

Week 4 Think Piece

From our visit to the Art Study Center last week, one of the concepts that was most prevalent from my perspective was the Japanese concept of *wabi sabi*. This is the concept of aesthetic beauty in imperfection. It was abundantly present in the examples shown to us, perhaps due to Korean potters' cognizance of its Japanese demographic. One example was the "Circular Tea or Rice Bowl with Abstract Décor" dated to 16th century Choson. The perhaps most immediately noticeable feature of the bowl is the angled "X" incision on the inward face of the body. The marking is not placed with any particular symmetry, and seems rather cursory. However, with *wabi sabi* in mind, such a mark promotes great beauty. Another example is the "Circular Bowl with Everted Lip and Inscription Reading 'Kui' (Precious) and 'Chon' (One Thousand)". This small bowl has a similarly placed inscription on the inwards face, but the inscription is actually made up of two Chinese characters. While their literal meaning is evident, it is unclear as to why the bowl was inscribed this way. The marking may be another example of *wabi sabi*, as most other tea bowls were finished with patterns with beautiful radial symmetry and a certain feeling of uniformity. This marking is far from that; it seems as if it was written with no particular carefulness. The exterior of body has also been brushed with slip, and it appears done with a similar attitude as the marking- with no particular attention to symmetry. Yet, from the perspective of *wabi sabi*, this is intentional. Such imperfections are where true beauty is found. For example, there are areas on the body where slip has not been entirely brushed on. The lines of slip are not straight and uniform; rather, they wave up and down, as reflecting the possibility of free-hand brushing. *Wabi sabi* is a concept that embraces breaks from uniformity and symmetry. It is perhaps the result of the desire to see beauty in human error; as imperfection is one of the most intrinsically human concepts.