

CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE  
**CERAMICS**

on view at the Woodson Art Museum through August 27

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**Woodson**  
**Art Museum**



Clockwise from top left: Yukiya Izumita, *Sekakai*, 2010, unglazed stoneware, photo courtesy of Ken Kondo; Shigemasa Higashida, *Taki (Waterfall) Lidded Vessel*, 2012, glazed stoneware, photo courtesy of Katie Gardner; Joji Yamashita, *Jar*, 2010, unglazed stoneware, photo courtesy of Tim Siegert all from the Collection of Gordon Brodfuehrer

Celebrate summer with visit a to [Nature, Tradition & Innovation: Contemporary Japanese Ceramics from the Gordon Brodfuehrer Collection](#), on view at the Woodson Art Museum through August 27. Enjoy the beauty of the season through the eyes of some of Japan’s most celebrated artists whose reverence for the natural world inspires their ceramics.

Learn more through [public programs](#) and the Art Museum’s free [audio tour app](#) or try your hand at ceramic techniques featured in the exhibition through a [guest-artist workshop](#) or [summer art sessions](#) for ages 5-8 and 9-12.



Satoru Hoshino, *First Snow of Spring Vase*, 2009, hand-formed glazed stoneware, photo courtesy of Tim Siegert; from the Collection of Gordon Brodfuehrer

*The following education materials developed by exhibition co-curator Meher McArthur*

### **Exhibition Overview**

Featuring 43 exceptional Japanese ceramists, *Nature, Tradition & Innovation* showcases ceramic objects of unsurpassed beauty made for everyday use. The 55 ceramic works chosen are closely associated with Japan’s historical pottery centers, and reinterpret traditional methods in a

modern context. Eleven digital photographs taken by photographer Taijiro Ito highlight their poetic connection to nature.

The exhibition provides a dynamic survey of the diverse and innovative practices of ceramic-making in Japan — from exquisite flower vases and serene tea bowls to whimsical candle holders and robust platters — revealing the earthly beauty of Japanese ceramics.

Stoneware ceramics occupy a uniquely esteemed position in Japanese culture. In the West, ceramics have been considered a minor “decorative” art form, eclipsed for centuries by the “fine” arts of painting and sculpture and even in China, where Emperors collected for centuries, stoneware vessels had little cultural or financial value. In Japan, however, rustic-looking tea bowls, tea caddies, and flower vases, with their naturally occurring glazes and imperfect forms, have long been treasured by rulers, tea masters, and connoisseurs, baffling 16th-century Portuguese Jesuit missionaries, who remarked that these simple pots and bowls were “prized beyond belief” and “the jewels of Japan.”

This admiration for rugged-looking stoneware derives in part from the aesthetic of wabi — a cultivated simplicity and rusticity — highly valued within the context of the tea ceremony from the fifteenth century onwards. However, it also derives from the Japanese deep-rooted love of nature and reverence of the kami —

higher beings, or spirits, that inhabit it. For centuries, Japan's potters used the natural elements of earth, water, and fire to create vessels that evoking nature, taking inspiration from the moss coating on a stone statue of a Buddha, the stain on an ancient rock or the bark of a majestic cryptomeria tree. Many of their forms and glazed finishes harmonize with these natural tones and textures and are often believed to be created by the kami themselves during the firing of the kiln.

All of the works in this exhibition are from the private collection of San Diego-based collector Gordon Brodfuehrer. The exhibition was originally organized by the Mingei International Museum in San Diego and curated by Christine Knoke, director of exhibitions and chief curator. It has been adapted for travel by Meher McArthur, an independent Asian art curator, author, and educator.

### **Glossary of Terms**

**Aesthetic:** concerned with a sense of beauty; a branch of philosophy dealing with the nature of beauty, art, and taste and with the creation and appreciation of beauty

**Botamochi:** a Japanese sweet made with rice and azuki (red bean paste); circular decorative marks on Japanese ceramics

**Ceramic:** products made from clay or similar materials baked in a kiln

**Collection:** works of art or objects gathered together and exhibited as a themed group

**Chanoyū:** (lit. "hot water for tea") the unique Japanese art and etiquette surrounding tea drinking typically referred to as the "tea ceremony"

**Design:** to compose a plan for the structure and form of a work of art; the decorative scheme for an object

**Earthenware:** a low-firing ceramic (1,000°C and below) that is a porous, less durable ceramic and usually unglazed — e.g. roof tiles and terracotta flower pots. In Japan there are two types of ceramics: toki (earthenware and stoneware, i.e. pottery) and jiki (porcelain). Each type is distinguished according to firing temperatures.

