2017

HAYASHI YASUO AND YAGI KAZUO IN POSTWAR JAPANESE CERAMICS: THE EFFECTS OF INTRAMURAL POLITICS AND RIVALRY FOR RANK ON A CERAMIC ARTIST’S CAREER

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Digital Object Identifier: https://doi.org/10.13023/ETD.2017.509

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HAYASHI YASUO AND YAGI KAZUO IN POSTWAR JAPANESE CERAMICS: THE EFFECTS OF INTRAMURAL POLITICS AND RIVALRY FOR RANK ON A CERAMIC ARTIST’S CAREER

THESIS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the College of Fine Arts at the University of Kentucky

By

Marilyn Rose Swan

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Andrew Maske, Professor of Art History

Lexington, Kentucky

2017

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

HAYASHI YASUO AND YAGI KAZUO IN POSTWAR JAPANESE CERAMICS: THE EFFECTS OF INTRAMURAL POLITICS AND RIVALRY FOR RANK ON A CERAMIC ARTIST’S CAREER

The use and firing of clay to make art instead of vessels was a revolutionary concept in Japan when it first was introduced by Hayashi Yasuo in 1948 with *Cloud*, and expanded upon by Yagi Kazuo in 1954 with *Mr. Samsa’s Walk*. Although both avant-garde artists were major forces in the advancement of abstract, nonfunctional ceramics, Yagi is usually given sole credit and occupies a prominent place in the literature, while Hayashi’s name can scarcely be found, despite his numerous international awards, large body of work and career spanning seven decades. This thesis seeks to identify the factors that influenced the direction of their careers and the unbalanced reception of their work. It compares their backgrounds, personality traits, avant-garde affiliations, and positions on art and ceramics, in relation to the norms and prerequisites for success in Kyoto’s deeply stratified, convention-bound ceramic community. The pervasive practice of rating and society’s emphasis on affiliation and rank were significant forces in this situation, as were issues that divided Japan’s art world -- the separation and unequal ranking of fine art and traditional craft, or the value of individual expression versus technique and tradition. Ultimately, this study reveals an insular world during a decade (1946–56) of crisis and transition that is rarely studied in the West from the perspective of ceramic art.

KEYWORDS: Hayashi Yasuo; Yagi Kazuo; Shikōkai; Sōdeisha; avant-garde Japanese ceramics; ceramic *objets*.

Marilyn Rose Swan
December 11, 2017
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge a number of people whose insights and direction advanced my research and the writing of this thesis, particularly my Thesis Chair Andrew Maske, for his invaluable knowledge and guidance, and members of my Thesis Committee, Anna Brzyski, who expanded my understanding of visual culture, and Masamichi Inoue, who informed my study of the Japanese language and culture. I want to thank Aoyama Wahei, Beatrice Chang, Kazuko Todate, and Yasuko Tsuchikane for their kind and incisive responses to my inquiries, and my friends and family for their continued support and encouragement. Above all, I wish to express my gratitude to Hayashi Yasuo, whose work sparked an interest that led to this thesis, and whose dedication to art and perseverance in the face of difficulties helped to sustain my own efforts.
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INTRODUCTION

Prior to the middle of the 20th century, ceramic articles were made to fulfill some type of function usually related to food storage and preparation or the performance of religious rituals and cultural activities. In general, potters adhered to the formal conventions of their time, and pieces reflected their intended functions. In Japan, a country rich in ceramic history and traditions, the use and firing of clay to make art objects instead of vessels was viewed as a subversive concept when it materialized during the turbulent decade following World War II, first as an individualistic practice, then as an avant-garde movement that crossed sculpture with ceramics, fine art with craft. By the late 1960’s, this new hybrid form had acquired mainstream status, but its identity and parameters remained ambiguous, as can be seen by the variety of its names: kiln-fired objets; (obuje-yaki), avant-garde ceramic art, abstract ceramics, nonfunctional ceramics, and sculptural ceramics. However, these variations all are rooted in the daring experiments of Hayashi Yasuo (b. 1928) and subsequent advances of Yagi Kazuo (1918–1979).

Hayashi’s hand-built Cloud (Kumo, 1948) was the first ceramic objet to be exhibited in Japan when it was shown in Shikōkai’s second exhibition, July 13–18, 1948 in Osaka. Hayashi’s abstract representation of the human body has been

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1 Dada and surrealist artists used the term “objet trouvé” for the objects they found and repurposed in their ironic art pieces. Avant-garde ikebana artists adopted “objet” in the name for their modernist assemblages (objet ikebana) that incorporated readymade objects. These included the nearly nonfunctional vases they commissioned from Hayashi and other ceramic artists in the late 1940’s and early 1950’s; “objet” soon became a term to describe a nonfunctional ceramic object in general.

described as "severe, even brutal in form." Its blatant disregard for aesthetic and technical standards must have been truly shocking at that time, especially in Kyoto, a city renowned for the elegance of its ceramics. Yagi followed suit in 1954, rejecting traditional conventions governing taste, function, and use of the wheel in his construction of *Mr. Samsa’s Walk (Zamuza-shi no sampō)*, also known as *The Walk of Mr. Samsa*. The strange, hoop-like form that he assembled out of pre-thrown bits and pieces supposedly provoked agitation in the highly critical and conservative ceramic establishment.⁴

Although both Hayashi and Yagi were major forces in the advancement of nonfunctional ceramic art in Japan, Yagi alone is generally recognized for this groundbreaking development. Hayashi’s right to credit as the first to make and exhibit ceramic *objets* in Japan has been well argued by others and so is not the subject of this thesis. The intention here is to situate the genre in the postwar landscape, then identify and explore the factors that contributed to the imbalance in treatment of Hayashi and Yagi and their work. Examples of unjust exclusion abound in art history for any number of reasons, including poor timing, politics, and the limitations of the canon. Investigating why and how it occurred in this situation is worthwhile because it reveals the social dynamics of an insular world and their effects on the careers of two pivotal artists during the decade following World War II (1946–56), a time of crisis and transition that is rarely studied in the West from the perspective of ceramic art.

