

SHOZO MICHIKAWA





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Nature into Art

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*To retain the natural 'intentions' of the clay
A cold winter morning,
wedging clay in the workshop.
More painful than cold,
the feel of a handful of clay-
steam rises from one's hands
and just for an instant it itches.
Various shapes are born from my hands.
This morning's little satisfaction.*

SHOZO MICHIKAWA

Natural Intentions

Shozo Michikawa creates pots that have that rare quality of being imbued with both spirit and palpable energy. His work has been described as being like a 'haiku in clay', a simile that captures a sense not only of the apparent simplicity, but also the complexity of his work. His pots are intriguing because they are replete with contradictions: they have a contemporary feel, yet are somehow timeless; they have an almost impractically sculptural appearance, yet serve functional purposes; they reflect an urban aesthetic, but simultaneously look as if they have grown from nature. While many great thinkers have tried to quantify that elusive Japanese aesthetic of '*Wabi Sabi*', to my Western untutored eye a tea bowl or kohiki incense burner by Shozo seems to be a modern manifestation of its qualities. His ceramics may, or may not, qualify under Soetsu Yanagi's explanation that *Wabi Sabi* celebrates "the mellow beauty that time and care impart to materials," (after all, Shozo has been nicknamed 'Hurry Potter' for his impressive throwing speed) but they do capture those intense emotions that are so hard to quantify.

When travelling in Japan last November, I had the great pleasure of being Shozo's guest at his home in Seto, a city that is known as one of the 'Six Old Kilns of Japan', with a history of over 1300 years as a pottery centre. A lesser potter might feel oppressed by the weight of such a tradition, but although Shozo has an acute awareness and respect for the ceramic heritage of Japan, he has forged his own highly distinctive style and technique that makes his work stand out, not only from his contemporaries, but the great potters of the past. Significantly, he was the first Japanese artist to be honoured with a solo exhibition in the Forbidden City in Beijing in 2005. Shozo himself is not a native of Seto, but moved there precisely because

of its heritage. He was born in Toya in Hokkaido in the North of Japan in 1953 and originally studied economics at Aoyama Gakuin University in Tokyo, where he worked in business for a couple of years, but discovered a natural affinity for pottery when he began evening classes. In the late 1970s, he took the brave step of giving up his life as a Tokyo businessman to become a potter. Perhaps this background, which is so different from many of his Seto neighbours who come from generations of potters, has brought a different urge to his creativity. Watching him at work was an exciting experience that shattered any preconceptions I might have had about how his pots were created.

At first glance, one would imagine that Shozo's dramatic faceted and twisted forms are hand-built and sculpted but, in fact, the vases he was working on during my visit were created on the wheel. However, he does not 'throw' his vessels in any conventional sense; rather their energy comes from the twisting of fractured planes on an internal axis. It is a different understanding of his materials, to do with cutting and paring down, rather than expanding from a ball of clay. He speaks of having a 'conversation with the clay' and 'assisting the way it wants to go,' which reflects his profound respect for its natural qualities. An early morning walk through the woods with his Japanese husky dog revealed just as much about his attitude to nature: almost an animist veneration for natural forces such as rocks, trees and the very earth from which the clay is mined, a sensibility that finds expression in the natural intentions of his beautiful pots.

Simon Martin

Simon Martin is an art historian, writer and curator, based at Pallant House Gallery in Chichester













Shino triangle pot, 2009
stoneware
height 22 cm
(SHM144)



Natural-ash, twisted pot, 2009
anagama fired stoneware
height 28 cm
(SHM139)



Kohiki tall twisted pot, 2009
stoneware
height 34.5 cm
(SHM137)



Twisted, cut-sided pot, 2009
anagama fired stoneware
height 37.5 cm
(SHM141)



Shino glaze pot, 2009
anagama fired stoneware
height 22 cm
(SHM130)

Shino glaze mizuzashi, 2009
anagama fired stoneware
height 12 cm
(SHM131)



Kohiki bowl, 2009
stoneware
diam. 34 cm
(SHM127)



Kohiki twisted bottle, 2009
stoneware, height 12 cm
(SHM136)

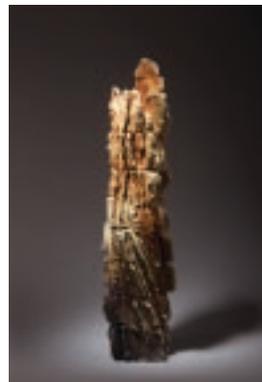
Tanka twisted bottle, 2009
charcoal fired stoneware
height 16 cm
(SHM138)



Tanka twisted pot, 2009
charcoal fired stoneware
height 18 cm
(SHM143)



Kohiki mizusashi, 2009
stoneware, lacquer lid
diam. 20 cm
(SHM135)



Twisted natural-ash pot, 2009
anagama fired stoneware
height 68 cm
(SHM125)

Shozo Michikawa was born in Hokkaido in 1953. He studied at Aoyama Gakuin University, from where he graduated in 1975. He lives and works in Seto, Aichi. He has exhibited widely in Japan and also in the Philippines, Mongolia, France, New York and London. In 2005 he was honoured with an exhibition at the Forbidden City in Beijing. This summer he is taking part in the International Ceramics Festival, Aberystwyth as a demonstrator and will also be giving workshops at Higham Hall in Cumbria and West Dean College in Chichester.

Solo exhibitions since 2007

- 2007 Tokyo Eizo Gallery, Tokyo
Izukan Gallery, Manila
Thirty Years, Thirty Pots, Galerie Besson, London
- 2008 Clara Scremini Gallery, Paris
Gallery hu, Nagoya
Tokyo Eizo Gallery, Tokyo
- 2009 Art Gallery Oyama, Tokyo
Nature into Art, Galerie Besson, London

Group exhibitions since 2007

- 2008 *International Ceramics*, Giroussens
Twenty Years, Twenty Pots, Galerie Besson, London
The Great North Art Show, Ripon
Tutor Exhibition, Sussex Barn Gallery, Chichester
A Japanese Dialogue, The Scottish Gallery, Edinburgh
- 2009 *Soft Beauty of Traditional Shinos*, Concord University, Athens, West Virginia
The Art of Japanese Craft 1870 to the Present, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia

Workshops since 2007

- 2007 West Dean College, Sussex
Higham Hall, Cumbria
Penland School of Crafts, North Carolina
- 2008 West Dean College, Chichester
Higham Hall, Cumbria
- 2009 *International Ceramics Festival*, Aberystwyth
Keramik-und Topferschule, Gordola, Switzerland
West Dean College, Chichester
Higham Hall, Cumbria



Shozo Michikawa prepares for a *tanka* (charcoal) firing

Works in public collections

- China-Japan Exchange Center, Beijing
- National Museum of Wales, Cardiff
- Philadelphia Museum of Art
- Qinglingsi Temple, Xi'an

