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Exhibition Description

Touch Fire: Contemporary Japanese Ceramics by Women Artists is composed of over 90 vibrant and dynamic ceramic sculptures by 21 leading contemporary Japanese women artists working within and transforming a medium traditionally associated with men. The exhibition also includes a selection of screens by Maio Motoko. Although women have played a central role in ceramic production in Japan for centuries, they have worked as studio ceramic artists only since the 1950s. Rather than training in the traditionally male-dominated apprentice system, most attended art school, where they were exposed to and influenced by a wide range of contemporary artistic movements in both Japan and the West.

Touch Fire is curated by Samuel Morse, SCMA’s consulting curator for Asian art. Works in the exhibition are lent by an alumna of Smith College who is one of the pioneer collectors of contemporary Japanese ceramics in the West.

The exhibition is accompanied by an illustrated catalogue with an essay on the history of women ceramists in Japan by Dr. Todate Kazuko, Chief Curator at the Tsukuba Art Museum (Ibaraki, Japan) and catalogue and artist biographies by Wahei Aoyama, International Director and Chief Curator of the Yufuku Gallery, Tokyo. The 112 page, full color catalogue will be sold for $28 through the Museum Shop and online at www.smithmuseumstore.com. Touch Fire is generously supported by the Art Mentor Foundation Lucerne, the Freeman Foundation, and the Brown Foundation, Inc., of Houston. Additional support is provided, in part, by the Tryon Associates and the Maxine Weil Kunstädter, class of 1924, Fund.
Why we made this Teacher Pack

The Smith College Museum of Art welcomes the special exhibition, *Touch Fire: Contemporary Japanese Ceramics by Women Artists*, on view on the Lower Level of the Museum from October 9, 2009 - February 28, 2010. The Education Department of the SCMA has prepared this Teacher Pack and group of related images for K-12 teachers to use in preparation for a class visit to the Museum. Activities are also suggested at the end of the packet to help students process their museum visit and try related hands-on projects. Educators may adapt this information into lesson plans suitable for their classrooms.

Related programming at SCMA

**Fall School Tour (October 14 - December 4, 2009):** The fall school tour theme is “Made by Hand,” inspired by the objects on display in the special exhibition. The tour includes stops in *Touch Fire* and the museum’s permanent collection.

**Public Programs:**

For the most up-to-date information about programs at SCMA: [www.smith.edu/artmuseum/programs](http://www.smith.edu/artmuseum/programs)

Three of the artists and the catalogue essayist of *Touch Fire* will be visiting Smith College over the run of the exhibition and will be part of the following public programs-

- **October 15 @ 5:30pm** *Todate Kazuko and Shigematsu Ayumi* will be giving a talk in Weinstein Auditorium (in Wright Hall, Smith College campus) as part of the exhibition opening.
- **October 17 @ 2:00pm** *Todate Kazuko* will present an overview of the *Touch Fire* exhibition in the form of a gallery talk at SCMA.
- **November 13 @ 6:00pm** *Katsumata Chieko* will present a gallery talk about her work in the *Touch Fire* exhibition at SCMA.
- **February 26 @ 3:00pm** *Miwa Hanako* will speak on a panel as part of the Real Lives of Women Artists Symposium. Location: Smith College Campus Center, Carroll Room.

For further assistance

To schedule a school field trip, please contact (413) 585-2781 or museduc@smith.edu. Contact Julie Zappia, Associate Educator for School and Family Programs, at (413) 585-2773 or jzappia@smith.edu, for ideas about how to integrate this exhibition and/or SCMA's permanent collection into your classroom. This packet was written and compiled in September 2009 by Julie Zappia. School programming at SCMA is funded by the Museum Program Fund and the Friends of the Museum. The bus subsidy program is funded by the Friends of the Museum.
Background Information

The women ceramicists in this exhibition represent a significant shift in the production of ceramics in Japan over the past half century. Until the twentieth century, women artists were literally not allowed to “touch the fire.” This exhibition’s title thus alludes to the historical exclusion of women from kiln sheds. While both women and men were involved for centuries in traditional Japanese earthenware production for utilitarian purposes, women were severely limited in what they were allowed to do in the production process. They were asked to remain in the background, excluded from apprenticeships, and forbidden to go into the kilns. Ceramics production in Japan remained a male-dominated, exclusive tradition passed on from generation to generation. It wasn’t until a few pioneering women ceramicists in the early twentieth century, such as Ono Hakuko, that women’s ceramic work started to be valued equally with men’s.

