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## Cultivating parallels

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**CULTIVATING PARALLELS**

**A Thesis  
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts**

**in**

**The School of Art**

**by  
SangDuk Yu  
B.F.A., Kookmin University, 2001  
December, 2005**

## **Acknowledgments**

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Above all, I would like to thank everyone in my family and Ema for their endless encouragement and belief in me.

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## **Abstract**

I create ceramic objects that are simple, geometrical and methodical. The design of these tile-like objects initiated from the idea of serving plates. Although the functional aspect of the work in this show has evolved into a tile piece, function is a part of tile. The series of each pattern was created by repetition and enlarging a small original unit that measured one inch by one inch. This repetition with small and simple units shaped by handmade templates created complex pieces. This coexistence of simplicity and complexity led me to a deep feeling of boundlessness on the tiles. The pattern was intensified by light and shadow, which created dynamic expressive qualities of the surface texture, which include matte, high gloss, opaque, and transparent.

## **Cultivating Parallels**

Some words that I associate with my ceramic work are meticulous, serenity, symmetrical construction, and ceramic mold making. For years, I have been exploring a motif that faithfully represents the terms of making ceramic work. I am concerned with making ceramics that incorporate utility and aesthetics in my everyday life. My primary concern is to fuse human and industrial qualities. With this in mind, it is important for the objects to be useful and have decorative value. These are the elements that I hope to incorporate into my work.

Every environment has a very dramatic effect on me. My experiences in culturally diverse places lie at the root of what I make today. I grew up in a very rural area in the southern part of Korea with no electricity, which of course eliminated any access to machinery. Even candles were too expensive to use; kerosene lamps were the norm. Because of the lack of amenities, people had a tendency toward more practical objects. This fact has kept my family simple and economical, even today. One of my favorite household objects is my father's handmade stool from the 1960's. I like this stool because it was made to function faultlessly, although it was not aesthetically designed. Whenever I visit my hometown, I am still impressed by his handmade dam that is used for irrigation by filling up the stream with natural stones that still work perfectly today.

My preference for household utensils altered once I entered the army. When I moved into this new circumstance, my aspect of community life was modified unintentionally by my surroundings. Serving in the military had a unique effect upon me, and showed me a very disciplined and practical life. Simple and strong steel objects were

more appreciated than well-decorated ones, because they were very portable, durable and convenient. Practical value was more important than aesthetic value. Interestingly, my preference for efficient daily objects still remained after I had returned to civilian life. Moreover, this utilitarian concept extended through my undergraduate work. I began to practice some of the basic ceramic techniques enthusiastically. In fact, basic building techniques were considered an imperative means for one's work. In other words, craftsmanship was regarded very importantly in order to achieve a fine piece of ceramic ware. My ceramic education was strongly associated with a longstanding Korean ceramic history. The fine craftsmanship from 12-13<sup>th</sup> century Goryeo<sup>1</sup> celadon porcelain, and the 15-18<sup>th</sup> century Joseon<sup>2</sup> White porcelain influenced many ceramists, including students today. Endless training on the wheel was a big part of my daily school life. My upbringing in conjunction with my school education further influenced me to work conservatively and focus on function. Artistic freedom was not emphasized. It seemed my goal in Korea was very clear and focused until I moved to Nova Scotia, a hemisphere away from my home in Korea for one year of study.

The experience in a widely different culture put me into a different mind-set and taught me other efficient ways to work with materials, clay, and glazes. I gradually widened my ways to approach ceramics. This time period in Canada was important for my conceptual development. I became more interested in combining concept and craftsmanship. Also, the sense of combining two cultures began to emerge in my work though it was not a fully conscious decision.

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<sup>1</sup> Goryeo: an ancient Korean state (918-1392)

<sup>2</sup> Joseon: an ancient Korean period (1392-1910)

From these experiences in Canada I wanted to further enhance my ability to marry concept and craft (plus the cultures.) I chose to take the step to study at LSU in America to deepen my understanding of the relationship between concept and craft. These concerns have matured with further experiences of lively discussion on one's work and deeper observation of the ceramic material and have influenced me.

Mold making has been my primary building method for the last four years. This particular way of fabricating also inspires me to find an interesting subject, which can dictate its forming method. I enjoyed investigating the problems that arose from making considerably big tiles (38 inches each side). In each different state of the tile, from wet to glaze firing, I dealt with various problems, and these difficulties gave me further desire to make gigantic tiles. I believe that working in this larger size excited my usual manner of solving a solution to a problem. Technical problems continuously kept me going forward, and I finally took the last survived, cracked piece from the glaze firing to get a water-jet cutting<sup>1</sup>. A technical problem often involves accessing new technology, which, in turn exposed me to diverse working experiences.

My efforts in these works are formed by the plaster mold making method. The mold making enables me to experiment with the scale of the tile and repeating shapes elaborately. The surface texture and color are created by glazing. A pleasing composition is achieved by careful assembly.

The project in this exhibition closely satisfies my prolonged curiosity in the merging of the two parallel concerns. I create ceramic objects that are simple, geometrical and methodical. The design of these tile-like objects initiated from the idea

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<sup>1</sup> Water-jet cutting is a computerized cutting process using a stream of pressurized water passing through a tiny hole. It is used to cut hard materials, such as metals with accuracy. There is no heat generated during water-jet cutting.



of serving plates. Although the functional aspect of the work in this show has evolved into a tile piece, function is a part of tile. The mold making method enables me to produce multiple pieces in a short period of time. Also this process enhances the functionality of making.