**Experimental:** derived from or founded on the characteristics of an experiment

**Functional:** capable of serving a purpose

**Geometric:** shaped and characterized by points, lines, curves, or surfaces

**Glaze:** a glassy coating on ceramics; can be used to apply colors to the surface of a vessel, to create a smooth outer texture, and to render the vessel waterproof

**Goma:** sesame-colored patches or drips forming natural ash glaze

**Hakuji:** white porcelain

**Hekiyū:** aquamarine glaze

**Hidasuki technique:** firing clay with red pine ash and straw cords to produce decorative red streaks

**Ikebana:** the Japanese art of flower arranging

**Ingenuity:** the aptness and cleverness to be inventive with design

**Iroejiki:** colorful overglaze enamel

**Kami:** the gods or spirits (literally “higher beings”) worshipped in Japan’s native, animistic Shinto religion

**Kiln:** a furnace or oven used to fire pottery

**Medium:** the material or technique used by an artist to produce a work of art

**Mouth:** the opening of an object

**Nonfunctional:** not having or performing a function

**Pottery:** ceramic ware, usually lower fired earthenware or stoneware

**Porcelain:** A clay fired at high temperatures (approx. 1300°C) to create pure white, translucent, resonant, non-porous, and durable vessels. Porcelains are almost always glazed.

**Representational:** relating to or denoting art that aims to depict the physical characteristics of recognizable objects

**Ruri:** lapis lazuli (a deep blue metamorphic rock) glaze

**Sake:** a Japanese drink made from fermented rice and water

**Sculpture:** a three-dimensional work of art; may be carved, modeled, constructed, or cast

**Seihakuji:** bluish-white porcelain

**Shino:** a thick white glaze composed mainly of feldspar

**Stoneware:** a ceramic that fires at a medium temperature (1,000°C-1250°C) that is non-porous, fairly durable, usually glazed

**Technique:** the manner, ability, and technical skills employed by artists and artisans to carry out their particular art form

**Tenmoku:** an iron-colored glaze that fires dark brown

**Tenzan:** heavenly mountain

**Tetsuyū:** iron glaze

**Three-dimensional:** having or appearing to have height, width, and depth

**Topographical:** the relief, features, and configuration of a structural entity

**Vessel:** a hollow container used to hold liquids and other contents

**Wabi:** a Japanese aesthetic that values simplicity and rusticity

**Yohen effect:** associated with Bizen ware, the colors and patterns produced when an unglazed piece is fired for an extended period

### The Six Old Kilns of Japan

The Six Old Kilns of Japan, Nihon rokkōyo, is the name given to the sites that have been major potting centers since the Kamakura and Muromachi periods (1185-1573). They include Seto, Tokoname, Echizen, Shigaraki, Tamba, and Bizen. These sites became renowned since the Fifteenth century for their pieces made for the tea ceremony (chanoyū).



Exhibition artist Satoru Hoshino at work during "Woodfired Landscapes: International Ceramics Workshop," Gothenburg, Sweden, 2012

**Guinomi:** sake cup

**Hanaire:** flower vase

**Mizusashi:** fresh water jar

**Sakazuki:** flat, saucer-like cup used when serving sake

**Tokkuri:** sake bottle

**Tsubo:** narrow-mouthed jar

### Common Forming Methods

**Tebineri:** potter forms the clay using only his hands, no tools

**Himo-zukuri:** ropes of clay piled (coiled) on top of each other, the edges firmed with the potter's hands or with a spatula

**Kata-zukuri:** use of clay or plaster molds

**Rokuro-zukuri:** used mainly for round vessels, clay is centered on a spinning wheel and potter uses his hands to pull and fashion the shape

### Common Vessels

**Chaire:** tea caddy

**Chawan:** tea bowl



Hironobu Ogawa, *Tea Bowl*, 2010, glazed stoneware, photo courtesy of Katie Gardner; from the Collection of Gordon Brodfuehrer



Shingo Takeuchi, *Sake Flask*, 2009, stoneware with *zogan*-inlay technique, photo courtesy of Katie Gardner; from the Collection of Gordon Brodfuehrer