“These artists, both literally and figuratively, have broken the mold of a centuries-old, male-dominated tradition of ceramic art in Japan and did so aided by new access to higher education after World War II. Departing from a long tradition of tea wares, these women make a range of objects, from the elemental stoneware forms of Futamura Yoshimi to the humorous, tripod-legged Robot Girls [at left] of Takano Miho.”*

No longer confined by the long-established forms of Japanese tea wares, these artists create sculptural works that are sometimes functional and sometimes not. Their inspiration ranges from floral and vegetal forms found in nature to cultural influences such as anime and environmental concerns. “...The primary market for ceramics in Japan is for tea wares, an area that remains dominated by men, but which continues to be conservative both in terms of form and style. Excluded from that domain, women artists have turned to making work that is more sculptural and more conceptual, yet which is not completely divorced from the utilitarian roots and technical sophistication that lie at the heart of the Japanese ceramic tradition.”**

While the exhibition is comprised of the work of 21 artists who span three generations (see the Exhibition Timeline, page 6), the bulk of the works of art on display was completed in the past decade. Most of the artists are represented by more than one work in the exhibition, so visitors will have a better sense of each artist’s technique. Several folding screens are incorporated into the layout of the exhibition to highlight the ceramic objects. The screens, also part of the anonymous lender’s collection, are by another prominent contemporary Japanese woman artist, Maio Motoko. Motoko’s work, such as Falling Blossoms (pictured here), also confronts a traditional Japanese art form by combining abstract shapes with layers of highly textured surfaces.

Exhibition Timeline (organized by artists’ birth years; exhibition includes additional works not pictured here)

ONOHAKUKO 1915-1996
MISHIMAKIMIYO 1932
TSUBOIASUKA 1932
KOIKESHOKO 1943
MATSUDAYURIKO 1943
OGAWAMACHIKO 1945
OGAWAMACHIKO 1946

ONOHAKUKO 1948
MISHIMAKIMIYO 1950
TSUBOIASUKA 1956
KOIKESHOKO 1957
MATSUDAYURIKO 1957
OGAWAMACHIKO 1957

KATSUMATACHIEKO 1948
SHIBATAMARIKO 1950
SHIBATAMARIKO 1956
KIYOSUZUYO 1957
KIYOSUZUYO 1957

KATSUMATACHIEKO 1958
SHIBATAMARIKO 1959
SHIBATAMARIKO 1969
KIYOSUZUYO 1971
KIYOSUZUYO 1972

SHIGEMATSUYAMU 1958
SAKURAIYASUKO 1959
SHIGEMATSUYAMU 1969
TOMITAMIKIKO 1971
TOMITAMIKIKO 1972

SHIGEMATSUYAMU 1958
SAKURAIYASUKO 1959
SHIGEMATSUYAMU 1969
TOMITAMIKIKO 1971
TOMITAMIKIKO 1972

MIWAHANAKO 1978
UEBAKASUMI 1978

TASHIMAESUKO 1969
TAKANOMIHO 1971
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TAKANOMIHO 1978
Selected artists

ONO HAKUKO (1915-1996)

Because her elegant works were embraced by the mainstream at a time when female ceramicists were rare, she helped to pave the way for future women artists. The daughter of a porcelain potter, Ono began practicing ceramics in the 1960s. Her particular area of expertise was the application of gold leaf patterns underneath a layer of glaze, as seen in the vase at left. She formed the main body of the piece on the potter's wheel. The circular motifs were cut from platinum and gold leaf, attached to Japanese paper, and applied to the lacquered surface.

