



KAZUHITO KAWAI

K A Z U H I T O K A W A I

Born 1984, Ibaraki, Japan
Lives and works in Ibaraki

Education

- 2018 Kasama College of Ceramic Art
2007 BA, University of the Arts London, Chelsea College of Arts

Solo Exhibitions

- 2021 *Like A Virgin*, Steve Turner, Los Angeles
2019 *The Kitsch*, t.gallery, Tokyo
Or Impressionism, rusu, Meguro, Tokyo
2018 *Naughty Loneliness*, SOZO Salon, Tokyo
2017 *Freaks*, House in Kasama, Ibaraki

Group Exhibitions

- 2020 *H—C≡N*, Tokyo International Gallery
Art Basel (with Taka Ishii Gallery)
Full Frontal: Nude Circulator, Mitsukoshi Contemporary Art Gallery, Tokyo
Taipei Connections (with Sokyo, Taipei)
SHOW ME [TUCHIKURE] with LOOP FEELING, Sokyo, Kyoto
Frieze Los Angeles (with Taka Ishii Gallery)
2019 Art Basel Miami Beach (with Taka Ishii Gallery)
Design Miami (with Sokyo)
Art Kyoto (with Sokyo)
±8, SHOP Taka Ishii Gallery, Hong Kong
Life As Present, L'Arbre à Plumes, Brussels
2018 Shu-Shu-Shu-Show: Spiral (with t.gallery), Tokyo

Awards

- 2018 Shibuya Awards

Bibliography

- 2020 Clark, Garth. "Kazuhito Kawai: Is it real or is it Memorex," *C-File*, October 22
Miseviciute, Aiste. "DISCOVER: Six New-Generation Japanese Ceramic Artists to Watch," *We Are Japan*, August 13
Ohad, Daniella. "7 Japanese Artists Put a Contemporary Spin on Craft Materials," *Interior Design*, May 27

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

STEVE TURNER



Kazuhito Kawai: *Like A Virgin*
February 13–March 13, 2021

Steve Turner is pleased to present *Like A Virgin*, the American debut solo exhibition by Kazuhito Kawai which features new ceramic vessels. The title comes from Madonna’s hit song that came out in 1984, the year of Kawai’s birth. In 1984, things were good in Japan and remained so for a few more years. However, over the subsequent thirty years, the situation has steadily declined, so much so, that Kawai’s generation is known in Japan as the “lost generation.” It has lived through a steady downward trend where hope was uncommon and drugs and alcohol were abundant. Bad as the situation has been, pop culture served to cover up the despair. These are the essential elements of Kawai’s work—despair represented by the chaos, irregularity, collapse and fragility of random shapes and the accompanying masking of that despair with bright and lustrous colors. A final ingredient are his titles which come from songs, movies and novels that are meaningful to him. With Covid the problems in Japan have come out into the open. Depression, discrimination, anger, helplessness and loneliness are now plain to see. To find meaning, Kawai turned inward. Using clay, he has built grotesque castles from despair, coloring them with fantasy and sealing them with fire.

Born in 1984 in Ibaraki, Japan, Kawai earned a BA in Fine Art at Chelsea College of Art, London (2007) before returning to Japan where he earned a BA at the Ibaraki Prefectural College of Ceramics (2018). His work has been exhibited at Mitsukoshi Contemporary Art Gallery, Tokyo (2020); SHOP Taka Ishii Gallery, Hong Kong (2019); t.gallery, Tokyo (2019) and House in Kasama, Ibaraki, Japan (2017). It also has also been presented by Taka Ishii Gallery at Frieze, Los Angeles (2020) and Art Basel, Miami Beach (2019). He lives and works in Ibaraki Prefecture, Japan.



Like A Virgin. Installation view, Steve Turner, 2021



Like A Virgin. Installation view, Steve Turner, 2021



Like A Virgin. Installation view, Steve Turner, 2021



Like A Virgin. Installation view, Steve Turner, 2021



H—C≡N. Installation view, Tokyo International Gallery, 2020



SHOW ME [TUCHIKURE] with LOOP FEELING. Installation view, Sokyō, Kyoto, 2020



SHOW ME [TUCHIKURE] with LOOP FEELING. Installation view, Sokyō, Kyoto, 2020



Frieze Los Angeles (with Taka Ishii Gallery). Installation view, 2020



Art Basel Miami Beach (with Taka Ishii Gallery). Installation view, 2019



Design Miami (with Sokyo). Installation view, 2019



±8. Installation view, SHOP Taka Ishii Gallery, Hong Kong, 2019



Or Impressionism. Installation view, rusu, Meguro, Tokyo, 2019



Or Impressionism. Installation view, rusu, Meguro, Tokyo, 2019



Or Impressionism. Installation view, rusu, Meguro, Tokyo, 2019



Or Impressionism. Installation view, rusu, Meguro, Tokyo, 2019



Graduation Show. Installation view, Ibaraki Ceramic Art Museum, Japan, 2018



Graduation Show. Installation view, Ibaraki Ceramic Art Museum, Japan, 2018

SELECTED WORKS



Creep, 2021
Glazed ceramic
12 ⁵/₈ x 9 ¹/₂ x 9 ¹/₂ inches (32 x 24 x 24 cm)



