

±8 – A Group Exhibition of Contemporary Ceramics**Dates: July 12 – September 8, 2019****Location: SHOP Taka Ishii Gallery, Hong Kong****Opening Reception: July 12, 6-8pm**

SHOP Taka Ishii Gallery is pleased to announce “±8”, an exhibition featuring eight Japanese and American artists who work with ceramics. Curated by Kentaro Kawabata, a Japanese ceramist of the emerging generation, this group exhibition introduces up to date development of ceramic as sculptural medium from an artist’s perspective, a position that is closest to the current of representation.

Although ±8 may appear like a simple symbol, it can in fact be interpreted in various ways. For example, when slightly shifted, ± can look like the Kanji character “±” which stands for “earth” or “soil.” When artists each engage in producing work, I believe that those who create through means of addition is able to convey their distinct characteristic the moment they subtract something or another, and conversely, the distinct characteristic of those who create through a process of subtraction, indeed comes to manifest when incorporating additional elements. I decided to include this in the title as I recognized the importance and necessity of this internal contemplation surrounding ±. The ‘8’ not only refers to the number of artists who are featured in the exhibition, but also takes into account the fact of it being considered a lucky number in Hong Kong. Furthermore, ‘8’ comprises of ‘0’ and ‘0’, and when placed on its side represents infinity. Instead of ±0 that is familiar to many, I felt that ±8, conceived by simply adding another ‘0’, was interesting to have as the title.

By Kentaro Kawabata

Often inspired by nature’s self-generation and renewal, the forms of **Kentaro Kawabata’s** works, such as the meandering rims created through the busy workings of the thumb and index finger, encompass a sense of vitality –instilling the pieces with a sense of organic vitality. Kawabata likes to experiment and observe the outcome of combining various materials with glaze after firing the ceramics. Blending with glass to create a watercolor-like clarity, and applying silver then onsen (Japanese hot spring) to make volcanic-like objects; Kawabata’s ceramics give the impression of breathing agglomerated landscapes.

As an artist trained with knowledge and understanding of western contemporary art, **Kazuhiro Kawai’s** encounter with ceramics upon his return to Japan has largely inspired his openness of creativity. Kawai’s works with their dynamic colors and forms convey the irregularity, ugliness, grotesqueness and vulnerability, which clay embodies. The repeated collages of clay attached to the vessel reflect a dialog between the clay and the artist, also presenting a layered representation of the artist’s inner self and state of mind.

For over 30 years, **Tony Marsh** has devoted his artistic practice to the exploration of ceramic vessels. In Marsh’s early work, the vessel was an arena within which he explored themes of fertility, union, death and creation by arranging evocative symbolic abstract forms within the interiors of carefully designed prototypical vessel forms. In a subsequent body of work that evolved over 15 years, Marsh created an endless array of thin-walled, hollow, abstract shapes and perforated them as densely as possible in an effort to replace the mass with light and dematerialize form, rendering the work as ethereal. The recent body of work “Crucible” are ceramic cylinders in which resides real and imagined allusions to physical sciences, earth formation, geographic phenomenon, force, pyroclastic work, time and landscape. They are transformed from the artist’s curiosity and stimulated innovation which was originated from the observation of phenomenon during the process.

Keita Matsunaga's works, both functional ware and sculpture, derive from the same process. First, he sketches the geometric form using CAD software. The clay, strongly pressed by the artist against the surface of the plaster mold, extends, curves and forms hemisphere shape shells. The rawness and roughness of clay confront the structured architectural form –the contrast serving to reflect Matsunaga's originality. His representative series, "Monuke" (meaning "empty shell from molting" in Japanese) comprise of two hemispheres combined, leaving the inside empty. This emptiness conveys lonesomeness and hollowness, while also representing the spiritual state of deliverance.

Akio Niisato's representative work "Luminescent" consists of vessels created by making perforations in translucent white porcelain, and filling each of the holes with clear glaze before firing. The works which give the impression of emitting light in themselves are conceived through independently developing the Chinese technique of 'hotarude,' which enable translucent patterns to emerge when it carries the light, with their luminescent appearance likened to a firefly. In addition to this technique that attempts to explore ways of vessels that transcend contexts of the everyday, in recent years he has engaged in producing works that while rooted in tradition, give form to the natural traces that are born out of the dialogue between the materials and his own body.