KISHI EIKO (b. 1948)

Kishi lives and works in Kyoto, a city that is both at the edge of the avant-garde and steeped in tradition. Her working process is similarly complex and her works are at the forefront of ceramics in Kyoto today. She creates vessels that are dotted with thousands of colorful bits of fired clay that are kneaded directly into the base clay.

In the exhibition at SCMA, a video of Kishi Eiko working plays alongside a touchable display of her multi-step working process.

KATSUMATA CHIEKO (b. 1950)

Like Kishi Eiko, Katsumata Chieko has made her kiln in Kyoto. She is one of the first female ceramicists to build a reputation outside of Japan. She lived in Paris and her time there studying industrial design and ceramics heavily influenced her work. The forms of her work are largely floral or vegetal, with mottled surfaces that almost appear to be dusted with layers of pollen. Many of her forms marry the functional with the decorative, such as this vase for flowers that imitates the flower itself. Her process includes hand-pinching, bisque-firing, and applying layers of clay slip. A deep, Technicolor palette is featured in many of her works.

Katsumata Chieko will visit Smith College in November, 2009 (see page 3).
KITAMURA JUNKO (b. 1956)

A third artist living and working in Kyoto, Kitamura Junko originally planned to work in textiles, dyeing kimono. Her intricately patterned work seems on first sight to be stamped, but each line is hand-impressed with a bamboo stick. The wave motif is common in her work, created with white slip set into the indentations she created with her stick tool. The white marks form geometric patterns that ebb and flow over a gray-black background.

SHIGEMATSU AYUMI (b. 1958)

While many works in the exhibition have clearly or vaguely functional forms, Shigematsu Ayumi’s works call upon abstract human and floral forms. Even her process develops organically; her works are often titled after their completion as she does not typically begin a work with a specific end point in mind. Ferengi, pictured at left, for example, was named for the Star Trek creature’s ear.

Her process begins with clay coiling and hand-pinching and continues not with traditional glazes, but with original mixtures of slip (mostly pastel tones). Her highly polished surfaces are achieved with a late stage stone polishing and low-temperature firing, resulting in softly colored smooth textures.

Shigematsu Ayumi will visit Smith College in October, 2009 (see page 3).

MIWA HANAKO (undisclosed birthdate)

Part of a well-known family of ceramicists, Miwa Hanako is the first woman in thirteen generations of makers of white-glazed tea wares (known as Hagi ware). Her father was the first to challenge the Hagi tradition, by creating more abstract, non-functional works. Miwa’s artistic beginnings were in sculpture. Her primary inspiration is the lotus flower and her work includes large lotus installations featuring separate elements such as the flower pictured at right. Her lotus pads and flowers are all initially formed on the potter’s wheel, glazed, and each fired in a different kiln.

Miwa Hanako will visit Smith College in February, 2010 (see page 3).
Glossary

BISQUE: first kiln firing; clay does not vitrify (it remains porous and cannot hold water)

CLAY: a natural product made of decomposed rock; an aluminum silicate mineral resulting from natural decomposition of feldspar and granite

FIRING: heating a clay object in a kiln to a specific temperature

GLAZE: a coating of powdered ceramic materials, usually prepared and applied in water suspension; the coating melts smooth and bonds to clay surfaces during glaze firing

KILN: the furnace in which ceramics are fired

SLIP: clay mixed with water (to a mayonnaise-like consistency); used in casting and decoration

VITREOUS: a ceramic object that has been fired to the point where it can hold water

VITRIFY: fired clay has fused together to where the body is impervious to water
Before Your Visit: Inquiry-based Discussion
Get students ready to talk about art!

Lesson Goal/Concept: Introduce your trip to the Museum and give students an opportunity to practice looking closely at a work of art.

Overall Objective: Students will participate in a teacher-led inquiry-based discussion using images so that they can explore what they will gain from a visit to the Museum.