Dynamite, 2021
Glazed ceramic
13 x 10¹/₄ x 10¹/₄ inches (33 x 26 x 26 cm)



Forever 21, 2021
Glazed ceramic
13 ¹/₄ x 15 x 15 inches (33.5 x 38 x 38 cm)



THE ANNABEL CHONG STORY, 2021
Glazed ceramic
15 ³/₄ x 14 ⁵/₈ x 14 ⁵/₈ inches (40 x 37 x 37 cm)



Bunkaya Zakkaten, 2020
Glazed ceramic
(31 x 30 x 30 cm)



California Dreamin, 2020

Glazed ceramic

14 ⁵/₈ x 14 ¹/₈ x 13 inches (37 x 36 x 33 cm)



Faculty Room, 2020
Glazed ceramic
(27 x 22 x 22 cm)



Happy Together, 2020

Glazed ceramic

12 ¹/₄ x 13 x 13 inches (31 x 33 x 33 cm)



Kinetic Youth, 2020

Glazed ceramic

15 x 17 ³/₄ x 17 ³/₄ inches (38 x 45 x 45 cm)



Kiyoshi Yamashita, 2020
Glazed ceramic
(30 x 32 x 26 cm)



The Flowing of Stars, 2020
Glazed ceramic
(50 x 38 x 38 cm)



Yellow Beam, 2020
Glazed ceramic
(34 x 32 x 32 cm)



Emo, 2019
Glazed ceramic
(20 x 22 x 15 cm)



Give Me Chocolate, 2019
Glazed ceramic
(18 x 14 x 14 cm)



Guilt, 2019
Glazed ceramic
(27 x 24 x 24 cm)



Mary Kitagawa, 2019
Glazed ceramic
(26 x 20 x 20 cm)



Pansuke, 2019
Glazed ceramic
(27 x 23 x 23 cm)



Piko, 2019
Glazed ceramic
(16 x 14 x 14 cm)



Reiwa, 2019
Glazed ceramic
(29 x 23 x 17 cm)



Tomobe Dental Clinic, 2019
Glazed ceramic
(21 x 13 x 19 cm)



Ocean Wave, 2018
Glazed ceramic
(18 x 15 x 15 cm)



Uniqlo, 2018
Glazed ceramic
(15 x 15 x 15 cm)

SELECTED PRESS

Kazuhito Kawai: Is it real or is it Memorex

Garth Clark | October 22, 2020



Kazuhito Kawai is a ceramist trained with knowledge and understanding of Western contemporary art receiving an MA in fine art in 2007 from the Chelsea College of Art in London 2007. After returning to Japan, he studied ceramics at the Ibaraki Prefectural College of Ceramics, graduating in 2018 with a BA (Hons) in Fine Art. He currently lives and works in Ibaraki Prefecture where he was born in 1984. Writing about his art the Taka Ishii Gallery explains:

“After studying contemporary art, his encounter with the medium of ceramics was an experience that liberated his creativity and led him to a

breakthrough. Characterized by dynamic colors and shapes, his ceramic works show various expressions of irregularity, ugliness, grotesqueness, and fragility, revealing the inner self brought out by the material in a multi-layered way. The piled-up lumps of clay reflect a dialogue between the repeated collages of clay and himself, a layered representation of the artist’s inner self and state of mind”.

Clearly, his work belongs to the Katuru Kuwata + Brian Rochefort school of extreme glazing. They have hundreds of imitators world-wide. This has threatened and caused considerable pain for Kuwata who has written about this situation. But when one sits at the top of the tree as Kuwata and Rochefort do, this is the inevitable price of stature. It is rarely fatal to a career if you are #1.

While there can little doubt that Kawai has been influenced, the question is whether that is a reasonable homage (very common among artists early in their careers) or flat-out mimicking. With that in mind, let’s look at the work more closely. These ceramics all come from his exhibition this year at Sokyō Gallery in Kyoto and the images are used with permission of Sokyō.