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After suffering through the eight-year Asian Pacific War (1937–1945), the Japanese people had to adjust to defeat, military occupation, and the total remodeling of their society for the second time in less than 100 years.\(^5\) Directives from General Headquarters, Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (GHQ/SCAP), deprived the emperor of his divine status, gave women the right to vote, legalized the Japanese Communist Party, and generally instituted “respect for fundamental human rights.”\(^6\) The Allied Occupation (1945–52) aimed to stimulate

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\(^5\) The first occasion occurred during the *Meiji* era (1867–1912), when Japan transformed itself from a secluded cluster of semi-independent feudal domains into a unified nation trying to achieve industrial, military and cultural parity with the West.

social change by encouraging freedom of expression in the arts; cultural exchange with the West also was initiated, thereby ending the stultifying isolation that Japanese artists suffered under the former ultra-nationalist regime. Democratic reforms reverberated loudly during the early years of the occupation, creating the illusion that age-old norms were irrelevant and independence from the mainstream system was possible. Pre-war avant-garde artists joined forces with the younger generation to denounce the rigid conventions and exclusive exhibition system of the art establishment (gadan). The progressive movement infiltrated even conservative Kyoto, formerly the home of the imperial court and still the center for traditional arts and classical culture.

The political climate in Japan became more repressive as the Cold War activated a dramatic shift to the right in U.S. politics and a reversal of the occupation’s goals, from democratizing and demilitarizing Japan to making it into a bulwark against the spread of communism in East Asia. General MacArthur enabled the return of Japan’s conservative forces and ordered the Red Purge of 1950. He also initiated the Subversive Activities Bill of 1952 suppressing unions, communists and dissidents, a category that included avant-garde artists, who since the early

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7 The military regime repurposed Japan’s art world to document and glorify the war. It commissioned leading Western style (yōga) oil painters to create gigantic panoramas depicting battle scenes and acts of bravery; these campaign record paintings were exhibited throughout Japan to arouse patriotism and induce civilian support and self-sacrifice. Photojournalists and graphic designers were recruited as well, to produce propaganda materials for domestic and international distribution. Artists who did not support the war effort had to hide or were forced to serve, either on the front lines or in munitions factories.
twentieth century had “cast themselves as social critics, strategically fusing modernist aesthetics with leftist politics.” The U.S. needed a base of operations for the Korean War (1950–53), so it subsidized the rebuilding of Japan’s infrastructure and industrial capacity. The U.S. military’s demand for supplies and services boosted Japan’s economy, but it also fostered an Americanized, consumer-oriented society and “lifestyle filled with devices of convenience, initially made to fit the taste of foreign troops.”

The influx of Western products and culture aroused strong resistance in those who wanted to preserve Japan’s cultural identity, based largely on its traditional arts. Pottery in particular was considered “a uniquely Japanese form of material expression and cultural capital.” This multivalent craft performed admirably in the international arena as a lucrative export item and ambassador for Japanese aesthetics; ceramic vessels also were central to private home-life and could “be imagined in intimate contact with the hands and mouths of the nation’s people.” Ensuring a cultural identity seemed to demand enshrining traditional ceramic forms and techniques, via either the folk-craft (*mingei*) ideology that honored the humble work of anonymous potters, or the celebration of Asian

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antiquities that demonstrated technical perfection. A national campaign of cultural preservation was initiated on a scale “never before seen in Japan or elsewhere”\(^\text{12}\) as an additional antidote to Western hegemony. The government instituted a “Living National Treasure” (ningen kokuhō) program in 1950 to protect certain craft skills, referred to as Important Intangible Cultural Properties; the system was revised in 1954 to focus on individuals and groups whose work exemplified specific traditional techniques.

When Picasso’s modernist ceramics appeared on the scene in 1951,\(^\text{13}\) they aroused excitement, resistance, and heated arguments that pitted ceramic connoisseurs and those who supported preservation of Japan’s ceramic traditions against proponents of Western art who appreciated Picasso’s creative originality.\(^\text{14}\) Picasso had begun working with clay only in 1946, so pundits such as literary critic Hideo Kobayashi considered his pottery crude and amateurish, especially when compared with the refinement and craftsmanship of Asian ceramics.\(^\text{15}\)

\[^{12}\text{Jones, 267.}\]
\[^{13}\text{In 1951, Picasso’s pottery was displayed in two exhibits: at Exhibition of Picasso’s Ceramics and Lithographs (Pikaso tōki sekibanga tenrankai), in Tokyo and Osaka; and at Picasso Exhibition (Pikaso-ten), in Tokyo, Osaka, and at the Ōhara Museum in Kurashiki; in 1952, his ceramics were exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in Kamakura.}\]
\[^{15}\text{Ibid.}\]
Meanwhile, middle-class urbanites with leisure time, expendable income, and a hunger for cultural activities welcomed exposure to current art trends and flocked to exhibitions at department store galleries and newly opened museums\(^\text{16}\) where they acquired not only a taste for modern art, but the desire to own artwork. The formerly elite custom of buying and displaying art at home was now "a fashion among millions of status-conscious citizens...who learned through the schools and the media that showing off objects of beauty implied refinement and social standing."\(^\text{17}\) The increased interest in and demand for art fueled the expansion of Japan's art world, which benefited both avant-garde and mainstream artist.