## Chanoyū: The Way of Tea



Toen Shusen, *Tea Bowl*, glazed stoneware, photo courtesy of Katie Gardner; from the Collection of Gordon Brodfuehrer

The first historical reference to powdered tea in Japan was in 814 when Emperor Saga drank chanoyū, hot water with tea. It was not until the early 1200s, however, that Japanese interest in tea became widespread, after the monk Eisai returned from China with tea plant seeds and his novel, *Kissa Yojoki*, extolled the medicinal benefits of tea. Eisai was also the first proponent of Zen Buddhism, inextricably linking Zen and tea. The tea used by Chinese monks from this tradition was powdered tea – it helped them stay awake during meditation. This type of tea was first consumed in Japan at Zen Buddhist temples in the 1300s and then spread into the homes of the wealthy military rulers, who hired tea masters and connoisseurs to serve tea to their guests. By the Fifteenth century these figures created a unique native aesthetic: the enjoyment of tea as an art form, known as The Way of Tea.

The Way of Tea reflects the Japanese penchant for simplicity and sincerity, for what is natural and imperfect (known as the wabi aesthetic). “Zen” means “meditation,” and for their long hours of meditation

monks enjoyed tea as a stimulant. Using powdered tea, or matcha, Zen Buddhist monks gradually incorporated tea drinking into their meditation practice, helping shape chanoyū into an elaborate yet spiritual art.

The tea ceremony combined an appreciation for the scientific as well as spiritual aspects of tea and transcended artistic, religious, and social boundaries. The tea ceremony also held a political component. When Japan was ruled by a shogun in the medieval age, military leaders (daimyo) used patronage of the way of tea to connect themselves with the imperial family. The shogun would hold a tea ceremony with the Emperor to signify his leadership had imperial approval.

In the Higashiyama era of the late fifteenth century, chanoyū at first incorporated only Chinese tea ceramics, or karamono. But Murata Juko (1423-1502), a Zen Buddhist priest, sought to harmonize Japanese and Chinese aesthetics, and a new form of tea ceremony emerged using native ceramics, or wamono. Wamono were often rough-textured and flawed, revealing the Japanese affinity for pottery in its natural, irregular form. Juko devised a new kind of tea ceremony based on the wabi aesthetic, the Japanese appreciation for what is simple and rustic.

Takeno Joo (1502-1555) refined the wabi aesthetic, urging compassion and sensitivity to beauty as the true spirit of tea. For Joo, even a broken tea crock should be saved and valued, used to hold flowers, for example, to mirror their delicacy.

Sen no Rikyū (1521-1591) further refined wabi by giving it a philosophical basis. He believed that within the tea house there were no class distinctions. He made the tea house as small and stark as possible—only two tatami mats in size—barely able to fit two or three people, and claimed that chanoyū in a small room was the best way to practice the spirit of Zen. Sen no Rikyū’s descendants went on to found the three main schools of tea ceremony: Urasenke, Omotesenke, and Mushanokojisenke.

## Sake

Sake has been a drink of reverence, family, friendship, and celebration for generations in Japan. First brewed after the introduction of wet rice cultivation around 300 BCE, sake is made from fermented rice and water. Sake can be served chilled, heated, or at room temperature, depending on the drinker, quality, and season. It is traditionally served from a flask called tokkuri, usually a bulbous form with a narrow neck, and poured into small cups called guinomi or choko. The reason for the petite size is twofold: first, smaller cups compel the drinker to slowly sip the sake, allowing him or her to appreciate and savor the taste; second, as it is customary to serve sake to one another, smaller sizes allow members to pour each other sake several times throughout an event, serving to bring people together. Sake can also be served in saucer-like forms called sakazuki, often used at weddings, or box forms called masu, originally used for measuring rice and often used at restaurants. Traditionally, sake was consumed in Shinto rituals and festivals as offerings to the gods in order to ensure rich and bountiful harvests.



Shinya Tanoue, Sake Cups, 2012, glazed stoneware, photo courtesy of Katie Gardner; from the Collection of Gordon Brodfuehrer



Left: Goro Suzuki, Sake Cup, 2002, glazed stoneware, photo courtesy of Katie Gardner; Right: Shinji Suzuki, Sake Cup, glazed stoneware, photo courtesy of Katie Gardner; both from the Collection of Gordon Brodfuehrer

## Traditional Types of Kilns

### **Anagama**

Single-chamber kiln, also known as a tunnel kiln, or cave kiln. It was introduced to Japan from China via Korea in the 5th century. This wood-burning kiln is preferred by potters who use natural ash glazes, and has regained popularity in the last few decades. Isezaki Jun, designated a Living National Treasure in 2004, helped reintroduce the use of anagama kilns in Bizen.