William J. O'Brien explores the potential of a diverse range of media including paper, clay, textiles, ceramics, steel, found objects and everyday materials. While O'Brien is best known for his ceramic sculptures, he begins his work by drawing. The colorful geometric patterns in his drawings are made through a process similar to Surrealist automatic writing techniques and evoke various U.S. visual cultures such as those related to psychedelia, op art, abstract expressionist painting, and architecture. The playful ceramic works, which are adorned with bright glazes, refer to a broad range of cultural elements such as ethnography, traditional crafts, poetry, pop and psychedelic cultures, and gay minimalism.

Sterling Ruby is an artist who appropriates diverse aesthetic strategies in his practice, from saturated, glossy, poured polyurethane sculptures, to drawings, collages, richly glazed ceramics, graffiti inspired spray paint paintings, and video. His work is a balancing act, maintaining a constant tension between a multitude of elements. Dealing with issues related to the violence and pressures within society and art history, Ruby's creations also reflect his personal history. In all of his work, he vacillates between the fluid and static, the minimalist and expressionistic, the pristine and the defaced.

Inspired by photos of ancient ruins in South America, **Kouzo Takeuchi** started creating ceramic sculptures formed of square tubes to express the unique ambience of decayed structures. The unexpected breaking of one work eventually led to the birth of the artist's renowned "Modern Remains" Series in 2006, in which he engaged in breaking other finished tubes with a hammer to create dynamic beauty and raise new aesthetic values in ceramics. Through methods such as breaking and removing sections of materials before the firing process, Takeuchi persists in searching for the perfect balance between original forms and their deterioration in his experimental geometric works.



Kentaro Kawabata

"Batista", 2019

Porcelain, glass

41 x 47 x 63 cm

© Kentaro Kawabata



Kazuhito Kawai
"Suidobata", 2019
Ceramic
23 x 24 x 23 cm
© Kazuhito Kawai



Tony Marsh
"Crucible" Series #4, 2018
Multiple fired clay and glaze
40.7 x 30.5 x 30.5 cm
© Tony Marsh



Keita Matsunaga
"Monuke", 2019
Clay
24 x 32 x 31 cm
© Keita Matsunaga



Akio Niisato
"Luminescent..." 2019
Ceramic
Blue: 8.5 x 11 x 11 cm
Yellow: 7.5 x 10 x 10 cm
A set of two
© Akio Niisato



William J. O'Brien
"Untitled", 2013
Ceramic
130.8 x 55.9 x 53.3 cm
© William J. O'Brien



Sterling Ruby
"HEART (6880)", 2018
Ceramic
53.3 x 39 x 5.1 cm
© Sterling Ruby



Kouzo Takeuchi
"Modern Remains Thunderbolt", 2017
Porcelain, (metal, glue)
105 x 59.4 x 27.5 cm
© Kouzo Takeuchi

Artist Biographies

Kentaro Kawabata was born 1976 in Saitama and currently lives and works in Gifu. After graduating from the Tajimi City Pottery Design and Technical Center in 2000, Kawabata began winning awards for his work, including the Kamoda Shoji Award at the Mashiko Pottery Exhibition (2004) and the Paramita Museum Ceramic Award (2007). His work has been the subject of numerous solo and group exhibitions at highly-reputed ceramic institutions, including "The Power of Decoration: A Viewpoint on Contemporary Kogei (Studio Crafts)" at the National Museum of Modern Art's Crafts Gallery (2009), "Phenomenon of Contemporary Ceramic" at the Ibaraki Ceramic Art Museum (2014), and exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Ceramic Art, Gifu (2004, 2010).

Kazuhiro Kawai was born 1984 in Ibaraki. He graduated from the Fine Art Department at Chelsea College of Arts, University Arts London in 2007 and completed his studies at Kasama College of Ceramic Art, Ibaraki in 2018. He currently lives and works in Kasama, Ibaraki. Kawai held his solo exhibition at House in Kasama, Ibaraki in 2017.

Tony Marsh was born in New York City in 1954 and lives and works in Long Beach, California. He spent 3 years in Mashiko, Japan at the workshop of Tatsuzo Shimaoka from 1978 to 1981. He teaches in the Ceramic Arts Program at California State University Long Beach in Southern California, where he served as the Program Chair for over 20 years. He is currently the first Director of the Center for Contemporary Ceramics at CSULB. Marsh has exhibited extensively throughout the United States, Asia and Europe. His works are housed in the Collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Mad Museum of Art, New York, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, The Everson Museum, Syracuse, the Oakland Museum of Art, Gardiner Museum of Art, Toronto, Museum of Fine Arts Houston.

