

Rooted in Clay: A Woman's Studio Story

By Teniyah Harris

Dae Yeol Choi- February 22, 2025, 3:02 p.m., 300 Nesbit Entry Dr, Roswell, GA 30076

Jihsu Ryu- February 17, 2025, 5:26 p.m., 8010 McGinnis Ferry Rd A4, Suwanee, G.A. 30024

A pottery wheel whirled throughout the workshop as shop owner and ceramic instructor Daeyeol Choi skillfully formed clay into an elegant cup. This new piece will add to the line of handcrafted teacups and plates that decorate two tall shelves in the back room. The pieces will be displayed in Japan next year as part of her next gallery exhibit.

"Each piece tells a story of my childhood back home," Choi said. "I hope they resonate with the audience there."

Growing up in South Korea, Choi has had an interest in drawing since middle school. She said that her inspiration came from the weather and the trees and plants around her home. She experimented with different mediums, eventually discovering her fondness for pottery. At 18 years old, she attended university, majoring in pottery art and earning her master's in art education. For more than 9 years, Choi taught ceramic classes in Korean schools and gave private lessons to students after hours.

"I love teaching others, and it has always been my passion to show people how to express their creativity through pottery," she said.

At age 31, Choi continued her studies in Japan and pursued a Ph.D. in formative arts, which led to a variety of opportunities for gallery work. While living there, she learned about traditional Japanese pottery techniques, and gained a small reputation as she learned to network with many local artists and gallery owners. This opened doors to numerous exhibitions in which she participated in Japan, Korea, and China.

"I was doing something that I loved to do, so when these places contacted me to show my art in their business, it made me happy," Choi said.

In South Korea, she met her husband, who was, at the time, the president of LG Corporation in Korea. Because of his high-ranking position, Choi said he did not want her to work, a custom in Korean families. She received intense backlash from both his family and her own when she said she wanted to open her studio. So, she put her aspirations on hold and complied with their wishes. She continued to create pottery art in her spare time, maintaining her skills and passion.

Her husband received a job opportunity to relocate to the United States. In 2015, the family moved to Roswell, where they are currently residing. In this new destination, Choi found a more acceptable environment to pursue her artistic ambitions. With copious convincing, she finally opened her first studio in Alpharetta, Georgia.

"I was so happy when I opened this studio," she said. "Even today, it's like another home to me."

With her dream finally coming into action, Choi began hosting pottery classes and workshops, sharing her passion with the local community. She resumed her gallery contracts and started showcasing her work in local exhibitions along with her previous ones in Japan and Korea.

19-year-old Jihsu Ryu, a worker at Choi's Alpharetta studio, described how since starting there, she has gained a deeper appreciation for pottery and developed her own skills under Choi's guidance.

"She's taught me so much since I've been here, and I plan to continue to use what I've learned to help me when I go to art school," she said. "I feel like I know so much already, so I'm grateful for the opportunity to work with her."

Now, at 57 years old, Choi has established herself as a respected artist and mentor in the local art community of Alpharetta and Roswell. Her studios continue to thrive, as she provides both group and private lessons to individuals of all skill levels. However, another dream has captured her attention in recent years.

"I wish to go back to Korea," Choi said. "All of my children are grown up and out of the house, so it's just me and my husband. His work is going well here, so I'll stay a couple of years, but soon I really want to move back."

As she remembers her friends and students in South Korea, she longs to go back there and continue teaching. She plans to return within the next few years, eager to reconnect with her roots and share her expertise with a new generation of artists.

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