\(^{16}\) Such exhibits included: 1950 \textit{Contemporary World Art Exhibition} at Tokyo’s Takashimaya Department Store; work by Cezanne and Renoir in the 1951 inaugural exhibit of the Museum of Modern Art in Kamakura, Japan’s first public museum of modern art; and a 1953 survey of modern Japanese and European art at the new National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo that had opened in 1952.

“Most scholarship outside Japan on modern art has focused on paintings and related media, and, with some exceptions, the scholarship that has been published on the topic of Japanese ceramics mainly has concerned older forms of expression deemed "traditional."\textsuperscript{18}

Japanese ceramics of the immediate postwar era is a subject not well represented in the English language literature. The few references that discuss avant-garde ceramic art and the inception of \textit{objets} tend to skip over Hayashi’s foundational work of the late 1940’s, to focus instead on the later innovations of Yagi and his associates in Sōdeisha during the mid 1950’s. Alexandra Munroe’s exhibition catalogue \textit{Scream Against the Sky},\textsuperscript{19} which is considered the most comprehensive English-language source on postwar Japanese art, includes several discussions of Yagi and Sōdeisha, but it never mentions Hayashi or Shikōkai. Smithsonian curator Louise Cort and art historian Bert Winther-Tamaki have contributed significantly to the literature on Japanese ceramics and other aspects of East Asian visual culture, but they too attribute the founding of nonfunctional ceramics to Yagi. Unfortunately, the opinions of Munroe, Cort and Winther-Tamaki have become gospel, the basis for the bias of subsequent publications. For instance, \textit{20th Century Ceramics} by Edmund de Waal\textsuperscript{20} cites Munroe’s \textit{Scream Against the Sky} and Yagi’s exhibition catalogs as his sources on postwar innovations in Japan. De Waal’s book appears to be the source for Ajioka Chiaki’s assertion in \textit{Since Meiji: Perspectives on the Japanese Visual Arts, 1868–2000} that Sōdeisha initiated "perhaps

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{18} Jones, 278.
\end{thebibliography}
the most significant creative development in the wake of World War II, notably the birth of the 'object ware' in ceramics."²¹ Cort and Winther-Tamaki are referenced by Allen Weiss for his similarly broad claim in *Zen Landscapes: Perspectives on Japanese Gardens and Ceramics*: "It is generally agreed that the first instance of a non-functional object in the context of Japanese pottery was Yagi Kazuo's *The Walk of Samsa.*"²² Cort, Winther-Tamaki and Munroe are the main sources for Glenn Adamson's discussion in *Thinking Through Craft* in which he attributes ceramic innovations to Yagi.²³

A few sources do vouch for the significance of Hayashi and Shikōkai to ceramic history. Art historian and former curator Kazuko Todate attests to Hayashi’s pioneering role and initiation of *objets*, in scholarly journals and the popular media in Japan and the U.S. In her recent book *Fired Earth, Woven Bamboo*, she clearly states he introduced “the first nonfunctional objects in 1948 to a world that had long considered ceramics synonymous with vessels."²⁴ In *Fired with Passion*, Japanese ceramics collector Samuel Lurie and Dai Ichi Arts Gallery director Beatrice Chang offer a “Chronology of Abstract Ceramic Sculpture” itemizing the exhibitions where Hayashi’s *objets* were displayed and probably seen, they argue, by Yagi between

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1948 and 1954. The authors also include a photographic chart (fig. 3) juxtaposing Hayashi’s sculptural work with the utilitarian vessels made by Yagi and Suzuki Osamu during that same time period. Rupert Faulkner, senior curator of Japanese ceramics at the Victoria & Albert Museum, affirms both Hayashi’s inauguration of sculptural ceramics and Shikōkai’s early leadership role in Kyoto’s avant-garde community; he credits the group for “encouraging the development of avant-garde ceramics during the period when members of the Sōdeisha were struggling to find a direction for their work,” and for introducing the terracotta sculptures of Isamu Noguchi (1904–88) at Shikōkai’s 1950 exhibit in Kyoto.

Quotes and information about Hayashi used in this thesis come from his writing, interviews and private communication, as well as from essays by his contemporaries; material about Yagi is based on the recollections of his contemporaries and quotations from his writing. My main source on the ceramic exhibition system is Brian Moeran, a business anthropologist who conducted research in the field during the early 1980’s, with a focus on the social institutions that influenced Japan’s ceramic production, marketing and evaluation. The art conglomerate of the affluent 1980’s certainly was more complex and sophisticated than the recovering art world of the 1950’s. However, little would have changed in social norms or human nature during those thirty years: business dealings still were oriented toward social relations and the maintenance of group harmony; seniority and rituals of reciprocity continued to be honored.

