Breaking the Mold:
Contemporary Chinese and
Japanese Ceramics Sculpture
April 26 – September 26, 2009

Information for Volunteers

DO NOT CIRCULATE THIS PACKET TO VISITORS; THIS IS FOR VOLUNTEER USE ONLY.
EXHIBITION OVERVIEW

Organized in collaboration with Dai Ichi Gallery in New York City, this exhibit features the work of contemporary ceramicists from China and Japan, juxtaposing the themes of Chinese work relationships, Western influences, social issues and human relationships with the Japanese attention to aesthetics of form, texture, color and materials. In each country there is recognition of tradition while breaking with that tradition in technique and subject matter brought on by experimentation and/or changes in society.

This exhibition demonstrates the variety and dynamism of contemporary ceramics from Japan and China. These works are on loan from Dai Ichi Arts, Ltd. of New York City. Beatrice L. Chang, Dai Ichi’s curator and director, specializes in contemporary ceramics of Japan and China. In a forward to a 2008 exhibition catalog, she speaks of contemporary works from these countries:

After 17 years as an active dealer, my love of Japanese ceramics is undiminished. But clay has no boundaries. Frequent trips back to my hometown, Shanghai, have opened my eyes to the less familiar world of contemporary Chinese ceramic sculpture. The dominant interest of Chinese work most often explores social issues and human relationships. Japanese work typically is concerned with the aesthetics of form, texture, color, materials, and the effect of time and kiln conditions. Both great artistic achievements are complementary, and together they give us a broader view of the glory of ceramics.
JAPANESE SELECTIONS

HAYASHI Yasuo (b. 1928)

*House "Events"* 2005
Ceramic

In 1948 Hayashi Yasuo became the first Japanese abstract ceramic artist. For over six decades he has helped to create an entirely new vocabulary for Japan's large ceramic-making population and given new meaning to ceramic sculpture. He has gone on to inspire generations of ceramic artists in Japan who also have found a way to honor the traditions of the past but explore new ways of sculpting clay to great effect.

This highly evocative work is open to many interpretations. Creatively ambiguous, like most first-rate works of art, it cannot grow stale. The work also refers to his prior optical illusions style. Its painting breaks new ground: personal, contemplative, a memory of his life experiences, or more general reference to our domestic life.

His early works were shown alongside those by stellar international figures such as Wassily Kandinsky and Isamu Noguchi. His personal story is equally unusual: his work is informed by his training as a pilot during World War II. Remarkably, Hayashi is still extremely active as a ceramic sculptor, and continues to extend his artistic reach exploring new frontiers. He is widely exhibited and collected all over the world.

HIGASHIDA Shigemasa (b. 1955)

*Oribe Platter* 2008
Oribe glazed stoneware

Higashida Shigemasa can be seen, quite simply, as an incomparable landscape artist working in ceramics. Verdant green hills, deep blue waters flowing in dramatic swirling patterns - all are characteristics of his best work. Higashida’s irresistible, vibrant art has been enthusiastically collected by museums and connoisseurs worldwide.

Higashida turned to ceramics after a brief but successful career as a stock trader at a major brokerage firm. Ceramic school and an apprenticeship with a master potter followed in 1980’s. Fully committed to ceramic art, Higashida has stored a lifetime supply of special clay he prefers. Although Higashida works in both the Shino and Oribe styles, his preeminent success has been in his Oribe work.
HINODA Takashi (b. 1968)  
*It's Uneasy Even Being in the World*  2005  
Ceramic

Hinoda is a member of the youngest generation of professional ceramic artists. He is obviously influenced by comic books, cartoons, animated films and a pop art sensibility. Within these influences, his work demonstrates a stylistic versatility and an original twist in his cartoon imagery. Hinoda has consciously avoided what he regards as the gloominess of too many traditional Japanese potters. Without changing his bright colors and funky forms, Hinoda has already given evidence that deeper qualities are to be found in his work. His light touch is not inconsistent with an underlying seriousness of purpose. Social commentary is done in a palette of very personal colors, an exaggerated perspective and expressive distortions of size.

