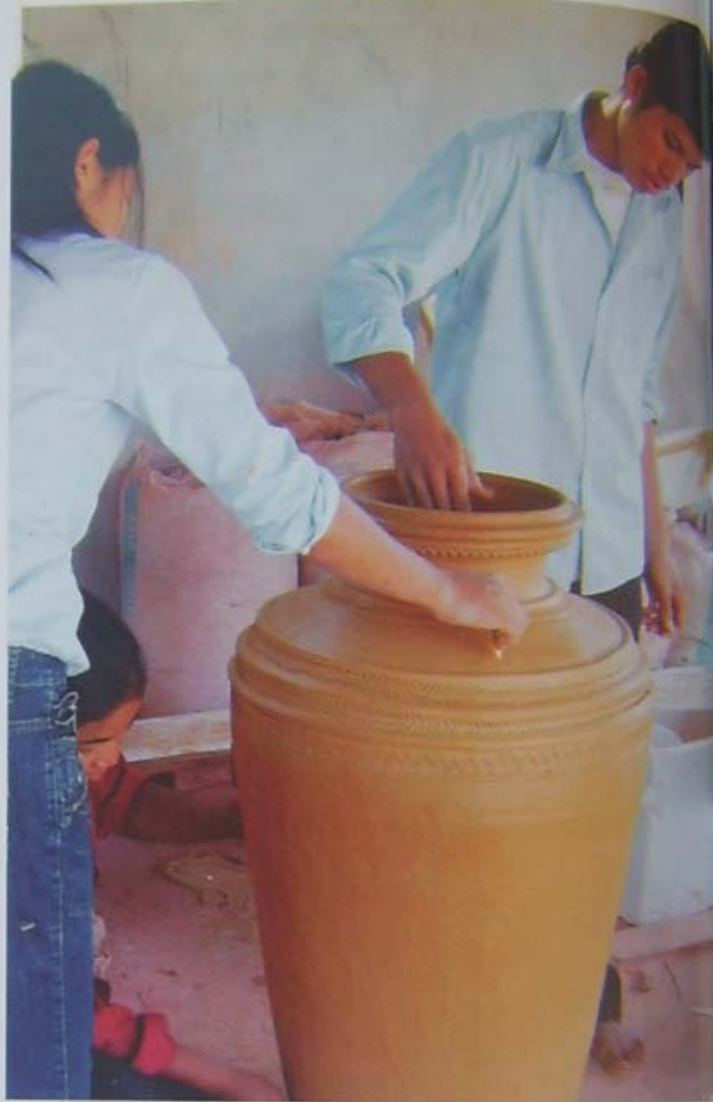
- Vocational training.
- Rural workshops development.
- Revival of contemporary Khmer Ceramic Arts.
- Research on Khmer Antique glazing and techniques
- Fight against illicit trade of Khmer antiques.
- Reach self-financing to ensure sustainability and independence of the project.

The vocational training focuses on handing the art of ceramics. Unfortunately, the technology to produce traditional, glazed, Khmer ceramics has been lost. A glaze is a vitreous coating on a ceramic material the primary purposes of which are decoration or protection. Glaze may be applied by dry dusting a powder mixture over the surface of the clay body. Liquid glazes - suspensions of various powdered minerals, and metal oxides - can be applied by dipping pieces directly into the glaze, pouring the glaze over the piece, or painting it on the vessel.

The center believes in passing on the pottery and ceramic technology that it has to the local community. Serge explains that many people from rural areas around Siem Reap remain poor as the tourism boom from the Angkor has not reached many people, even those living just 2 km from Siem Reap town.

Techniques linked to ceramics are extremely complex and therefore the apprenticeship to acquire the skills takes a year and a half. It is the Center's goal to that this technology is transferred from generation to generation as this art is deeply linked to the Cambodian soil.

The first rural workshop will be installed in collaboration with the NGO Heritage Watch in August 2007. This workshop will be linked to Koh Ker program (see page 8) to prevent looting. The second workshop will be in the Pouk area not far from Siem Reap and is scheduled to begin in May 2008.



Currently Khmer Ceramics is building a replica of an ancient Khmer kiln, following the discovery of Tani kiln site (in archeological Angkor area). This kiln is not designed as a tourist attraction, but will be use in order to research the techniques of Khmer glazing.

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