25 Lurie and Chang, 10.
The intension of this thesis is to explore the personal, social and historical factors that might have influenced the artistic and professional development of Hayashi Yasuo and Yagi Kazuo and the reception of their early work. The first element to be considered is Japan’s mainstream ceramic system, including the structures and procedures that existed right after World War II, and the system as it expanded along with Japan’s economic recovery during the 1950s. This discussion is followed by a comparison of the backgrounds and characteristics of each artist in relation to the system. How well did Hayashi and Yagi conform to its rigid norms
and ceramic standards, and what effect did compliance or its lack have on their careers? Certain international developments will be considered as well, since they spurred change and reaction within Japan’s political, economic, and cultural spheres, with both positive and negative repercussions for the artists. The Cold War, for instance, aided Japan’s economic recovery, which led to an expanded art market; but it also enabled the return of reactionary politics, which smothered the idealism of the early occupation years that had inspired artistic independence. The ongoing debate over the nation’s cultural identity and the role of ceramics in that debate will be addressed as well since these issues influenced the direction of and discourse on postwar ceramic art and its place on the art/craft continuum.

The social forces that appear to have greatest significance in this situation are the importance of group membership,27 the consequences of joining the wrong group,28 the pervasive practice of rating, and the emphasis on rank order in a vertical society. This study speculates on the ramifications of membership in Shikōkai and Sōdeisha, the two groups to which Hayashi and Yagi belonged, and on Hayashi’s loss of affiliation after Shikōkai’s demise, but closest attention is given to the pressure to attain top rank and the rivalry it generated between groups and individuals. According to social anthropologist Chie Nakane, “collaboration between two equally competing groups is almost non-existent”29 in Japan. What impact could rivalry have had on interaction between Shikōkai and Sōdeisha, the two factions

28 Lebra, 32. According to Lebra, in Japan “one who makes an initial error has a hard time establishing identity by belongingness.”
within Kyoto’s small circle of avant-garde ceramic artists? Since awareness of rank also “contributes to the encouragement of competition among peers,"\textsuperscript{30} how might the desire for primacy have affected the naturally ambitious Yagi and his relations with Hayashi?

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 77.
"Prewar organizations and exhibitions tended towards the positioning of ceramics as modernist art on par with Euro-American painting and sculpture, but wartime and postwar organizations and exhibitions tended towards the promotion of ceramics as material embodiments of the nation and as central to postwar recovery."\(^{31}\)

The Taisho period (1912–1926) was a relatively liberal and peaceful era that spawned political reforms, artistic innovations, as well as efforts to modernize ceramics and counterbalance the overly technical direction of Meiji era pottery designed for foreign markets and international expositions.\(^{32}\) The dominant movement in ceramics at the time was toward individualist expression\(^{33}\) and originality, as manifested by its pioneers, Tomimoto Kenkichi, Kusube Yaichi and Yagi Issō, Yagi Kazuo’s father (fig. 4). These individualist potters signed, named, and exhibited one-of-a-kind vessels and lobbied to have art ceramics (bijutsu tōki) classified as fine art. Meanwhile, Yanagi Sōetsu, Hamada Shōji, and Kwai Kanjirō were pursuing an alternate model that prized the spiritual qualities inherent in Japanese folk-craft (mingei, an abbreviation of minshu-teki kogei) produced by selfless, unnamed craftsmen. Yanagi opposed art crafts (bijutsu kōgei) “made by a few, for a few, at a high price”\(^{34}\) because they were divorced from the needs of people and reflected “the personality of the artist rather than the character of the

\(^{31}\) Jones, 237.


\(^{33}\) Jones, 33.

crafted.” He claimed the ordinary handmade wares for everyday use (getemono) “reveal the identity of our race with their beauty rising from nature and the blood of our homeland, not following foreign technique or imitating foreign countries.”

There is an obvious nationalistic tone to this rhetoric and to his comparison of potters’ lives in Japan, where “people have a special inclination and regard for ceramics,” and the West, where industrially-produced implements (kōgyō) are the norm, and where there is a lack of respect, support, and “few vestiges of tradition in the sphere of handcrafts.”

Figure 4. Yagi Issō, Conceptual Flower Bud Vase (Hoga no i kabin, 1929), celadon porcelain, 34.3 x 20.3 cm. Source: http://kagedo.com/wordpress/artist/yagi- isso.

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35 Ibid., 199.
37 Yanagi, 219.
38 Ibid., 218.
During the war, cultural organizations either ceased to operate or were redirected to serve the national effort. As soon as the war ended, Japan's art world resumed the business of organizing juried exhibitions: the first Kyōten (Kyoto Municipal Art Exhibition) was held November 21–December 10, 1945; the first Nitten (Japan Art Exhibition) was held in Tokyo, March 1–31, 1946. Despite the liberal reforms of the Allied Occupation, the formal exhibition societies (bijutsu dantai) and oldest ceramic dynasties maintained a tight grip on all aspects of life in Kyoto's ceramic community.39 Winther-Tamaki notes the "striking degree of sovereignty" within this world, a domain "defined by distinctive canons, ancient histories, factional divisions, commodities and institutions,"40 the most important of which is the juried exhibition, "a complex hierarchical organization structured something like the academic salon of late nineteenth-century Paris."41 Throughout the pottery world, "a delicate and intricate system of ranking"42 based on seniority prevailed: the studios and schools, with their ascending ranks of apprentices, teachers, headmaster (iemoto); the exhibition societies and art associations, with their varying degrees of membership and corresponding levels of authority; the juries and executive committees that selected art for exhibits and prizes.