Massachusetts Curriculum Framework Connections: ELA General Standard 1 (June 2001 Framework, pages 13-14), Discussion: Students will use agreed upon rules for formal and informal discussions in small and large groups. ELA General Standard 2 (June 2001 Framework, pages 15-16), Questioning, Listening, and Contributing: Students will pose questions, listen to the ideas of others, and contribute their own information or ideas in group discussions or interviews in order to acquire new knowledge.

Supplies needed:
~three images from Touch Fire: Contemporary Japanese Ceramics by Women Artists
~a way to project or reproduce those images so that all students can look at them as a class

Directions:

1. Begin the discussion without the images, and ask your students some of the following questions:

~Have you ever been to a museum before? Tell me about your visit.
~What kinds of things do you expect to see at the Museum?
~What kinds of words do you think you might hear used when talking about art?
~What do you want to learn from our visit?
~As a class, what do you think some of our goals for going to the Museum should be?
~What can we do to make sure we meet these goals?
~Are there any questions you might want to ask our guides about the Museum?

2. Introduce one of the images by projecting or reproducing it large enough for all students to see at one time. You don’t necessarily need to know any detailed background information about the artwork before you show it to your students--you can try some of the following questions and let students know that you’ll just be exploring ideas together.

~What seems to be going on in this artwork? What do you see that makes you say that?
~Does this piece remind you of anything in your life? How might it relate to your life?
~What do you want to know about this artwork? How could we find out more information?
~What can we guess about the artist from looking at this artwork? Why do you think the artist chose to create an artwork like this?
Before Your Visit: Discussion and Visual Analysis

Traditional vs. Contemporary Ceramics

Lesson Goal/Concept: To compare traditional and contemporary Japanese ceramics.

Overall Objective: Students will compare and contrast two pieces of Japanese ceramics; a tea ware from the Edo Period (1615-1868) and a conceptual piece from 2006-2007.

Massachusetts Curriculum Framework Connections: ELA General Standard 2, Questioning, Listening, and Contributing: Students will pose questions, listen to the ideas of others, and contribute their own information or ideas in group discussions or interviews in order to acquire new knowledge. Arts General Standard 6, Purposes and Meanings in the Arts: Students will describe the purposes for which works of dance, music, theatre, visual arts, and architecture were and are created, and, when appropriate, interpret their meanings.

Supplies needed:
~two images, one of a traditional Japanese tea ware and one of a contemporary piece (the two pictured below can be downloaded from our Teacher Center website)
~a way to project or reproduce those images so that all students can look at them as a class

Directions:
1. Project the two images below, and have students describe their similarities and differences. Create a class chart, or have students take notes as individuals.

2. The discussion can be followed by assigning a comparison/contrast essay or other written response.

Artist Unknown
Water Jar (Seto Nizusashi)
Edo Period (1615-1868)
Stoneware, brown iron glaze and black lacquer lid
SC 2008:17-6a,b

Sample points:
~Traditional, functional object used during the Tea Ceremony to carry water to the hearth
~Wide mouth was necessary to ladle water out of the jar into a metal kettle

Miwa Hanako
Love Lotus (detail)
2006-2007
Stoneware, Hagi glaze, platinum luster
Photograph by Keitaro Yoshioka, Boston

Sample points:
~One part of a larger installation of eleven elements made to resemble a lotus pond
~Artist comes from a well-known legacy of male ceramicists who made tea wares, but her work is more sculptural and conceptual
After Your Visit: Activity

Natural inspiration, natural forms

Lesson Goal/Concept: To work with self-hardening clay.

Overall Objective: Students will analyze the purpose and symbolism of Miwa Hanako's Love Lotus and use self-hardening clay to create a work of art.

Massachusetts Curriculum Framework Connections: Visual Arts General Standard 1, Methods, Materials and Techniques: Students will demonstrate knowledge of the methods, materials and techniques unique to the visual arts. Arts General Standard 6, Purposes and Meanings in the Arts: Students will describe the purposes for which works of dance, music, theatre, visual arts, and architecture were and are created, and, when appropriate, interpret their meanings.