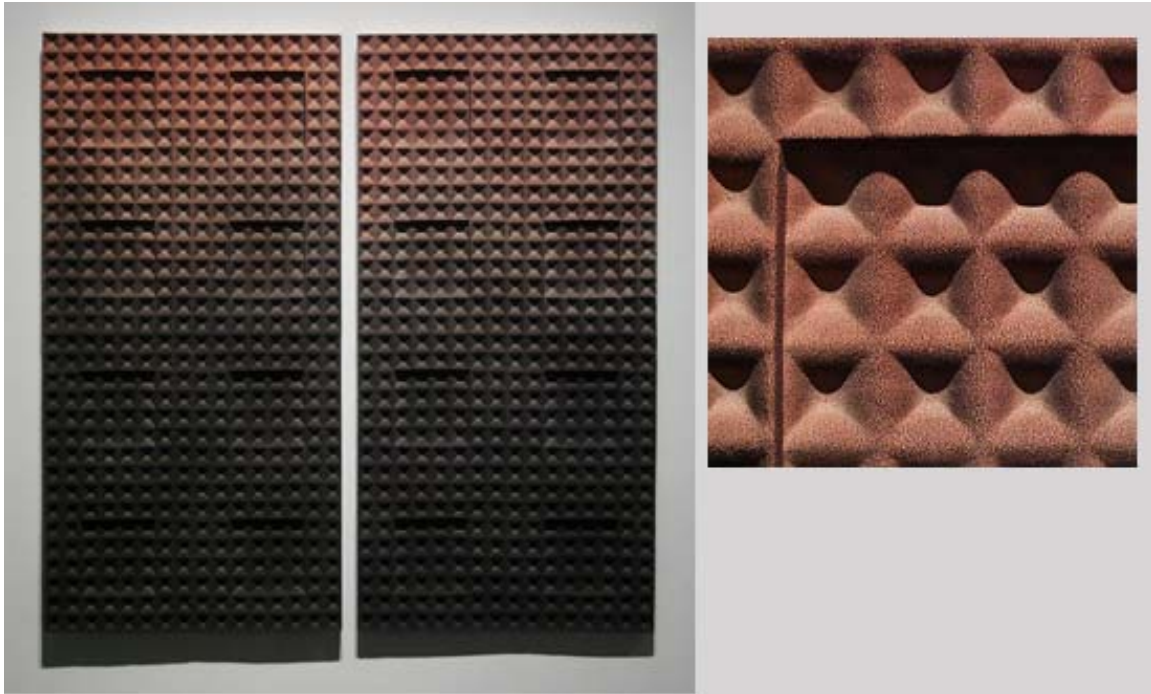
The vast popularity of ceramic tiles has contributed its extensive presence in everyday life. They have been used in the palaces of Korea as an important material for interior decoration, walls, floors, fountains and patios. Crisscross pattern has been used for the frame design of Korean sliding doors.

One's preference of tile has become dependent on individual taste rather than regional or religious influence. My tiles do not necessarily represent the culture of my home country or my current American culture. With my lively tiles, I want to enrich places such as homes, schools, hospitals or offices where beauty and charm are desired. My conceptual direction started off by hand making an intimate design. Basically, the design was addressed as simple but also complicated, calm but also playful, and dynamically different depending on light. The series of each pattern was created by repetition and enlarging a small original unit that measured one inch by one inch. This repetition with a small and simple unit created by a curved-line shaped handmade extruder created a complex piece. This coexistence of simplicity and complexity led me to a deep feeling of boundlessness on the tiles. The pattern was intensified by light and shadow, which created dynamic expressive qualities of the surface texture, which include matte, high gloss, opaque, and transparent. I desire mystery in the relationship between complex color, texture and form. Glazing is still an intuitive process for me. I have some anticipation of producing a good glaze, but I had to use my accumulated experience for

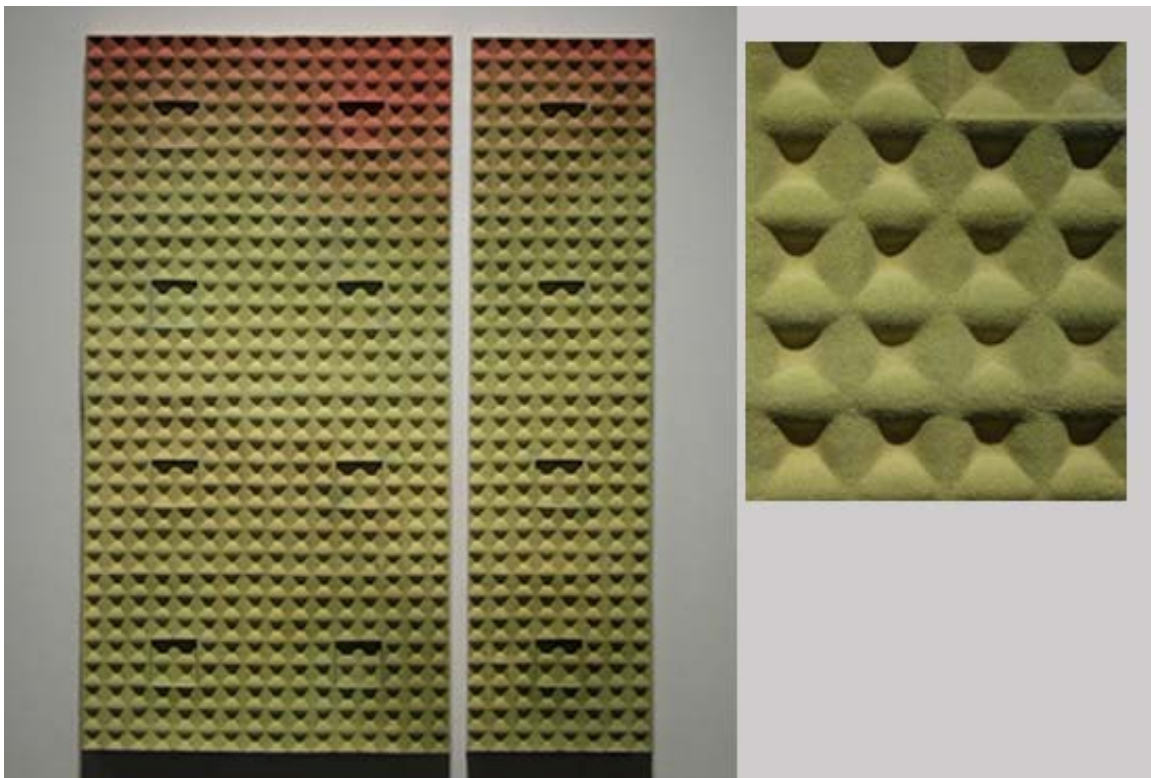
glazing these uneven shapes. It is hard to describe the references of the colors that I used, but I emotionally respond to the richness and profoundness of the glazes. I carefully organized and displayed these diverse colored tiles. I hope the viewer to experiences joy through my work.