Strong bonds of interdependency linked individuals of unequal status (e.g., master/apprentice), with persons on all levels needing patronage from their senior

40 Winther-Tamaki, 124.
41 Ibid.
42 Nakane, Japanese Society, 25.
associates (senpai), while providing support to those beneath them (kōhai), in exchange for their loyalty and service. A person appointed to the prestigious position of exhibit juror was indebted to someone above him on the executive committee who also had to pay in some way for the favor of his elevated position; the juror’s “continued allegiance and deference to his immediate senior in the vertical structure may in the end lead to his being elected as a member of the executive committee.”

Deep-seated awareness of rank (jōretsu ishiki) influenced all interactions and behaviors, such as where a person sat in a meeting, when and how often he gave an opinion. Respect for rank also affected the decision-making process of exhibition jurors and judges, inhibiting them from expressing disagreement with someone of superior status. Ultimately, the ceramic pieces selected for exhibition or awards were those favored by the committee chairmen, “who themselves were appointed on the basis of seniority in the ceramic art world.”

Although pieces were supposedly submitted anonymously, Moeran found that judges “made it their business to be aware of who had submitted what” and often based selections on their personal ties or an artist’s credentials rather than the aesthetic merits of his submissions, for which there were no clear standards anyway.

To succeed in this system where social credit outweighed worthiness, an artist needed good interpersonal skills in addition to mastery of his medium. It also

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helped to be connected to one of Kyoto's ceramic dynasties by birth, adoption, and/or apprenticing. These early blessings afforded preferential treatment within the system, an important advantage when competing to exhibit or needing recommendations to join an exhibition society. Membership in an elite association was a critical gateway to advancement. It provided access to a network of influential connections, upward mobility through the ranks to positions of authority within the organization, and eventually to prestigious appointments in the larger ceramic world, such as an invitation to serve on an exhibit jury or award committee.46

An increased demand for art accompanied Japan's economic recovery of the 1950's, encouraging the development of new markets and exhibit venues that were welcome alternatives to the national and association-controlled salons. The showing and selling of mainstream art, once characterized as "genteel and quietly profitable,"47 was becoming a bustling commercial operation partnered by agents from business and culture. Department stores equipped with gallery space and shoppers cosponsored exhibits in conjunction with major newspapers offering promotional services, advertising space and subscribers; in return for supporting the arts, these business entities hoped to acquire prestige and social credits as well as an increase in customers and sales. The cultural component of the enterprise consisted of critics and authorities from museums, universities, and art

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46 Moeran, “The Art World of Contemporary Japanese Ceramics,” 38. For an artist to attain full membership in a top rated society like the Nitten (Japan Fine Arts Exhibition), he was required to exhibit work in ten of its annual exhibitions and to win awards.

47 Havens, 118.
organizations who lent the exhibits credibility; viewers and prospective buyers relied on these art experts to provide background information, interpretation, and recommendations for purchasing art. Meanwhile, an artist was dependent on the good will and services of all participants in the system — gallery directors to accept and host his exhibits, journalists to promote his work, art critics to give him good reviews and recommendations, and teachers to write endorsements — with gratuities and gifts expected of him in return. Ultimately, the artist required buyers, not just for the income, but because sales figures were an important determinant of an artist’s rank; in addition, a successful exhibit satisfied the sponsors and increased the likelihood of their continued patronage.

While the mainstream art world focused on already popular artists who were easy to market, there were new “entry points to the art world”\(^\text{48}\) for young, unknown and unconventional artists as well, sponsored by nonprofit artists’ groups, municipal and prefectural governments. One of the most inclusive of these was the shiten (city salon) inaugurated in 1948 in Ashiya, a small city located between Osaka and Kobe. It welcomed submissions by avant-garde artists, amateurs and even children. The non-juried independent exhibition was another less restrictive exhibit option as it circumvented much of the favoritism, cronyism, and orthodoxy associated with jury selection. The first of these was launched in 1947 by the Japan Art Society (Nihon bijutsu-kai, or Nichibi for short), a coalition of progressive artists and collectives. Nichibi’s Nihon Independent Exhibition (Nihon andepandan-ten) was

followed in 1949 by one with a similar name sponsored by Yomiuri Newspaper; it eventually was renamed *Yomiuri andepandan-ten.*

An artist also could give himself a solo show, but that was a very expensive and time consuming business as he would have to rent a gallery space and cover all exhibit costs and tasks himself. Unfortunately, this was Hayashi’s only option after Shikōkai disbanded in 1957. He hosted one exhibit in 1958 in Tokyo; two in 1959, in Osaka and Tokyo; and one in 1960 in Tokyo. A solo show did provide certain advantages that sometimes compensated for the costs, such as better control of location and timing, plus more profit from sales. It also advertised an artist’s serious intent, which could amplify his public image. But best of all, it gave him the undivided attention of viewers and critics. Yagi hosted four solo shows after his breakthrough with *Mr. Samsa’s Walk* (two in 1954, in Kyoto and Tokyo; one in 1955 in Osaka; and one in 1956 in Tokyo), even while exhibiting annually with Sōdeisha.