Keita Matsunaga was born 1986 in Tajimi, Gifu. After graduating from the Architecture course at Meijou University in 2010, he began his studies at Tajimi City Pottery Design and Technical Center and later continued his studies at Kanazawa Utastuyama Kogei Kobo. Matsunaga currently lives and works in Tajimi and Kani, Gifu. Matsunaga has participated in group exhibitions at Taina Art Museum (2019) and the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa (2017). Matsunaga's work is included in public collection of the Museum of Ceramic Art, Hyogo.

Akio Niisato was born in 1977 in Chiba. After withdrawing from his studies at the Philosophy Department, School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Waseda University, he went on to study at the Tajimi City Ceramic and Design Center where he received his Diploma in 2001. His selected awards include the Award for New Artist, Premio Faenza 54th Edition (2005, Italy); Grand Prize, Paramita Museum Ceramic Competition (2008); Jury's Special Award, International Ceramics Festival MINO; Incentive Award, Kikuchi Biennale (Tokyo, 2009); and Award for New Artist, MOA Mokichi Okada Award (Tokyo, 2014). He continues to receive high acclaim for his works, with participation in numerous exhibitions both in Japan and overseas including the United States, Italy and Romania.

Born 1975 in Ohio, **William J. O'Brien** is an artist who currently lives and works in Chicago. He received his MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (2005). His major solo exhibitions include Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (2014), The Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City (2012) and the Renaissance Society at The University of Chicago (2011). O'Brien has received awards from the Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation (2011), and Artadia: The Fund for Art & Dialogue (2007). His work is included in the permanent collections of the Cleveland Clinic; Miami Art Museum; and The Art Institute of Chicago.

Born in 1972, **Sterling Ruby** lives and works in Los Angeles. Ruby's solo exhibitions include Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2008), FRAC Champagne-Ardenne, Reims (2012), travelling to Centre D'Art Contemporain, Geneva (2012) and to Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Rome (2013), Winterpalais, Belvedere Museum, Vienna (2016), De Moines Art Center, Des Moines (2018) and Nasher Sculpture Center (2019). His works are included in the collections of Museum of Modern Art, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Tate Modern, London; Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Moderna Museet, Stockholm among others.

Kouzo Takeuchi was born 1977 in Hyogo Prefecture. After graduating from Osaka University of Arts in 2001, he continued his studies at Tajimi City Pottery Design and Technical Center, Gifu. Takeuchi has participated in numerous solo and group exhibitions at highly-reputed institutions, including The 13th Paramita Ceramic Grand Prize Exhibition (Paramita Museum, Mie, 2018); Syuen Museum, Taipei (2016); "La Ceramique Japonaise" (Espace Culturel Bertin Poiree, Paris and Galerie IAC Berlin, Konigswinter in 2014 and 2013); "Contact 4: Japan - Korea Ceramic Exhibition" (The Museum of Modern Art, Shiga, 2005). His works can be found in the public collections of the Museum of Fine Art, Boston; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Sernuchi Museum, Paris; The Museum of Ceramic Art, Hyogo; INAX Tile Museum, Aichi; and Louis Vuitton, Japan.

SHOP Taka Ishii Gallery, opened by Taka Ishii Gallery in Tokyo is a new concept-based retail shop in Starstreet Precinct, Wan Chai, Hong Kong. The SHOP aims to create an experimental retail space that transcends the boundary between "gallery" and "shop" by inviting different artists and designers to freely explore the spatial design and exhibit selected works and other products in approximately three-month cycles.

Taka Ishii Gallery opened in 1994 and for approximately a quarter century since, it has represented Japan's most important photographers including Nobuyoshi Araki, Daido Moriyama, and Naoya Hatakeyama, painters, conceptual artists, and up-and-coming artists. The gallery was also one of the first in Japan to look abroad and regularly participate in foreign art fairs such as Art Basel and the Frieze Art Fair, playing an important role in establishing the reputations of its artists abroad. At the same time, it has organized exhibitions of works by highly acclaimed foreign artists such as Thomas Demand,

Dan Graham, Sterling Ruby, Cerith Wyn Evans and young foreign artists on the rise, proactively introducing trends in Euro-American contemporary to Japan. In February 2011, Taka Ishii Gallery Photography/Film, specializing in photographic works, opened. Gallery founder Takayuki Ishii also established the Fine Art Photography Association in May 2014 to help the further development of the Japanese photography scene, which has a unique context.

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Gallery hours: 11:00 - 19:00 / Closed on Monday