I want my design, which is created by a simple line, to present practicality and aesthetics. This systematic and industrial design reflects the impression of my handmade craft. I hope this simultaneous representation of the mechanical and human in our saturated culture generates a sense of irony. The object that I make is not as important as the sentiment comes from how the object is made. I want the aspects of my human quality to be in harmony with the mechanical property through these tile works. The parallels between machine and human, utilitarian and aesthetic, historical and modern, and Eastern and Western culture function as a guide for my work.

Images



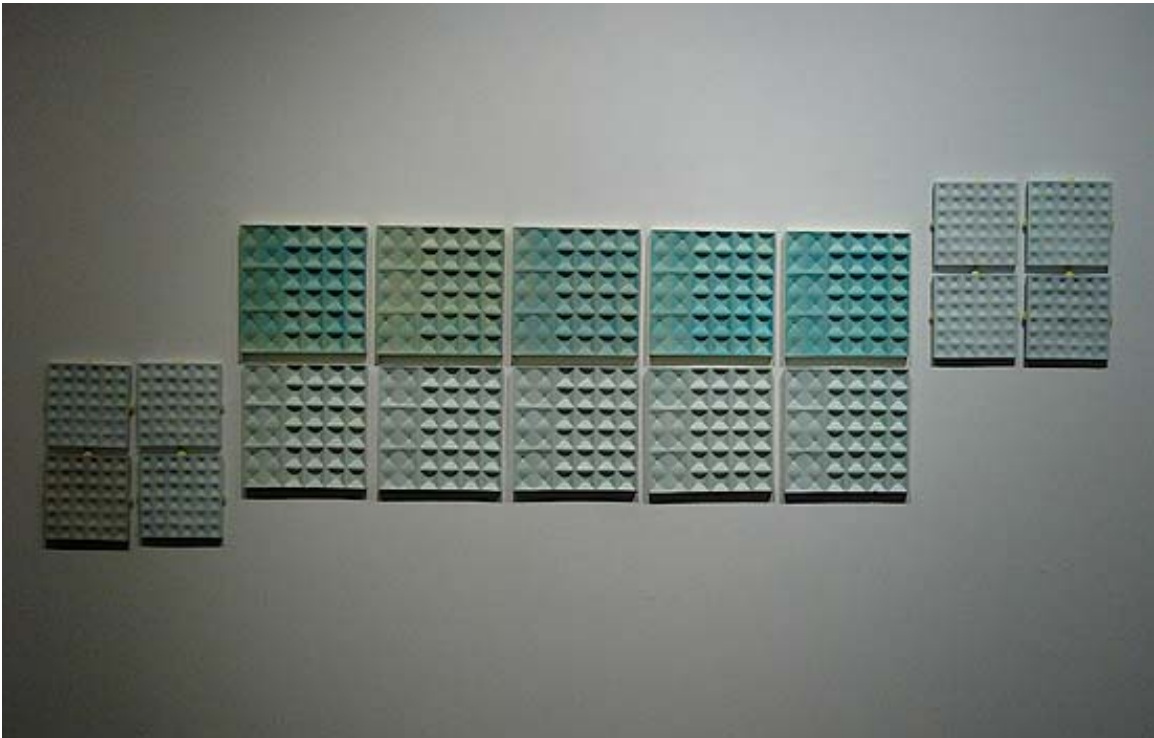
*Untitled I*  
Porcelain, glaze, 38 x 38 inches with detail view