KANESHIGE Kosuke (b. 1943)  
*From the Sea*  2004  
Wood fired bizen stoneware

Kaneshige Kosuke, a son of Toyo, the first Living National Treasure from Bizen, has made an independent adjustment to his family pottery heritage, which can be traced back as far as 15th century Bizen. Trained as a sculptor at the Tokyo National University of Arts & Music, Kosuke has developed his own vocabulary of resonant sculptural forms.

*From the Sea* suggests a sunken warship, with ominous projections, whose hull armor is intact after being violently damaged by an unidentified disastrous force. Numerous loose, long planks or beams, sometimes suggesting one-eyed fish, show the utter destruction of the ship’s top deck. The tough armor, even though it held together, failed to prevent this catastrophe.

KATO Tsubusa (b.1962)  
*Square Bowl*  2008  
Pale blue celadon glazed porcelain

Starting from age 21, Kato has worked exclusively with white porcelain clay. Porcelain is invariably associated with the Chinese porcelain aesthetic: refined, flawlessly balanced form, delicate, serene, elegant, in short, perfect. The work of Kato
Tsubusa, with subtle pale blue celadon glazing, is no less beautiful than traditional porcelain, but in much different ways. Kato’s porcelain sculpture manifests motion, not tranquility; “flawed” adventurous forms, not examples of impeccably executed familiar forms; dramatically sweeping, not refined stillness.

**NAKASHIMA Harumi** (b. 1950)
*Work 0403* 2004
Porcelain

Nakashima Harumi was born in a farm area. His experience with the natural growing processes of plants, trees and vegetables made a deep impression, and became a major influence on his work as a ceramist. He studied with two important sculptural artists: Hayashi Yasuo and Kumakura Junkichi. Nakashima’s career has combined his early fascination with plant growth with the challenging sculptural ideas from his two master teachers, leading Nakashima to make his unique biomorphic sculptures.

The basic component of his sculpture is the sphere covered with dots, both in a variety of sizes. The spheres and dots expand and contract. There are sinuous cylindrical connections among the spheres. Sometimes, the cylinder turns into a waving ribbon or collar form uniting the spheres and delightful interrelated shapes. His work is unfailingly joyous and playful.

**SHIGEMATSU Ayumi** (b.1958)
*Bone Ear ‘96-11* 1996
Ceramic

Shigematsu studied with Suzuki Osamu in Kyoto City University of Arts. She then became the first female ceramic professor at her alma mater. She is among the vanguard of women who have become influential in molding a new generation of ceramists, among whom are to be found an increasingly large number of women. Her work takes on an organic appearance. She has said of her own creative process that rather than making aesthetic choices exclusively with her mind, she has characterized it as “thinking with one’s hands.” She prefers an array of pastel colors, highly unusual for ceramics. This represents a significant rebellion against the norm that clay work should only look like clay. Erotically charged, complex associations and aesthetic daring mark Shigematsu as a challenging artist.
WAKAO Toshisada (b. 1933)  
*Gray Shino Large Rectangular Plate (Moon & Rabbits)*  
2008  
Stoneware

Wakao is one of Japan’s foremost potters. His innovative elaboration of traditional Momoyama gray *Shino* has garnered him many awards and sold-out shows. Wakao was born to a family of potters in Tajimi City, Gifu Prefecture, a center for *Shino* ware both in the Momoyama period and in modern times. Wakao’s contribution was the use of a latex resist process that enabled him to add naturalistic floral motifs with greater crispness of line than was possible with traditional methods. His motifs are lyrical and poetic. The same qualities pertain to his *Oribe* work, which is characterized by lush green glazes and confident brushwork.

KOHARA Yasuhiro (b. 1954)  
*Square Platter*  
2007  
Wood-fired stoneware

Kohara profoundly believes that everything coming from nature is beautiful and treasurable. Colors, textures, edges and shapes which some might think undesirable, become transformed by his hands into a unique, radical beauty. His green-hued platter is a good example of his challenging aesthetic achievement. Ruggedly beautiful, irregular edges encircle contrasting glazed and unglazed surfaces, made by blocking the central portion during the firing process.