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50 Havens, 124. The artist had to produce and fund "posters, an opening, sometimes a catalog, and the obligatory picture post cards bearing a few words of greeting from a teacher or critic, for which the artist pays an honorarium."
THE ARTISTS

Figure 5. Yagi Kazuo (left), and Hayashi Yasuo (right) in their studios. *Sources:* https://www.pinterest.com; Gallery 16, *Shikokai: 1947-1956*, 32.

Hayashi Yasuo and Yagi Kazuo were contemporaries but not colleagues, though they both lived and worked in Kyoto’s small pottery enclave of Gojōzaka and were part of its even smaller avant-garde circle. The two had contrasting backgrounds and opinions on art and ceramics. Hayashi had originally studied traditional painting and had no special training in ceramics, regarded clay primarily as a medium of expression, and thought of himself as an artist (*geijutsuka*) rather than a potter (*toūgeika*). Yagi grew up immersed in ceramic ideology and traditions, remained focused on his material, and identified as both a potter and an artist. The two men also had opposite personalities and domains. Reticent Hayashi was an
independent-minded individualist who preferred the private world of his studio to being out in public, building alliances and seeking attention, whereas the social environment was where extroverted and assertive Yagi flourished. Yagi had strong ties within the community, which aided his advancement and made the ceramic establishment willing to forgive his avant-garde affiliation; however concern for what others thought, as well as obligations to his family, initially impeded his artistic independence. Hayashi, on the other hand, was a precocious pioneer who experimented fearlessly, but he lacked the social support that would have given him access to opportunities and possibly mitigated his individualistic behavior and lack of social compliance. The two artists also belonged to different avant-garde factions: Yagi was the founder and leader of Sōdeisha (Crawling Through Mud Association), a group of local potters united by their interest in clay; Hayashi was a member of Shikōkai (The Society of the Four Harvests), a more revolutionary ceramic group concerned with modernist issues.

Hayashi Yasuo (b. 1928)

Hayashi’s father, Hayashi Mokū, was an unaffiliated potter in poor health who sporadically produced mold-made tableware at a studio away from home. He doesn’t appear to have exerted much authority over his son’s education and didn’t

51 All people have, to varying degrees, a public (omote) side that they reveal outside (soto), and a private (ura) side reserved for inside (uchi) and home. Yagi shows more of the former tendency, while Hayashi is inclined toward the latter. Their complementary personalities reflect the duality of human nature that psychiatrist Takeo Doi says is “prominent in the Japanese consciousness of human relations.” Takeo Doi, The Anatomy of Self: The Individual Versus Society, trans. Mark A. Harbison (New York: Kodansha International, 1986), 24.
expect him to become a potter. Instead, young Hayashi chose to study traditional style painting (*Nihonga*) at which he excelled, rising to first rank in his class. His studies were interrupted when the government began mobilizing school children to aid the war effort and he was assigned to help transport gunpowder. Hayashi recalled living in an area surrounded by military bases where he never heard any intellectual conversation.\(^{52}\) At age fifteen, he again showed his independent nature by choosing to join the Naval Air Force, despite his father’s preference for the army. Hayashi had been indoctrinated since childhood in self-sacrifice for his emperor and country, so he volunteered for training as a *kamikaze* pilot in the Spring of 1945. He was scheduled to fly his one and only mission just as the war ended in August 1945.

Hayashi returned home to Kyoto feeling lost and without purpose. His life, like his society, had been turned upside down,\(^{53}\) and public opinion had turned against kamikaze pilots, which made him feel uncomfortable. The city had been spared the relentless bombing inflicted on Tokyo and other urban centers, but the economy was in ruins and people were starving. He said he tried to resume his study of painting but felt out of place at school and dissatisfied with the medium’s lack of substance.\(^{54}\) Meanwhile, his parents were trying to revive the family pottery business and needed his help, so he went to work in his father’s studio. This was his first real experience working with clay and three-dimensional form.

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\(^{53}\) Hayashi Yasuo, interview by Okumura and Sakagami (2011).

\(^{54}\) Ibid.
Hayashi delved into the material with hands unencumbered by years of formal training or the demands of the wheel; his perspective was that of an artist exploring the properties and potential of a new medium. He had no desire to make functional ceramics or use the wheel, but he knew he needed a better understanding of ceramic processes.\textsuperscript{55} When he tried joining an association for young potters, however, he was refused for lack of recommendations from three high-ranking Nitten members. Luckily, the avant-garde movement presented an alternative source of affiliation and training that suited him better (fig. 6). He was invited to an organizational meeting of Shikōkai at the home of Uno Sango (1902–1980) where he was exhilarated by the sight of a Max Ernst reproduction — his first encounter with surrealist art. Under Uno’s tutelage, Hayashi learned about Western art movements and met internationally acclaimed progressive artists, e.g., the painter Yoshihara Jirō


\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
(1905–1972), and *ikebana* masters Teshigahara Sōfū (1900–1979), Ōhara Hōun (1908–1995), and Nakayama Bunpo (1899–1986). Although Hayashi found Shikōkai debates and lectures intellectually stimulating, he credits the humble work of making molds in his father's studio for showing him how to apply the principles of abstract art. The process of wrapping objects in plaster gave him hands-on practical experience in the mechanics of simplification and reducing forms to their essential planes.\(^56\)