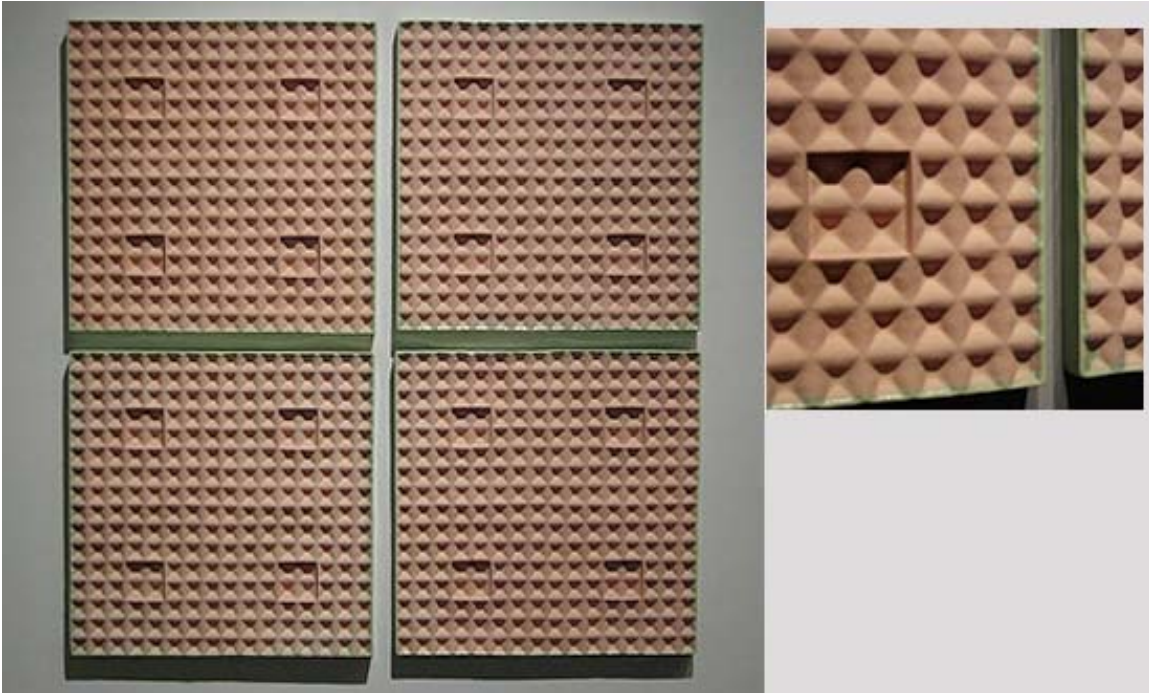
*Untitled II*  
Porcelain, glaze, 28 x 38 inches with detail view



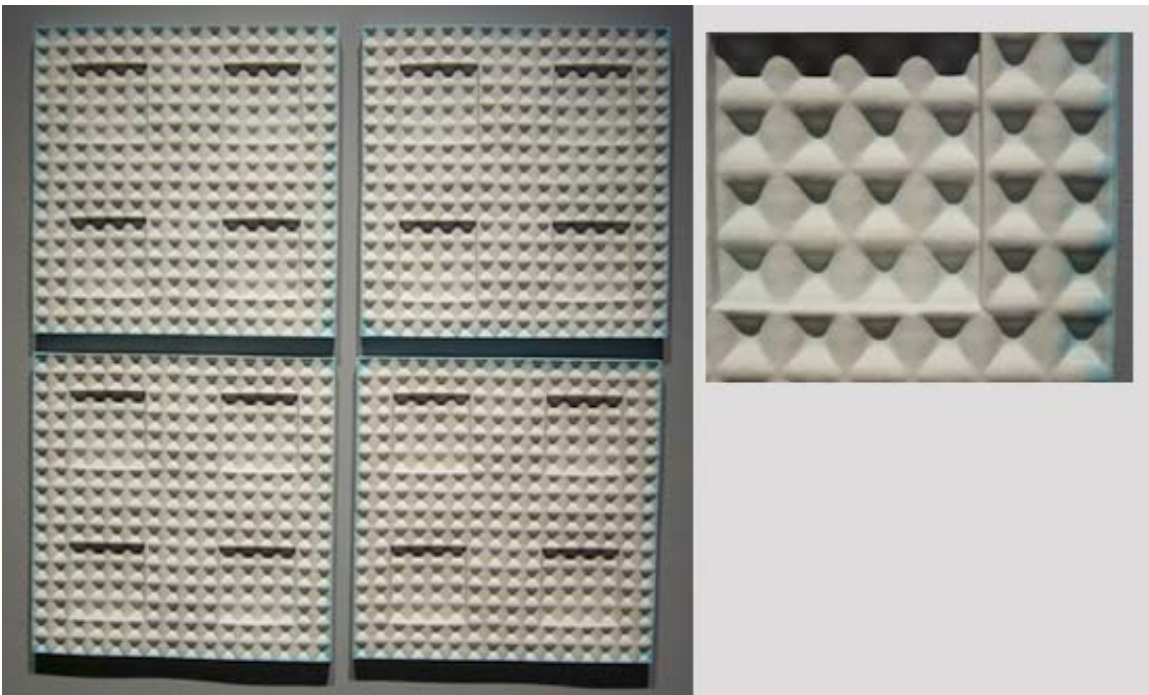
*Untitled III*  
Porcelain, glaze, 40 x 40 inches (each)



