Gorky González' Workshop

More than 40 years ago, ceramicist Gorky González —whose workshop is in Guanajuato's Pastita neighborhood— decided to try to recover the tradition of majolica ware ceramics made with viceregal techniques. His love of clay and form has always been the raison d'être of the activity that has given him both satisfaction and local, national and worldwide recognition. Two years in Japan, where he studied with master ceramicists considered "national treasures," added the courage and simplicity of the Asian spirit to his abilities.

Visiting Gorky's workshop is a revelation, uncovering the unexpected at the different moments of the process. The porcelain balls tumbling in the grinders where the craftsmen mix and prepare their own colors and enamels. The careful preparation of the clay —giving the word "plasticity" meaning— which requires care since greater plasticity makes for greater ease of handling but also for more shrinkage as the piece dries before firing. Pieces made in molds do not have this difficulty, but Gorky's workshop is known precisely for making all the round-ed pieces by hand in the traditional manner.

A high point is seeing the pieces shaped by the potter, who uses the wheel as an extension of himself, watching him add handmade forms and figures to make, for example, a frog out of what had been a container. The darkroom is key since the gradual drying process, out of the way of drafts and direct sunlight, diminishes breakage and cracks. The pieces are fired for the first time; then the enamel is applied; and then the artist-craftsman paints colored figures onto the piece. Each artist has his own paintbrushes made of horsehair and squirrel tail because, with use, they are shaped to the intensity of his individual brush stroke. Then comes the second firing and the piece takes on a personality of its own. It is ready to take its place on shelves or in display cases, dining rooms or the corner of the house reserved for our most treasured objects.

Elsie Montiel
Editor

Photos by Daniel Munguía