Hayashi and his contemporaries were seeking a vocabulary that would evoke the idealist spirit of the early occupation years,\(^57\) when the resurrection of humanity was one of the great themes in art. Hayashi wanted to render the human form in an expressive style that would communicate directly with a viewer's soul.\(^58\) He called the first of his groundbreaking pieces *Cloud* (fig. 7), though its heft and glossy surface challenge association with any normal cloud. When asked if the piece alluded to Hiroshima, Hayashi admitted his work was rooted in the war experience, when the value of human life was "lighter than a leaf,"\(^59\) but he denied having had any conscious political intention (direct reference to the bomb was forbidden at that time by occupation policy). He said the piece referred to the human body, and that it was quite sexual if viewed from a certain angle.\(^60\) Unfortunately, this side of *Cloud* is never seen; the piece always is represented in profile from the same angle, showing

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\(^{56}\) Hayashi Yasuo, interview by Okumura and Sakagami (2011).

\(^{57}\) Tezuka, 355.

\(^{58}\) Hayashi Yasuo, “Artist’s Statement,” China Ceramic Net, accessed November 2, 2013, http://artcn.net/worldstudio/asianpr/YasuoHayashi/index.htm. This website is no longer useable and may contain malware.

\(^{59}\) Hayashi Yasuo, interview by Yōko Horikawa, at Gallery 16, Kyoto, on July 18, 2014.

\(^{60}\) Ibid.
a muscular upper-body, head joined to fist, suggesting self-contained power or internalized rage.

![Hayashi Yasuo, *Cloud (Kumo)* (1948), coil built, black glaze, 33.7 x 33 x 27.5 cm. Mishō-ryū Nakayama Bunpokai. Source: Todate, *Fired Earth, Woven Bamboo* (Fig. 3), 17.](image)

In response to criticism from Uno that his organic-looking early pieces lacked straight lines and relied too heavily on curves, Hayashi began researching solutions in both Western and Eastern art. He investigated the use of geometric form in modern European art, and then discovered a motif from his own culture that resonated with his understanding of cubism. The *chokko-mon* pattern (fig. 8) was an elaborate arc-and-straight-line design used during the Kofun era (ca. 250–550 A.D.) to decorate funerary artifacts; it has been described as "rectangular panels cut by opposed diagonals, where the resulting quadrants are in turn reduced to numerous arcs by intersecting curving lines."61 This abstract design, which Hayashi has

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credited as the foundation of his artistic expression, possessed "geometrical and mathematical elements ... extremely important in figurative art." The incorporation of these elements is evident in *Human Body (Jintai, 1950)* (fig. 9).

![Image of arc-and-straight-line design.](Image)

Figure 8. The *chokko-mon* arc-and-straight-line design. *Source: J.E. Kidder, Early Japanese Art, 162, in Claudia Zancan, "Decorated Tombs in Southwest Japan," 71.*

![Image of Hayashi Yasuo's Human Body (Jintai) (1950).](Image)


swords), examples of which were found on Kyushu and Honshu.


63 Hayashi, “Artist’s Statement,” China Ceramic Net.
Art historian Yoshikawa Itsuji noted Human Body for its “complete integration of Western vision and the Japanese mode of expression.”

Yagi Kazuo (1918–1979)

In 1919, the year after Yagi’s birth, his father, Yagi Issō (1895–1974) joined with Kusube Yaichi and several other individualist potters to form Sekidōkai (the Red Clay Group). Their intension was to reform and elevate ceramics, which still suffered, along with the other traditional crafts, “under the strain of its inferior status in the reigning hierarchy.” Their efforts to end the exclusion of ceramics from the Teiten (Imperial Arts Exhibition) did contribute to systemic change and the addition of an art-craft category (bijutsu kôgei) to the national fine-art salon in 1927. The individualist potters’ actual ceramic innovations, however, were superficial (e.g., they gave their vessels romantic names) and challenged neither form nor function.

Yagi Issō was wedded to the vessel tradition and never wavered in his belief that pottery should be made for use, not just display.

Like his father, Yagi Kazuo trained at the Kyoto Institute of Ceramics where he also studied sculpture, at his father’s insistence, to get a better understanding of three-dimensional form. In 1939, “Yagi recalled that he felt a ‘strange thrill’ when

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65 Winther-Tamaki, 127.
Professor Numata recommended that he submit his work to the division of sculpture rather than crafts,” but his hopes were dashed when his father refused. Numata Ichiga (1873-1954) was a figurine maker who had studied sculpture in Paris with Rodin and ceramic processes at the Sèvres Porcelain Factory. He must have felt stymied by the constraints and inferior status imposed on ceramic art in Japan because he tried “to lead his students away from the conventional subjects of Japanese ceramic ornaments (okimono), which he dismissed as frivolous, and to introduce them to ceramic sculpture (tōchō) as a genre of serious art.”


Unfortunately, Numata did not benefit personally from his attempt to elevate the craft. He is known, not as a sculptor, but by the lesser title of figurine maker, and his work — mostly small, beautifully rendered animal figurines (fig.10) — has been relegated to the okimono category.