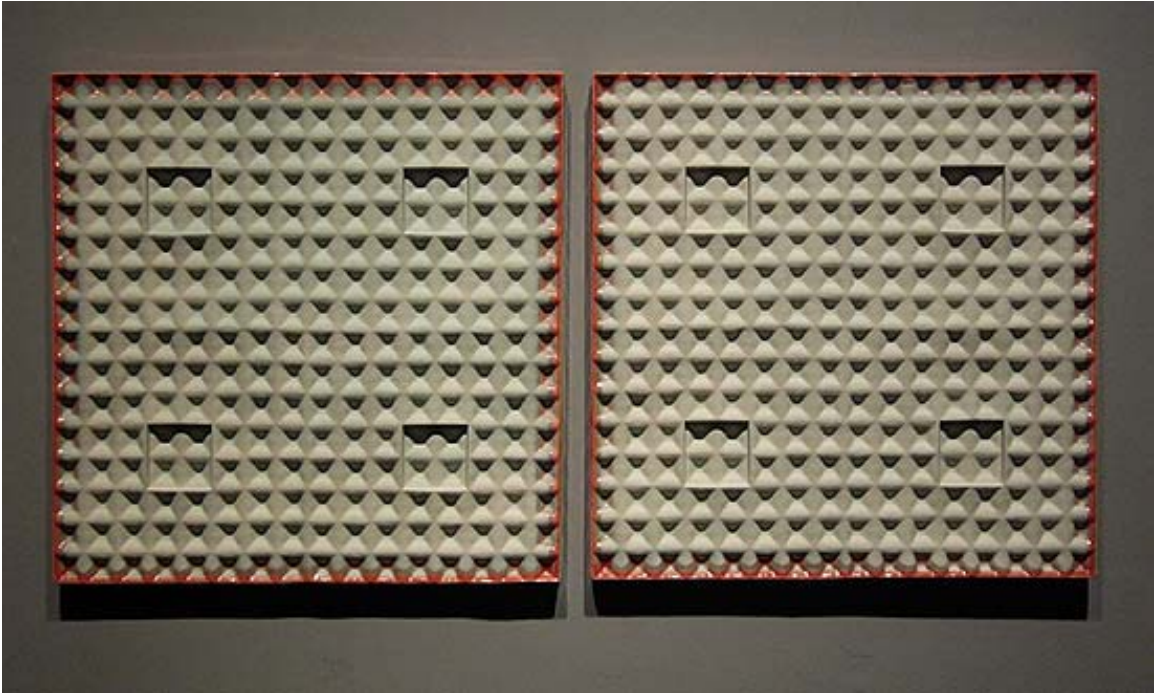
*Untitled IV*  
Porcelain, glaze, 35 x 75 inches



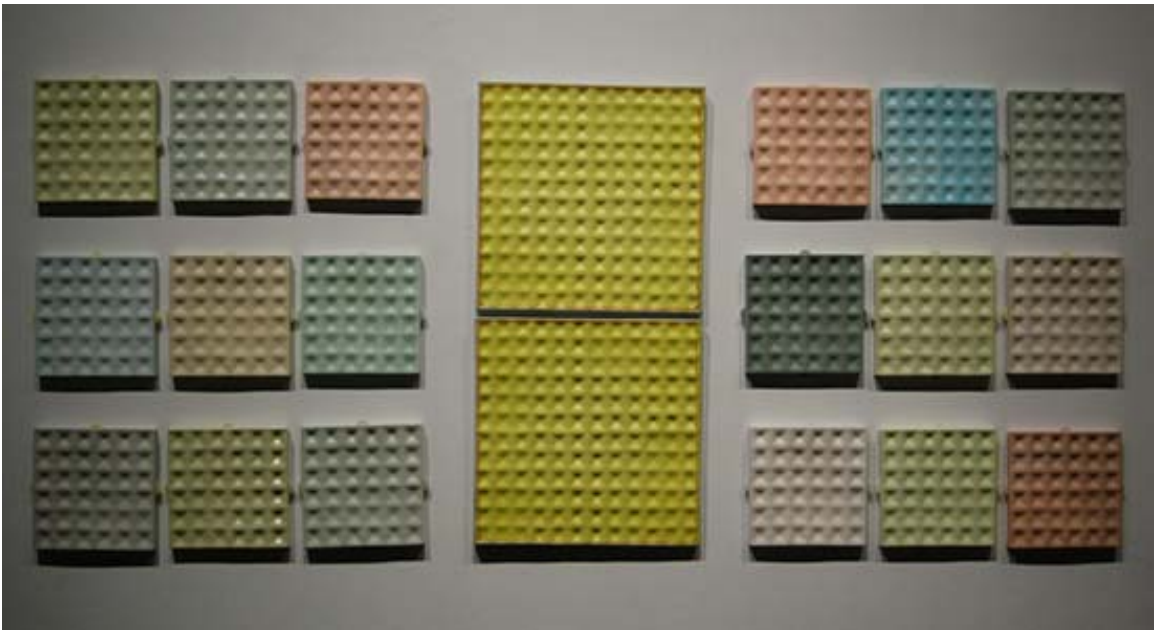
*Untitled V*  
Porcelain, glaze, 8 x 38 inches with detail view