Supplies Needed:
› self-hardening clay, such as Prang’s Air Hardening Modeling Clay
› small cups of water
› paper towels
› clay tools or makeshift clay tools for incising

Directions:

1. If your students have been to the Museum for a tour, ask them to recall Miwa Hanako's Love Lotus, the large-scale installation which includes eleven sculptural elements shaped like lotus blossoms and lotus pads. The flowers and pads sit on top of a mirrored surface, meant to recall water, and have another accordion-shaped mirror set up behind them, reflecting the “lotus pond.” The lotus is one of Miwa’s frequent sources of inspiration, as it is commonly found near her home and is a symbol of purity in many cultures.

2. Ask your students to think about inspiration and symbolism in nature. What do you think of when you think of a rose (love, perhaps)? An oak tree (maybe strength)?

3. Ask your students to consider an object in nature that has symbolic value for them; maybe it’s a dark cloud symbolizing trouble, or a fallen leaf symbolizing the cycles of nature. Each student should choose an object to create using the self-hardening clay.

4. Students can form objects independently and set them out to dry (for at least 24 hours). The dried pieces can be decorated with various paints or other materials.

5. You might also consider doing a larger scale project that would involve the whole class, such as creating a lotus pond where each student contributes one element.
Image Captions

Cover, L-R:


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For Further Reference

BOOKS:

Note- All of these books are available for viewing in the Smith College Hillyer Art Library. Most of these books feature the work of male ceramicists. The books with an asterisk * feature the work of at least two of the women ceramicists in the Touch Fire exhibition.


CURRICULUM GUIDES:

Asia Society's educational materials for teachers (lesson plans, background essays, maps, images & other resources)--
www.askasia.org/teachers

Freer and Sackler Galleries' (Smithsonian) online guide to Japanese art--
www.asia.si.edu/education/teacherResources/onlineGuides.htm

Peabody Essex Museum's online guide to Japanese art--
www.pem.org/learn/for_teachers/ed_asia.php#japan
Other Resources Available to Teachers

@ the Art Museum

Cunningham Center for Prints, Drawings, and Photographs
This part of SCMA houses over 16,000 works on paper including prints, drawings, photographs, watercolors, and illustrated books. The center is open for class and individual visits by appointment only Tuesdays-Fridays. To schedule a visit or to obtain more information, call (413) 585-2764 or email ccenter@smith.edu.

SCMA Records Room
Explore curatorial files and access slides and disc images on the fascinating spectrum of works within the Smith College Museum of Art collections. Visits by appointment only during business hours. Contact the General Administrative Offices to inquire, (413) 585-2761.

Museum Website
Use our website to get the scoop on upcoming exhibitions, as well as accurate event and contact information. We have launched a new section for educators which includes the ability to become a free registered user in order to download our teacher packs! www.smith.edu/artmuseum/education (follow links for K-12 educators).

Museums 10
To learn about other museums and cultural resources around the Five Colleges area, please visit the Museums10 website- www.museums10.org

Database
Search this developing database by title, artist, or artist's culture to dive into the art collections of the Five College Museums and Historic Deerfield- www.museums.fivecolleges.edu

Friends of SCMA
Consider membership at the Educator or Individual level to receive discounts to teacher workshops and invitations to special programs. You can purchase a membership online at www.smith.edu/artmuseum (click on “Join”), or call (413) 585-2777.

@ the Art Library (adjacent to the Art Museum)

Hillyer Art Library
Research any art topic or keep up with the latest exhibition news through Hillyer's extensive collection of books and periodical holdings. Regular hours during the semester: Monday – Thursday, 9:00 A.M. – 11:00 P.M., Friday 9:00 A.M. – 9:00 P.M. Saturday 10:00 A.M. – 9:00 P.M., Sunday 12:00 P.M. – 12:00 A.M. (413) 585-2940 www.smith.edu/libraries/libs/hillyer