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NCECA FOR NEWBIES!

For those who are going to THE NATIONAL COUNCIL ON EDUCATION FOR THE CERAMIC ARTS for the first time, any time, this group of observations, gleaned and compiled over many years might just help in a practical approach to gaining the most from NCECA CONFERENCES in the future. I have been meaning to write this for years for my own benefit as memory gets shorter and needs a jog from time to time. As we have just come through a very good one in SEATTLE, I thought this would be an ideal time to put this together, while recent impressions are fresh in mind.

I try to arrive at the host city on the Monday of conference week to give some relaxation and orientation time before the inevitable chaos starts to unwind. I check into the hotel and try to prepare with a good night's sleep. You will need much preparatory rest to take the ensuing confusion. From noon on the Tuesday afternoon, the registration booths are open, usually until 5pm, they re-open at 8am each morning. You get your complete program package at registration along with special tickets for entry into lectures and galleries and your most important personal label that gets you into all the activities. There are a massive number of exhibitions to see so the sooner that you start gallery tours, the better. Seattle had 190 to choose from. It is normally best to visit the ones closest to the main hotel first. For some weeks ahead of the conference, a number of the ceramic magazines include details of the whole program with gallery shows, lectures, workshops and bus tours that may be taken for a fee. If you have a car available it helps to get to outer galleries as the bus tours generally include considerable frustrating wait-times. There are many gallery openings throughout the week. You will never manage to get to all the shows so prioritize the ones that sound most interesting to you and whomever you may be with. Evening openings often come with refreshments so you can gaze and graze at the same time. Wednesday is the primary day for gallery hopping. It is also the first day of the associated trade shows, where you can find an amazing array of the latest and greatest gadgets for the potter who has to have the everything from kilns that can be controlled from your cell phone to the latest clays, substrates, glazes, books, tools, CD's and DVD's to hit the market. It is advisable to get breakfast early as the bulk of people are coming in by this time and the hotels seldom have enough space or staff. For several years now I have kept a "dance card" with people I want to spend some extra

over a meal. This normally starts with Breakfast on Wednesday with Barbara at 7am Wednesday and on Thursday with Linda. My mealtime dance card is normally completely filled by January. If you want to be sure of meeting people you want to see, this is an excellent way to do it. Wednesday is also the start of the meat market aspect where university programs from around the world can be compared for those looking for tertiary educational opportunities

Whenever I think of NCECA Conferences I always think of a big Three Ring Circus or Cirque de Soleil, all that goes on in them and the amazing diversity of activity. The actual conference program begins on Wednesday Evening with the Opening Ceremonies so try and save enough energy for that.

The Opening Ceremonies generally are the formalities of the conferences and usually include a very interesting Keynote Lecture of given by someone of note who may or may not be directly involved with the ceramic medium.

The full slate of lectures and demonstrations continues throughout Thursday and Friday usually starting at 8.30am, and going on until 5pm. If you want to see somebody specific, get there early to make sure of a space. Very interesting special presentations, usually musical, take place on Thursday evenings. If you want or need to eat, it is best to fill up at breakfast with buffet. For the last three years there has been a Potters' Jam Session by musically inclined members of NCECA who bring and play their own instruments.

Saturday morning is normally comprised of the emerging talent show lectures and is always very interesting. Unfortunately many people choose to fly out that morning and need to get to the airport early. In doing so they miss one of the most interesting sessions. It is followed by the closing keynote lecture and final business meeting and elections of changing directors and other board meetings.

Altogether the phenomenon titled the NCECA Conference is, is an extremely energizing, informative and educational experience. They are always different from one another but never a let down. One of the great benefits is the opportunity to rub shoulders with many of the best ceramic artists in the world in one place at one time. For those looking for any of the above opportunities, this conference is the place to find it.