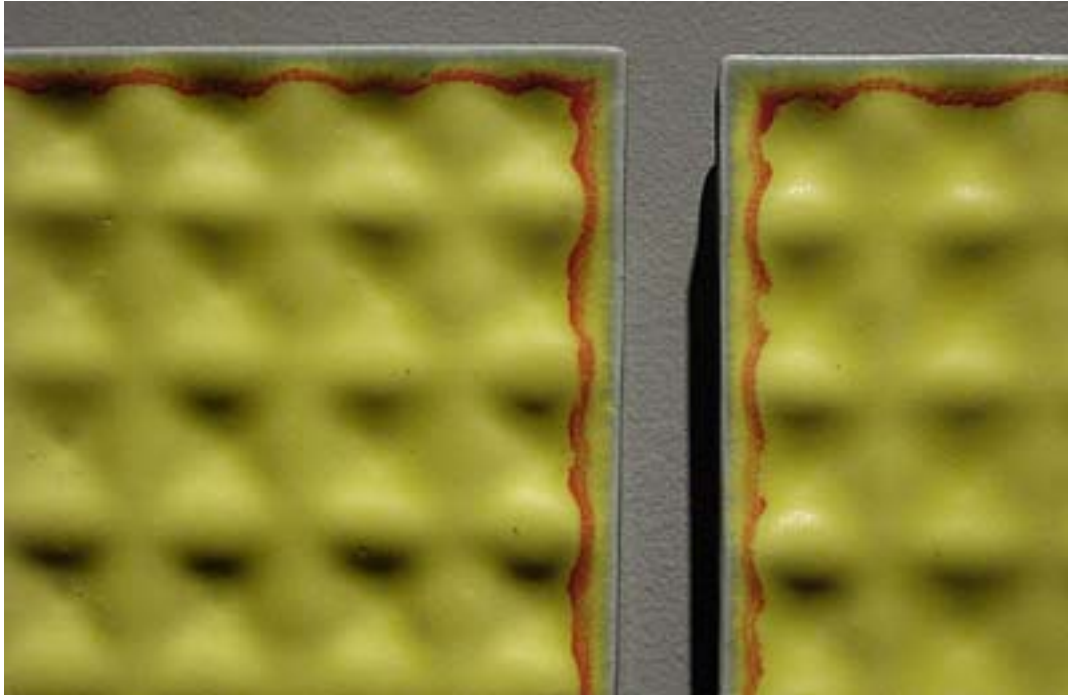
*Untitled VI*  
Porcelain, glaze, 38 x 38 inches with detail view



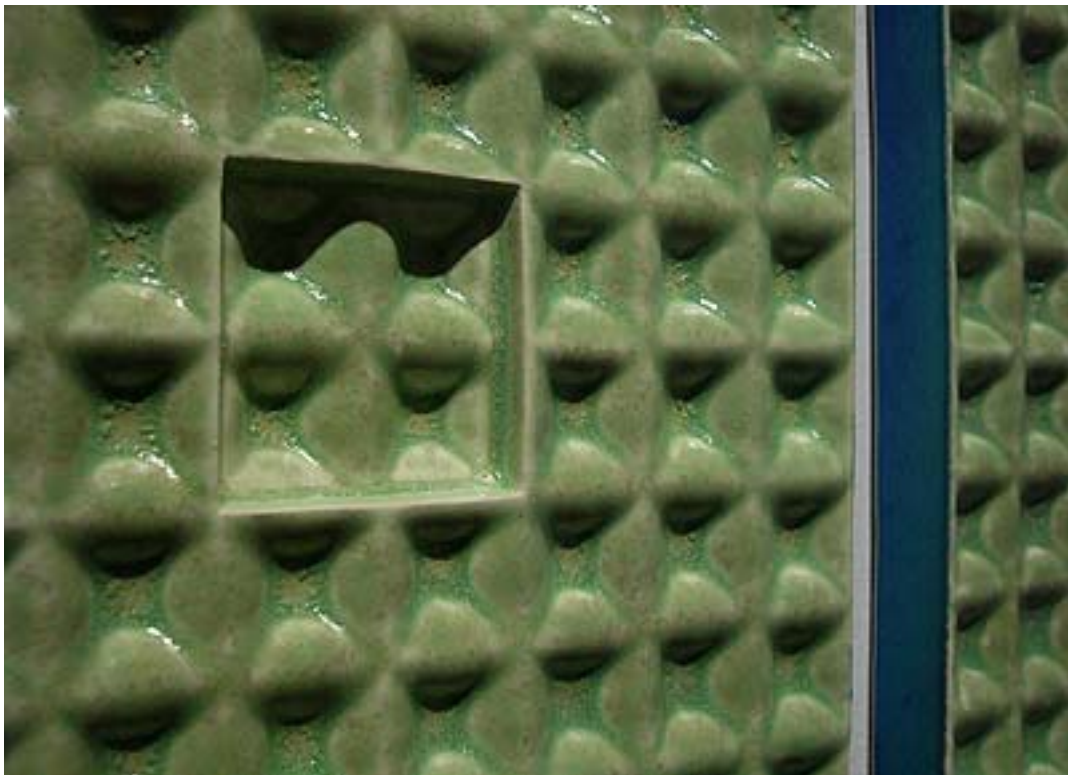
*Untitled VII*  
Porcelain, glaze, 19 x 38 inches