Kohara is an unusual combination of an artist essentially following the great Shigaraki tradition, whose personal lifestyle is untraditional. Forget the image of the typical traditional Japanese potter. Kohara loves music, particularly jazz, drives a red European sports car, loves scuba diving, and enjoys dining at exquisite restaurants. It is unsurprising that out of this unusual background, Kohara has given us Shigaraki ceramics with a distinct personal and unconventional twist. His rough, rustic quality Shigaraki works invite the company of delicate flowers.
CHINESE SELECTIONS

**LI Lihong** (b. 1974)
*McDonald's - Blue Dragon in Clouds, Yellow* 2007
Porcelain

With uncanny accuracy and unmistakable clarity, Li Lihong focuses on the mixed blessings of the commercial westernization on thousands of years of Chinese culture. Without sacrificing the beauty of his sculpture, he creates perfect visual metaphors in which the arches of McDonald’s and the bottles of Absolut vodka co-exist comfortably, or not comfortably, depending on your point of view, with traditional colorful Chinese artistic motifs. The talent of this younger artist has been instantly recognized in China.

**LU Bin** (b. 1961)
*Fossil 2004 III* 2004
Stoneware

Lu Bin is the past director of the ceramic studio at the Shenzhen Sculpture Academy and Director of the ceramics studio of Nanjing Art Institute. He has been recognized as one of China’s modern ceramic masters. He has gained international recognition for his work. He takes objects from daily life in China and makes them into fossils from another time while using them to offer commentary on contemporary issues in China.

LU Bin’s work has been widely exhibited and collected in China and internationally.
**WEI Hua** (b. 1963)  
*Couple*  2007  
Stoneware

Wei Hua has been widely exhibited and collected in museums from Norway to China and Korea. This exceptionally versatile artist is equally at home working in the media of bronze, marble, clay and wood, as well as being a superb painter and draftsman. His large-scale work has been commissioned for many public spaces, including parks and important buildings.

Combining sculpture and Chinese ink painting, Wei Hua expresses, with minimal means and a touch of humor, a deep, warm understanding of human affection and female sensuality and fertility.

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**XU Hongbo** (b. 1971)  
*Clone 05 Laboratory 1*  2005  
Jingdezhen porcelain

The dominant interest of contemporary Chinese work most often explores social issues and human relationship. Hongbo is a pioneer in demonstrating this in the medium of ceramic. In this overwhelming pile of cloned babies, he warns us about the further devaluation of human life. Although the babies are identical in appearance and well-nourished, they have lost all individuality. However, it is work to open to many interpretations, including references to China’s massive over population.
YAO Yongkang (b. 1942)
Millennium Baby   2006
Porcelain

Yao Yongkang has the reputation of being technically the finest living Chinese ceramic artist. He is most famous for his sculptural work in porcelain celadon. “Millennium Baby” was made in the year 2000. It reveals the Chinese love of male babies. The accompanying dog symbolizes good fortune, and the large lotus leaf in the background constitutes a blessed wish to have male babies.

CHENG, Caroline Yi (b. 1963)
Prosperity V  2007
Porcelain, fabric

Born in Cambridge, England, educated in the U.S. raised outside of mainland China, moved to Shanghai in 1998, has continued to live there to date, Caroline has a unique understanding and perspective of China.

Each dress is composed of countless number of handmade porcelain butterflies, meticulously sewed on to the dress made of linen. Another layer of meaning of her dress is that the word “Fu” (dress) in Chinese is pronounced the same as the word “Blessings” and “Happiness.” Closer examination of the dresses reveals that each butterfly is subtly different just like each every human being in China is different.
WAN Liya (b. 1963)
*Untitled* 2006
Stoneware

Wan Liya delights in creating experimental art by taking the familiar and looking at it in different ways. Wan’s work has been described as imaginative, highly erotic and daring, and sometimes extremely funny. Wan will be visiting the Dennos Museum Center and Northwestern Michigan College for a residency in September of 2009.

**OTHER RESOURCES**

Pottery Workshop Shanghai: [http://potteryworkshop.org/shanghai/](http://potteryworkshop.org/shanghai/)