

arts & activities[®]

THE NATION'S LEADING ART EDUCATION MAGAZINE

\$4/FEB. 11



constructing
in **CLAY**

SOARING VOICES:

Recent Ceramics by Women from Japan

by Mark M. Johnson

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



Etsuko Tashima. *Cornucopia 03-III*, 2003. Stoneware and glass. Photo ©Taku Saiki.



▲ Shoko Koike. *Shell Vessel*, 1997. Stoneware. Photo ©Takashi Hatakeyama.

◀ Kyoko Tokumaru. *Hatsuga-Germination*, 2007. Porcelain. Photo ©Hideya Amemiya.

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 a traditional art form 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 Tsuji, who had no 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 "irrespon-

ITINERARY

The Crow Collection of Asian Art
Dallas, Texas
Through April 17, 2011

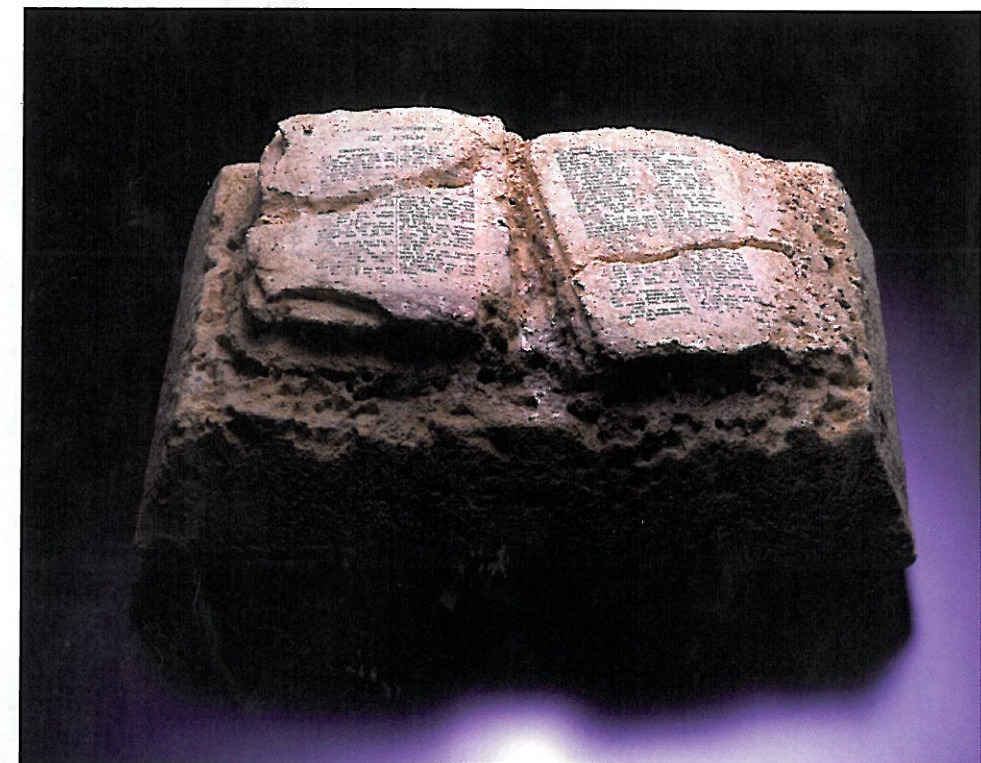
Morikami Museum and Japanese Gardens
Delray Beach, Fla.
June 21–Oct. 2, 2011

The Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art
University of Florida, Gainesville
Oct. 15–Dec. 31, 2011

Western Gallery at Western
W. Washington University, Bellingham
March 23–May 20, 2012

City Arts Center, Oklahoma City
June 12–Aug. 25, 2012

Maui Arts and Cultural Center
Kahului, Hawaii
Oct. 20–Dec. 31, 2012



▲ Takako Araki. *Bible of the White Sand*, 1989. Chamotte and sand. Photo ©Takashi Hatakeyama.

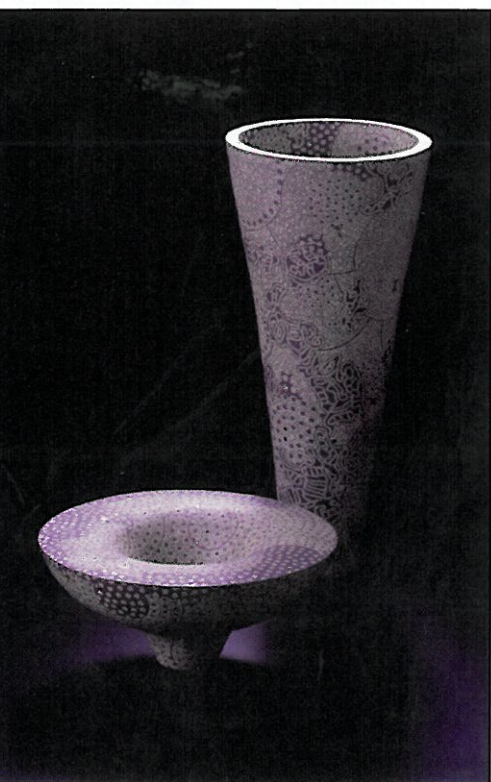
◀ Ikuko Ando. *Factory Chimney*, 1996. Stoneware. Photo ©Hideya Amemiya.

sibility"; 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





Junko Kitamura. *Vessel*, 2006. Stoneware. 
Photo ©Takashi Hatakeyama.

Ayumi Shigematsu. *Circuit Tree*, 2006. 
Stoneware. Photo ©Hideya Amemiya.



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 Mirua 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. ■

Mark M. Johnson is Director of the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, Montgomery, Ala., and serves on the Arts & Activities Editorial Advisory Board.