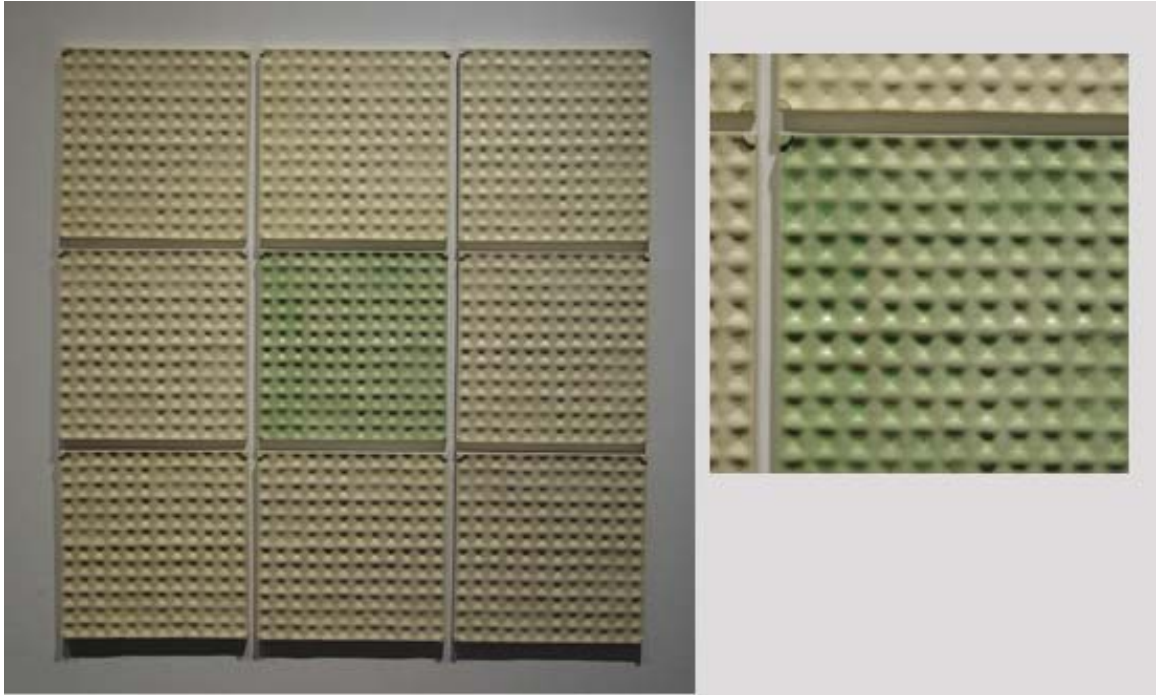
*Untitled VIII*  
Porcelain, glaze, 25 x 85 inches



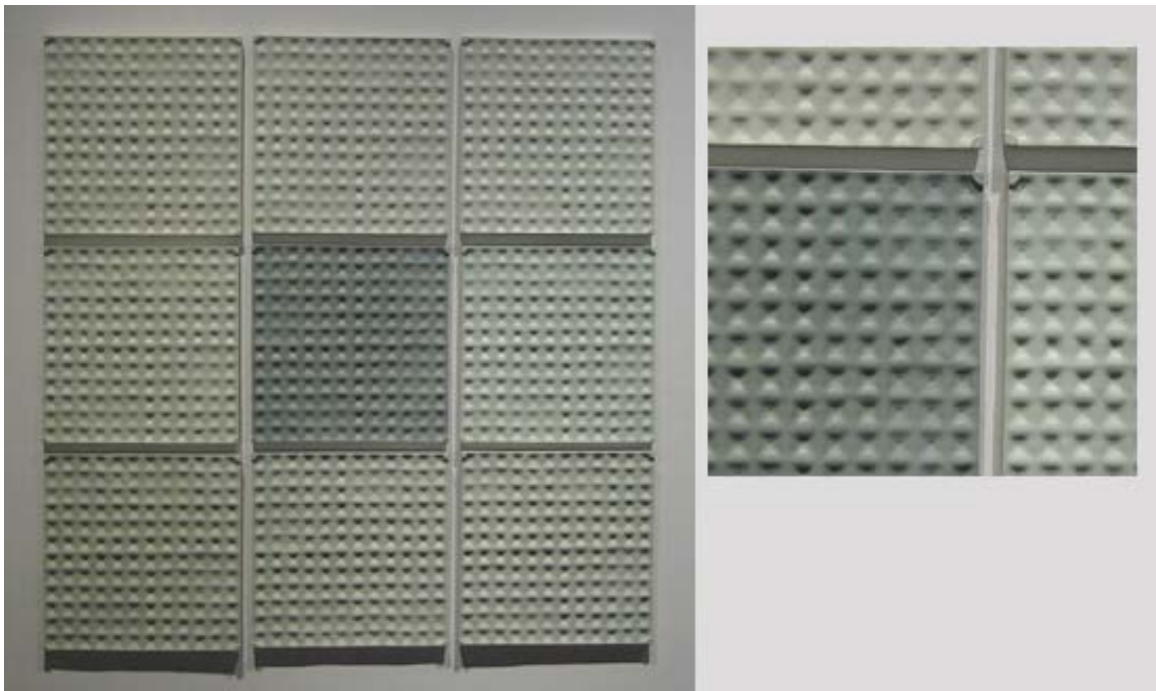
*Untitled X*  
Porcelain, glaze, detail view



