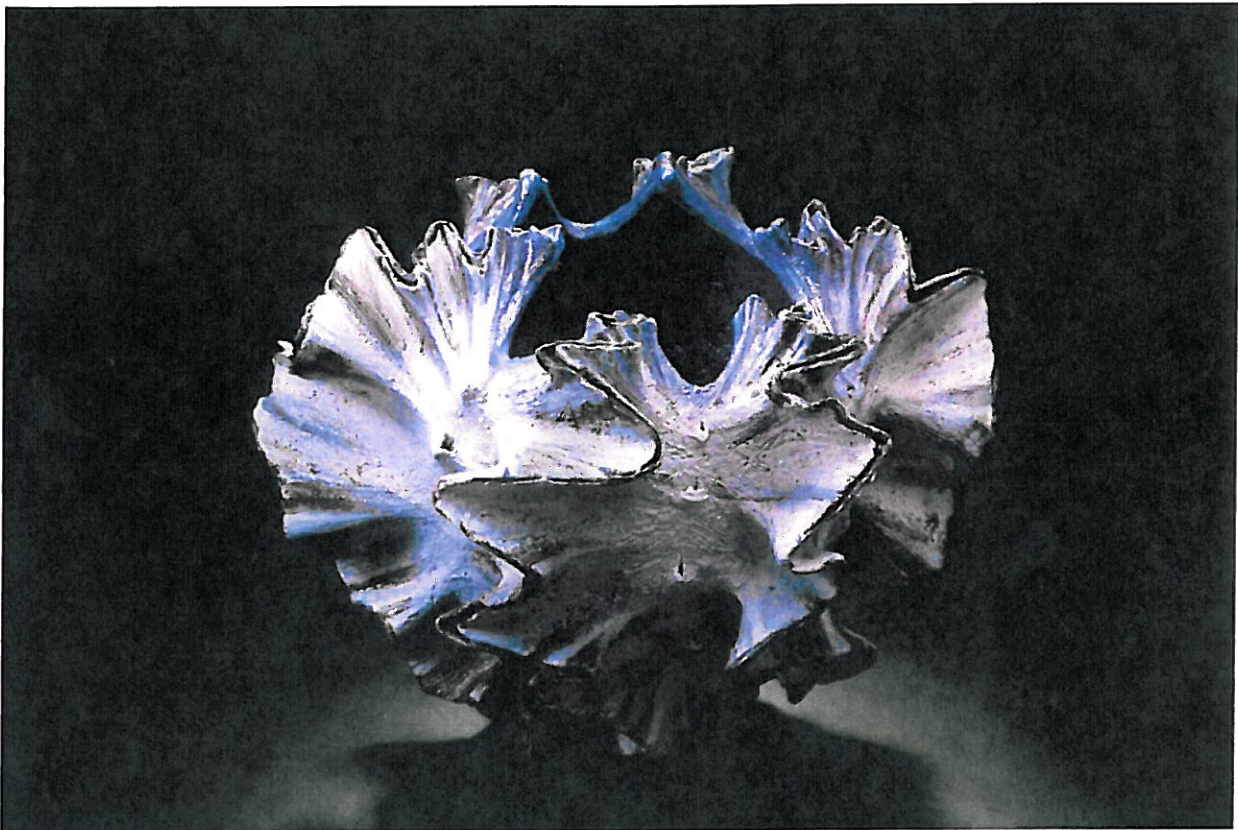


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Smashing the Clay Ceiling: The Quiet Revolution of Japanese Women Ceramists Explored in New Crocker Exhibit



Shoko Koike, Shell Vessel, 1997. Stoneware, 17 1/2 x 22 13/16 x 18 5/16 in. Courtesy of International Arts and Artists. Private Collection.

SACRAMENTO, CA. On view at the [Crocker Art Museum](#) August 8 – October 18, 2009, Soaring Voices celebrates the revolution in clay by the women who broke through the once male-only field of Japanese ceramics. With more than 80 signature works, including vessels, sculpture and a large-scale installation piece, this exhibition surveys the accomplishments of 25 leading female figures in contemporary Japanese ceramics from post-World War II to present day.

The Crocker is the first stop for Soaring Voices on its U.S. tour. The exhibition was organized by

and first exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Ceramic Art at the Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park in Japan.

Soaring Voices showcases work by the first three generations of Japanese women ceramists. The featured artists include self-taught pioneers, such as Takako Araki and Kyo Tsuji, who had no artistic role models, traditions to draw upon or approval from peers, family and society at large. Araki was even disowned by her family for her "irresponsibility." The next wave of artists, whose work is also on view, became the first to enroll in university fine art programs and are now among Japan's most innovative instructors and practitioners, garnering national and international recognition.

"The women featured in this exhibition catalyzed contemporary Japanese clay," said Diana L. Daniels, Associate Curator. "This exhibition is the most extensive effort to date to recognize their innovative and provocative production."

Until women seized new opportunities to be artists during the 1950s, clay was unacceptable for women. For centuries, men threw on the potter's wheel while women were strictly relegated to supporting their efforts. The gender divide could only be bridged during the 1950s when the concept of the studio potter as a creative individual working alone, apart from tradition, was introduced. In this period of societal transformation, not only did the look of Japanese ceramics radically change, but also its makers. And in Japan, clay became a medium of expression accorded the regard always given to painting.