





## BLUE & WHITE PORCELAIN

– an exchange, or from divine white to imperial blue

The 100 blanc de Chine teapots made by Tineke van Gils (NL) in Dehua (Neue Keramik 6/11) had hardly cooled down when the city of Delft invited her to work for the exchange project Delft-Jingdezhen in its sister city Jingdezhen, the other porcelain capital of China.

### T ravel blue

The idea of exchange is my guideline to creating artworks in the Sanbao artist in residence centre in Jingdezhen. So prior to my departure, I read up on the ceramic history of both cities.

In the 17th century, along with tea from China, teapots, cups and plates also came to Europe. Chinese porcelain became adored and sought after. Tin pitchers and cups, in vogue in the West, were brought to the East to be copied in porcelain and imported back to Europe: Chine de commande.

In Europe the struggle commenced to find the recipe of "Chinese Gold". In 1708, it was Johann Friedrich Böttger from Dresden who succeeded. The start of Meissen porcelain was the result. Before Böttger's discovery, potters from Delft created a cheap look-alike of the precious blue and white from Jingdezhen, called blue and white faience.

This blue Delftware became popular. It had its heyday from 1650 to 1750 and made Delft famous worldwide until this very day. Delft blue earthenware is slipcast in moulds (the same method is used in Jingdezhen except when the objects are too big for the moulds), whitened with tin glaze and painted with blue.

I have to admit these techniques are not my cup of tea. My tool is the potter's wheel and my technique is the act of throwing. Between Delft, Jingdezhen and me, the only link I could imagine was a blue one. This is why I arrived at Jingdezhen with a homemade porcelain teapot with inlaid tulips in blue.

### Jingdezhen breathes ceramics

Unlike Dehua, where ceramic Valhalla begins in the hills between the dragon kilns, in Jingdezhen it is the city itself that is

immersed in ceramics. And so am I when walking through neighborhoods that are changed into entire porcelain factories. One area belongs to the mould makers, in another the slip-casting is done and pots are drying everywhere out on the streets. Behind a building under a jungle of roofs I spot four men working together on one potter's wheel. Their eight hands, stacked upon each other, control a huge lump of clay in order to create an enormous vase, perhaps a part of a lamppost? Pots too large for a mould are thrown on a wheel. A handcart full of vases and Mao busts is pulled towards the painter's district.

In a shop among thousands of ceramic decals I find Dutch windmills and even the name of "Delft".

The weekly antiques market could be called

Tineke with teapot, h 27cm  
photo Maarten Gerlach



"Blue Monday". Streets and squares are covered with thousands of blue and white shards sorted by subject. Jingdezhen breathes porcelain.

The more I inhale, the easier it is for me to welcome the techniques of slip-casting and painting to my own work. Of course, I will do in Jingdezhen what can only be done here. The exchange-feeling is born.

### Seamlessly together with a world in between

In a slip-casting factory it is fun when I try to explain that I want to buy giant vases directly from the moulds. Once I am understood, a worker accompanies me to the taxi with visible pleasure to place the wet pots on my lap and on the laps of my willing fellow passengers. While driving over deep holes we hold up the butter-soft pots. In Sanbao I cut off the necks and bottoms and put the vases, even when they are squared, onto the wheel to throw new necks, bottoms and lids on them. In this way I change archetypal vases into exchange teapots. My style and that of Jing-dezhen go together seamlessly with a world in between.

Under time pressure I have to dry the teapots in the full sun. This asks for ingenuity. Some of the greenware pots crack, but master potter MaCheFu teaches me how to repair everything. The bottom of one pot breaks into eleven pieces and a handful of grit. I meticulously fit the grit and the pieces back together. With both our hands in one move we reconnect the bottom to the pot. That makes us proud. It is my masterpiece. The culmination of my teapots comes when a Chinese painter decorates the mould-made parts, as commonly done in Jingdezhen. In the painting factory I find a scenery painter willing to be hired. After her day job she drives to my studio on her motorbike, to paint mountains and waterfalls on the slipcast parts of my pots. She is used to the size of those Jingdezhen surfaces, but the dents I applied are challenging for her. When I ask her to paint big tulips, it is obvious that she feels too uncomfortable to paint the long strokes of the stems. So I paint the tulips myself next to her Chinese scenes. The shape and the painting style of my pots are recognised in Jingdezhen. The surprise of those teapots, however, is the idea of exchange in each part of them. The magazine *Ceramics Science & Art* from the province Hunan wrote an article about it with enthusiasm.

### 400 Years Exchange Delft – Jingdezhen

Since 2006, there has been a frequent contact between the ceramic cities of Jingdezhen (China) and Delft (NL). Dutch artist Adriaan Rees, who has worked for many years now in his own studio in Jingdezhen, initiated and guides the project: "400 years Exchange Delft – Jingdezhen". In October 2010, the mayors of Jingdezhen and Delft signed a Memorandum of Understanding for future cooperation. An artist in residence programme was launched to allow the exchange of artists between both cities. Each spring, Chinese artists work in the Royal Delft studio, and each autumn, Dutch artists work in the Sanbao Ceramic Art Institute, at the time of the Jingdezhen International Ceramic Fair in which Delft participates. At the fair I demonstrate



above Tineke in SanBao studio

left Disk teapot, h 17cm



- above Master painter Chen Jun  
 right Transporting pots in Jingdezhen  
 below Pots for sale in the streets of Jingdezhen



how to combine Jingdezhen greenware with China porcelain on a potter's wheel. The Chinese students are greatly interested in this. On the second floor is the exhibition of the First Kaolin Grand Prix of International Ceramic Art displaying one of my teapots.

The opening of the Sanbao International Ceramic Museum in Jingdezhen in October 2011 is of great importance to the city of Delft. The first exhibition is called: 400 Years Exchange Delft-Jingdezhen. Beside a collection of Royal Delftware, you can also find works of the exchange artists. Jackson Li, owner of the Sanbao museum, promises to permanently keep up the exhibition. Exchange is a bridge that has to be crossed to remain.

The teapots are on view in the studio/gallery 't Spint, Rijksstraatweg 16, 2636 AX Schipluiden

More information on the website: [www.tinekevangils.com](http://www.tinekevangils.com)

Work by Tineke van Gils are on show in the exhibition:  
 "Blue Revolution"  
 400 Year Exchange Delft-Jingdezhen  
 Museum Het Prinsenhof Delft  
 Sint Agathaplein 1, NL-2611 HR Delft, The Netherlands