*Untitled XI*  
Porcelain, glaze, detail view

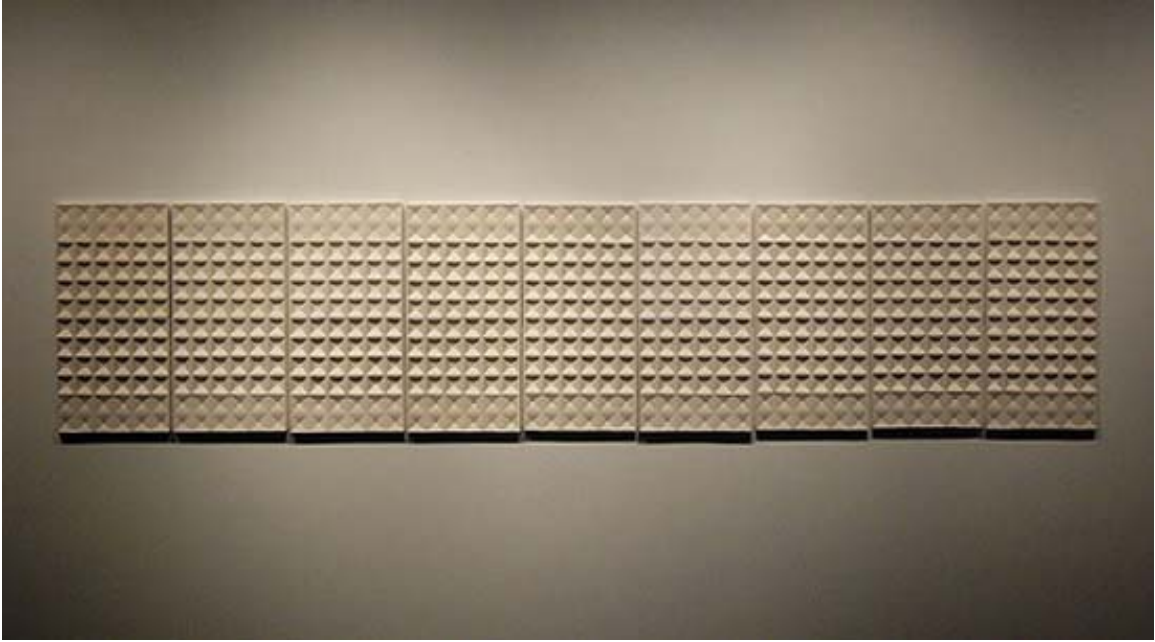


*Untitled XII*  
Porcelain, glaze, 40 x 40 inches with detail view

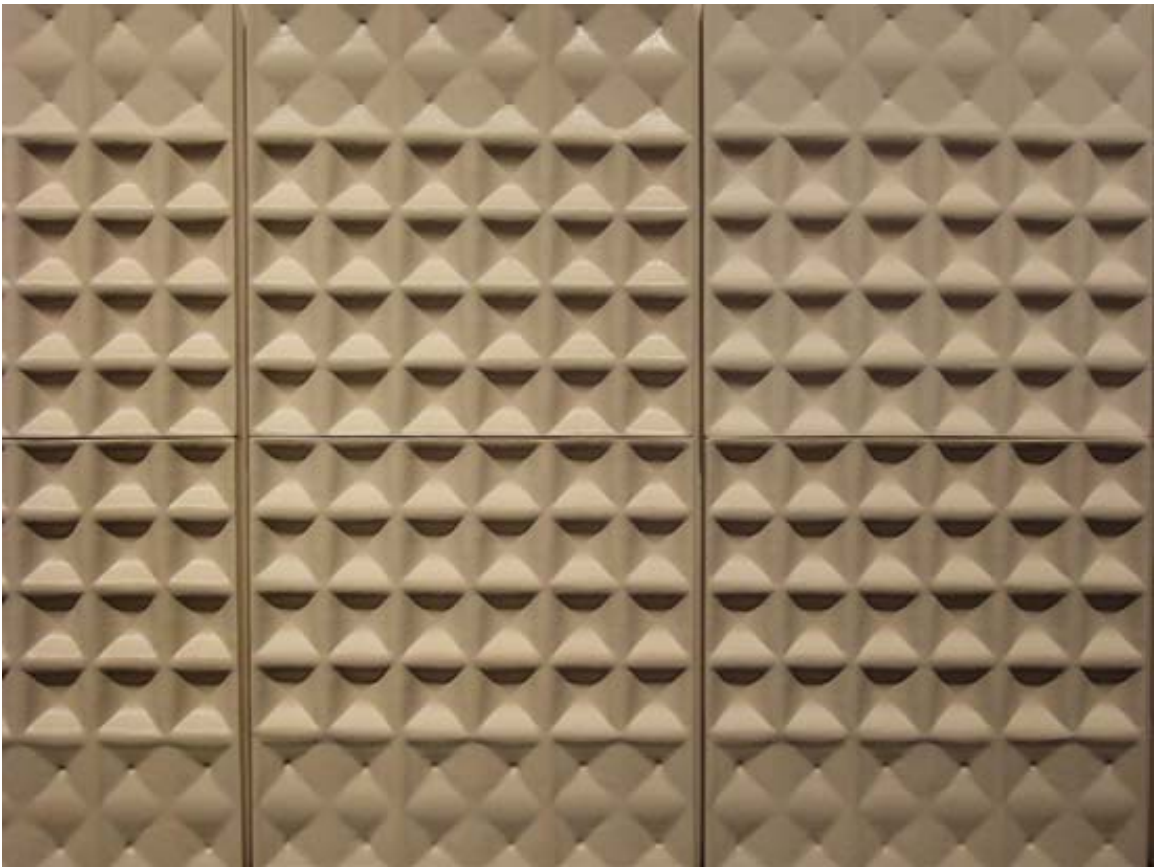


*Untitled XIII*  
Porcelain, glaze, 40 x 40 inches detail view





*Untitled XIV*  
Porcelain, glaze, 22 x 100 inches



detail view



Installation view I



Installation view II



Installation view III



Installation view IX

## **Vita**

SangDuk Yu was born in a small farming village, Sanchung, Kyungnam, in the southern part of South Korea. He grew up in Busan until he moved to Seoul where he received his Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from The Kookmin University in 2001. He spent one year in Nova Scotia College of Art and Design as an exchange student in 1999. He is currently a candidate for the degree of Master of Fine Arts from Louisiana State University in December 2005.