The works are baroque in spirit though nurturing rather than sexual. The way in which he uses glazes, slips and relief clay in context to the form is different. The polychrome surface collage is tightly knitted around the form, from top to toe, even the vestigial handles, whereas to Messrs. Katuro + Rochefort tend, more frequently, to leave part of the form visible with its monochrome surface, bringing its bland charm into the dialogue. Downward flow of glaze is part of their kinetic aesthetic but not for Kawai. Here and there is some primordial ooze but mainly his surface and form are bonded and static. The relief work looks porous and even soft, like cauliflower florets in some cases, or hanging tufts of raw wool.



Put the work of the three together and talented Kawai survives on his own terms. My interest, once he gets over this kind of theatrical tours de force, is where he will go in the future. It can hardly be more, so it would be insightful to see what he does with less.

DISCOVER: Six New-Generation Japanese Ceramic Artists to Watch

Aiste Miseviciute | August 13, 2020

Japanese ceramics expert and gallerist Robert Yellin once told me that “ceramics are like living creatures”. Indeed, when on one late autumn afternoon I was walking around his Yakimono gallery in Kyoto, located in an old sukiya style townhouse, I felt that the objects around me were alive and breathing. They were all kinds of shapes, colours and sizes: earthen Bizen ware, large tsubo jars, bright turquoise porcelain vases and modest Raku tea bowls — each and every one of them with its own story, born from earth and fire and carefully moulded by human hands.

“Japanese pottery is an insular world that dates back to the beginning of mankind’s first ceramic vessel and one that flourishes to this day in flair and colour. Perhaps no other land has the depth, variety and cultural support of pottery as Japan”, writes Robert Yellin in his article. Thanks to a long and rich history, the magical world of Japanese ceramics encompasses a wide range of styles; yet it is the simple, rustic pieces that first made me fall in love with this craft.

Introduced to tea ceremonies in the 15th century by Zen monk Juko Murata, *wabi-sabi* aesthetics, or, finding beauty in imperfection, is an important aspect of Japanese culture, aesthetics and arts. Celebrated by ceramic artists for centuries, the *wabi-sabi* tradition has been continued by the new generation of contemporary artists, evolving in line with modern life and culture. With worldwide exhibitions from Kazunori Hamana and Yuji Ueda (and curated by Takashi Murakami), and fashion collaborations like the recent Loewe and Takuro Kuwata association, Japanese ceramics are living a Golden age. An impossible mission to choose a limited selection from so many, here are a few contemporary Japanese ceramic artists to watch.

Kazuhito Kawai, Ibaraki prefecture

The wild and colourful world of Kazuhito Kawai is inspired by grotesqueness, the texture of clay itself, 90s Harajuku culture, fashion designers like Rei Kawakubo and John Galliano, contemporary artists such as Anselm Kiefer and impressionists like Monet.

After studying contemporary art at the Chelsea College of Art, followed by a stint as a businessman in Tokyo, Kazuhito chose to return to his hometown Kasama, known best for its ceramics. Working with clay and glazing has been a personal breakthrough for Kazuhito Kawai. He may have learned to be a potter, but his work can now be considered contemporary art; a very unique transmission of *wabi-sabi* itself.



7 Japanese Artists Put a Contemporary Spin on Craft Materials

Daniella Ohad | May 27, 2020

In the hands of seven Japanese artists, traditional craft materials and techniques take a contemporary turn.

3. Kawai Kazuhito



Cutting-edge ceramicist Kawai Kazuhito with a typically powerful work.
Photography by Daiki Nakamura.

Clay is but one medium among many Kawai Kazuhito (b. 1984) utilizes in his highly distinctive work. His creations are odd and edgy, yet so compelling that when he exhibited them at Design Miami for the first time last December, they immediately captured the attention of collectors. After graduating from London's Chelsea College of Arts in 2007, Kawai completed his studies at Kasama College of Ceramic Art in his home prefecture of Ibaraki, where he currently lives and works. He belongs to a generation of young artists who began with conventional ceramic craft but have turned their backs on many wabi-sabi concepts—simplicity, economy, modesty—to produce bright-hued, dysfunctional objects with powerfully eruptive surfaces. Combining sensuality with vivid color, Kawai's work reflects a contemporary interest in the aesthetics of the grotesque, which is explored through an exceptional approach to materiality. Resembling flamboyantly irregular candy, his pieces may look like fun, but they incorporate covert critiques of pop culture, fashion, and society.



Titled Hiroshi Nagai and City Pop, 2020, this piece comments on popular culture.
Photography courtesy of the artist.



Celebrity in the contemporary performing arts is referenced in A Friend of Mine Resembles Yuja Wang, 2019. Photography courtesy of Sokyo Gallery.

INTERIOR
DESIGN



Brilliant color floods Cafe AYA, 2019. Photography courtesy of the artist.

INTERIOR
DESIGN