### **Noborigama**

Multi-chamber kiln, also known as a climbing kiln, or step kiln. It is woodburning, like the anagama, but able to produce ten to twenty times more pieces in a single firing. It has been the main kiln used by Japanese potters since the early seventeenth century, favored both for its productivity and its consistency with glazed ceramics.

Today, there are also many other types of kilns, such as electric, oil, gas, coal, and propane.

## Popular Wares

**Arita ware:** Porcelain also known as Imari ware, because they were exported through the port of Imari. Arita, located in Saga Prefecture, was where in the early Seventeenth century by Korean potter Ri Sanpei discovered porcelain. Kakiemon and Nabeshima porcelain (see below) are varieties of Arita ware.



Naoki Yokoyama, *Nerikomi Vase*, 2009, unglazed stoneware, Bizen ware, photo courtesy of Ken Kondo; from the Collection of Gordon Brodfuehrer

**Bizen ware:** Stoneware made at kilns located in Okayama Prefecture. Bizen is one of Japan's Six Old Kilns. Bizen ware is made from unique clay found under the area's rice paddies. Because the pieces are not glazed, the effects come from the way the potter fires them for an extended period of time in the kiln.

**Iga ware:** Stoneware made at kilns located in Mie Prefecture, the Iga kilns are famous for their blue-green tea ceramics. The pieces often resemble those produced by the nearby Shigaraki kilns, one of the Six Old Kilns of Japan.

**Kakiemon ware:** Named after the family that makes it, Kakiemon porcelain is colorfully decorated with red, blue, yellow, purple, and black enamels applied over a transparent glaze. The technique was designated an Intangible Cultural Property in 1955, and Sakaida Kakiemon XIV was named a Living National Treasure in 2001.

**Karatsu ware:** Located in Saga Prefecture, Karatsu stoneware ceramics appeal to aficionados of the tea ceremony. The modest pieces have three varieties – painted, mottled, and “Korean.”

**Kutani ware:** Located in Ishikawa Prefecture, Kutani porcelain is known for its thick overglaze enamels in red, yellow, purple, green, and dark blue. Kutani ware has been made for over 400 years, and its colorful pigments are rooted in Ming Dynasty Chinese porcelain.



**Mashiko ware:** Located in Tochigi Prefecture and home to Hamada Shōji, the celebrated founder of Mingei, Mashiko is renowned for its simple folk-art ceramics, usually stoneware.

**Mino ware:** Located in Gifu Prefecture, Mino ware became famous during the Momoyama era for its four styles of tea ceremony stoneware ceramics—**Shino** (white, red, gray, or decorated), **Oribe** (green or black), **Setoguro** (black Seto), and **Kiseto** (yellow Seto).

#### **Nabeshima ware**

Named for an Edo-period feudal clan who used elegantly decorated porcelain as gifts to the elite. The brilliant floral designs in red, green, and yellow over a blue underglaze are known as iro (colored)-Nabeshima. Imaizumi Imaemon XIII was designated a Living National Treasure in 1989 for revitalizing Nabeshima ware.

#### **Raku ware**

Refers both to tea ceramics made by the Raku family dynasty and to a style of tea ware made using a technique in which the glazes cool rapidly to create beautiful colors and effects. The simple beauty of Raku glazed stoneware is associated with Zen Buddhism and the great tea master Sen no Rikyū (1521-1591). Chojiro was the originator of Raku in the early Momoyama period (1573-1615) in Kyoto.

#### **Tamba ware**

Located in Hyogo Prefecture, Tamba is one of the Six Old Kilns of Japan and is known for its reddish-brown stoneware vessels for everyday use, such as storage jars.

### **The Art of Fire and Clay: A Timeline of Japanese Ceramic Production**

Japan has one of the oldest and richest pottery traditions in the world. The earliest Japanese ceramics date from the prehistoric **Jōmon period (10,500-300 BC)**, when earthenware cooking pots were formed with successive coils of clay (the coil method) and fired at low temperatures. The outer surface of the pot was then impressed with ropes or cords to create a rope patterns or “jomon.” In the middle and late Jōmon period, potters also began to make dogū, small figurines.

