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Art From Earth

Xiem Clay Center in its well-equipped, modern and spotlessly clean studio offers up classes for learning, a studio for creating, a gallery for experiencing

By SETH AMITION
Monday, October 8 | 2:58 pm

It takes three days to fire up a kiln. The first day, the kiln operator cleans out the kiln and places the pre-heated clay pieces in it, filling up the space inside the kiln as best as he or she can, the second day, the kiln is fired up, the clay pieces cook and gain structural integrity and the third day, they are left to cool.



Kevin Nguyen

Every step of the process is demanding. An error can destroy irreplaceable work, countless hours of artistry can be lost.

Kilns are also expensive, and this makes clay workshops valuable commodities. Kevin Xiem Nguyen, founder and proprietor of the Xiem (pronounced "sim") Clay Center in Pasadena has created an all-encompassing clay arts facility, with classes to teach, a studio to create and a gallery to experience.

Nguyen, 36, was born in Vietnam and moved with his family to southern California when he was 14. He studied at Cal State Long Beach and later at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, where he graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Industrial Design.

"He worked with clay as an industrial designer," Sonette Munnik, the Xiem Center's education director says. "Some people like it, others don't. He happened to like it a lot."

And so in October 2003, the Xiem Clay Center opened with "state-of-the-art" equipment.

Membership is required for the use of the facilities, but not for the gallery shows and workshops that the Center hosts, including the recent exhibition "Broken Boundaries: Transitions in Expression," by artist Thomas J. Smith.

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