constructing in CLAY
Japanese ceramics enjoy a long and distinguished history, and the Japanese aesthetic of elegant simplicity, along with their approach to materials, has influenced ceramic artists around the world for centuries.

Women in Japan have been involved in the production of ceramics for thousands of years, but with few exceptions, their names have remained unknown. *Soaring Voices* demonstrates the recent shift in Japanese society toward individual women.
artists becoming recognized in an artistic realm traditionally dominated by men.

The 87 works by 25 women artists in this special exhibition showcase unique contemporary interpretations of traditional art forms through a range of motifs inspired by the natural world: plants, shells, mountains, rivers, and the play of light and shadow. On these ceramic vessels, other sources of inspiration pay tribute to Japan, such as the dance movements in the Noh Theater, and kimono patterns of the Edo Period.

Soaring Voices focuses on the work of three 20th-century generations of Japanese women ceramists. Some of the artists are self-taught pioneers of this women's art movement, including Takako Araki and Kyo Tsujii, who had an artistic role models, traditions to draw upon, or approval from peers, family and society at large. It is reported that Araki was even disowned by her family for her "irreponsibility"; such was the response to women as independent artists.

Until women pursued educational and training opportunities to become artists during the mid-20th century, clay art was a previously unavailable field 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." (Source: ArtKnowledgeNews.com.)

The next generations of artists, also on exhibit, were among 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. Women now comprise the vast majority of enrollment in Japanese art schools, and are now receiving a good number of awards in national ceramic competitions.

While Japan is highly regarded for its rich history and traditions in the visual arts, including ceramics, the work by women artists in this exhibition are largely nontraditional. While many objects are based on nature, a fundamental motif in Japanese art, these contemporary ceramic works are decidedly more innovative and experimental in form and concept.

“The women featured in this exhibition catalyzed contemporary Japanese clay,” said Diana L. Daniels, Associate Curator, at the Crocker Art Museum, an earlier venue for this exhibition. Soaring Voices “is the most extensive effort to date to recognize their innovative and provocative production.”

Soaring Voices was developed by The Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park, Shiga Prefecture, and hus-10 Inc., Tokyo, Japan. The exhibition tour was organized by International Arts & Artists, Washington, D.C. The exhibition was generously supported in part by the E. Rhodes & Leona B. Carpenter Foundation and the S&R Foundation.

International Arts & Artists is a nonprofit arts service organization dedicated to increasing cross-cultural understanding and exposure to the arts internationally, through exhibitions, programs and services to artists, arts institutions and the public.

A fully illustrated catalogue accompanies the tour, with essays by curator Hiroko Murua and Louise Allison Cort, Curator for Ceramics, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution. It is published by Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park.

The exhibition traveled to the New Otani Art Museum, Tokyo, and Shizuoka Art Gallery, Shizuoka, Japan in 2008, and the Musée National de Céramique in Sèvres, France in 2009, before traveling to the United States, where the exhibition will remain on tour through 2012.

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