**Yayoi era (300 BC-300 AD)** pottery, likely influenced by Korean culture, was plainer than Jōmon forms but used finer clay to produce delicate and graceful shapes. Like Jōmon ware, Yayoi pots were earthenwares fired at low temperatures and unglazed; though unadorned, they often had red and black firing marks. The late Yayoi era also saw the creation of haniwa, clay figurines used to decorate and protect the exteriors of royal tombs.

Stoneware in Japan took root in the late fourth to fifth centuries. By the sixth century, Japan imported from China and Korea the techniques of the potter’s wheel, high-temperature firing kiln, and colored lead glazes, which were only used for a brief period in the eighth century in Japan. For the next few centuries stoneware, often coated with simple transparent or yellowish green glazes, was produced mostly for the upper classes around the capital of Kyoto.



Takahiro Ishii, *Sake Cup*, 2006, glazed stoneware, Oribe ware, photo courtesy of Ken Kondo; from the Collection of Gordon Brodfuehrer

During the **Kamakura (1185-1336) and Muromachi (1336-1573)** more kilns were established throughout Japan and increasingly created stoneware ceramics for use in the homes of people of the lower classes for serving and storing food. One notable form that emerged in this period was the tsubo, a simple but beautiful jar with a narrow opening used to store seeds and other foodstuffs. These were often decorated with natural ash glazes.

The tea ceremony, *chanoyū*, had a profound influence on Japanese ceramics during the **Momoyama era (1573-1615)**. Many older kilns in turn redirected their efforts to tea wares, and hundreds of new kilns emerged that specialized only in tea ceramics. Some of the modest, undecorated tea bowls, caddies, and jars associated with Zen Buddhism are considered the height of ceramic beauty. Raku tea bowls, for instance, slightly irregular in shape because they are handcrafted without a wheel, continue to be admired today.

The start of the **Edo period (1615-1868)** saw the discovery of porcelain in Arita, and the ensuing production of porcelain ceramics for export, primarily to Europe. Arita ware, often used as food dishes, became known for its pure white color enhanced by an elegant blue underglaze. Some porcelain was also decorated with overglaze enamels to suit the tastes of the European markets. From the eighteenth century on, many ceramic centers sprouted throughout Japan, with stonewares mostly consumed by the Japanese, while porcelain was largely created for export.

Ceramic production began to be more mechanized during the **Meiji era (1868-1912)**, with potters using plaster molds and coal-firing kilns. In the 1920s, Mingei ceramists in particular, sought to counteract the growing popularity of mass-produced goods in Japan and to reawaken the attraction to hand-made crafts.

Japanese ceramics after World War II encompassed both the resurgence of native forms as well as the influence of the West. Potters employed diverse techniques to produce a wide range of pieces, from the purely functional to the purely artistic. Ceramics remain a vital form of Japanese culture and a unique expression of the Japanese aesthetic.

### **Educational Reference Materials**

#### **Publications**

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Yellin, Robert. *Ode to Japanese Pottery: Sake Cups and Flasks*. Tokyo: Coherence, 2004.

### Online Resources

<http://www.e-yakimono.net/>

[http://www.the-anagama.com/En/articles/six\\_valley.html](http://www.the-anagama.com/En/articles/six_valley.html)

### @ the Woodson Art Museum

During their docent-led Experience at the Art Museum, students will explore *Nature, Tradition & Innovation: Contemporary Japanese Ceramics from the Gordon Brodfuehrer Collection*, discuss artworks on view and have an opportunity for hands-on art making inspired by time in the galleries. Students will create their own hand-formed vessel using air-dry clay and hand tools to create textures and patterns in the ceramic's surface (see samples below).



### Activity Guides

Each participant on a docent-led Experience receives an [Activity Guide](#) to extend learning and enrichment beyond the Woodson Art Museum and as a way to share the visit with friends and family.

### Woodson Art Museum Information

Please encourage your students to visit the Museum again.

#### Hours:

Tuesday – Friday	9 am – 4 pm
First Thursday of every month	9 am – 7:30 pm
Saturday – Sunday	Noon – 5 pm

Closed Fourth of July.

#### Contact:

Call the Woodson Art Museum or visit the website for more information:

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