

How to Write Haiku – an alternate form of expression while you are away from the clay studio.

Lisa Chicoyne – March 2020

Haiku is a traditional Japanese form of poetry. Not unlike other traditional art forms from Japan it follows some specific rules that give structure to the practice. I'll share some of those with you here to get you started writing your own.

I think it relates well to our practice as potters and clay artists. Think of it being similar to the structure of a cup. A cup has a particular form it takes. It has a rim, a body, a foot and sometimes a handle. What happens between the parts is the artists' playground. The artist decides what claybody to use, the proportions, the basic shape, the style, the level of refinement. No two people make cups that look exactly alike and something about ourselves is reflected in those choices we make and our execution.

Haiku "Rules"

(*note rules are meant to be broken. I suggest you start by following the rules. Once you understand the subtleties of the form then you can take some liberties to suit your expression) Also, there are more subtle distinctions, but this will get you started.

Form:

Each poem has 3 Lines (Rengetsu, below is in five, likely due to translation)
5-7-5 syllable count – 1st line has five syllables, 2nd seven, and the 3rd has five

Two important parts of a haiku:

- 1) It joins two images where you are comparing the relationship between two things like the first example by Basho – the good house and the sparrows. See if you can identify the two things in each example below.
- 2) It connects human feelings to nature, time/place, and/or the seasons.

Two goals of a haiku:

- 1) Trying to present a deep feeling you have experienced
 - 2) Trying to describe what you saw
- So, in essence it is combining experience and observation.

A few random notes that relate to Haiku

"It's very difficult to do something small in a meaningful way"

Think about using concrete images.

Japanese believed that someone learning to write haiku should explore the details of their daily life and try to express their feelings about those details in their own language. In other words, use your own words. Use the language you normally speak in.

"When you understand one thing through and through, you understand everything." (from *How to Haiku* by Bruce Ross)

Examples and some Haiku artists and poets who have written Haiku to look up:

(a note regarding syllable count and translations – the syllable count does not always translate the same in Japanese and English)

Matsuo Basho, Japan 1644-1694

Good house:
sparrows out back
feasting in the millet.

I don't know
which tree it comes from,
that fragrance.

Yosa Buson, Japan 1716-1783

Among the twenty snowy mountains
The only moving thing
Was the eye of the blackbird.

The short night -
a broom thrown away
on the beach.

Kobayashi Issa, Japan 1763-1827 (Issa means "a cup of tea")

In a dream
my daughter lifts a melon
to her soft cheek.

The pheasant cries
as if it just noticed
the mountain.

Rengetsu, Japan 1791-1875

She was Buddhist nun who made her living making and selling pots on which she wrote her poems.

DIGGING CLAY AND MAKING A VASE

Taking the fragile
Little Handmade
Thing to sell-
How lonely it looks
In the market place!

THE WILLOW AT THE WINDOW

So quickly!
The willow planted
Three years ago
Now beating against
My windowpane.

Jack Kerouac, American 1922-1969

Morning meadow-
Catching my eye,
One weed

Haiku, shmaiku, I cant
understand the intention
of reality