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66 Winther-Tamaki, 128.
67 Cort, “Japanese Encounters with Clay,” 120.
In 1940, following a brief period in the army, Yagi became involved with a group of avant-garde painters, exhibiting with them, exploring Western art, and "creating ceramics in the style of Brancusi or Moore." At the time, he struggled with doubts about whether he "was really 'a serious artist' and this sense of insecurity would be heightened by what others would say." Fearing imprisonment by the ultraconservative regime, he left the avant-garde group and reverted to the cover of classical forms. After the war, Yagi reconnected with Western art and founded Sōdeisha with Yamada Hikaru (1924–2001) and Suzuki Osamu (1926–2001). Yagi wanted to break away from the Kyoto style, so he stepped back seven centuries or more to Song dynasty Cizhou (Tz’u-chou) stoneware forms and thick white slip coating, into which he incised Picasso-like images using a Paul Klee-like line. He worked this way for several years until he became aware of the irrelevance of classical foreign models to his own time and place. The shocking originality that he saw in the ceramics by Picasso and Noguchi (fig. 11) inspired him to experiment with asymmetrical shapes and multiple or off-centered openings.

Yagi’s real breakthrough came when he freed himself from the dictates of the wheel and his father’s insistence on utility. In 1954, he assembled Mr. Samsa’s Walk (fig. 12) out of pieces he had thrown separately, thus reducing the wheel from its role as co-creator to that of a mere tool. When he stood his hoop-like structure on its side, Yagi eliminated any semblance of usefulness, thus turning his back on

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69 Ibid., 13.
another cornerstone of Japanese ceramics. As important as his iconic piece was to the development of avant-garde ceramics, however, it still came seven years after Hayashi's Cloud, the first ceramic objet.

Figure 11. Isamu Noguchi, *Tiger (Tora, 1952)*, unglazed stoneware, 25.7 x 37.5 x 13.7 cm. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. *Source*: Cort and Winther-Tamaki, 50.


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Throughout his life, Yagi seemed uncomfortable about his dual identity as an artist and a craftsman. He had deep ties to the world of craft and functional ceramics, but he was attracted to the exciting possibilities of personal expression as well as the higher status associated with the fine arts. He defended his submission to the sculpture division of the 1956 *Kyōten*, stating "I doubt whether the work I would like to submit would be recognized as craft, and I myself don't think of it as craft." However, Sasayama Tadayasu, a founding member of Shigaraki Sculpture Group who joined Sōdeisha in 1967, remembers Yagi saying “in a deprecating Kyoto dialect, ‘We just make bowls!’ When as a young man I argued that tea bowls were a classic product of authoritarianism, Yagi dismissed my argument, saying that ‘tea bowls are also craft!’ I could not contradict him.”

Yagi would often refer to himself as “just a tea-bowl maker” (*chawanya*). It is doubtful he chose this humble identification out of modesty or even false humility. The title possibly was assumed as a foil, thus signaling “self-pride in a ceramic artist being able to make such works when the common view is that potters are a rank below ‘real’ artists.” Winther-Tamaki suggests a similar interpretation: that *chawanaya* was used for contrast, as an invitation to “his viewers to savour the radical strides of his work which are apparent only if his work is classified with that

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70 *Kyoto Shimbun* (February 5, 1956), quoted in Cort, “Crawling Through Mud,” under “The issue of the potter’s identity.”
of such tea bowl makers as those depicted in the tale of *Musashi.*” The author, Yoshikawa Eiji, compares two archetypal characters: a skilled but nameless tea-bowl maker; and a wealthy master of classical arts. The tea bowl made by the latter suggested “something regal and arrogant” about its maker, as though he was “big and daring” and “didn’t regard other people as being quite human.” Yagi had read this popular story in his youth and later referred to it in an essay. He also had idolized the skill of a neighbor who resembled the humble potter in the story, so that character, or even the anonymous craftsmen of the *mingei* movement, might have been behind his choice of an epithet; given Yagi’s personality and multiple talents, it’s likely he also related to the “regal and arrogant” man as well.

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73 Winther-Tamaki, 137-38.
74 Ibid, 126-27.
75 Ibid, 127.
Aoyama Wahei, owner of Yūfuku Gallery in Tokyo, attributes much of Yagi’s personal success to the success of his group. The importance of the group is evident in all aspects of Japanese life; in fact, “to those discussing what they see as the peculiarly Japanese social structure, no feature is more salient than the idea of group orientation.” Nakane differentiates between groups based on attribute, such as age or profession, and groups formed within a specific institutional frame (meaning location or ba in Japanese), such as a school or company; she credits the institutional unit as “the basis of Japanese social organization” and the predominant element by which people in Japan identify and introduce themselves. A person’s primary group fulfills his need for belonging and social engagement; in return, he puts the goals of his group ahead of his personal agenda and devotes himself to maintaining group solidarity. Cohesion can be reinforced, Nakane says, by feelings of “rivalry against other similar groups.”

Art historian Reiko Tomii notes the remarkable proliferation of artists’ collectives in Japan since the late nineteenth century and credits collectivism as the force that propelled “the evolution of its art practices and institutions in the past

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76 Private communication with Aoyama Wahei, email, 2014.
79 Ibid., 178.
For Alicia Volk and other historians of Japanese modern art, “artists’
groups form the overarching structural framework upon which narratives of
historical change and development have been fashioned. They are the anchors in an
otherwise chaotic sea of empirical and ideological complexity.” Art collectives also
functioned as “strategic alliances (primarily) of artists motivated to seek and create
alternatives to the existing options, be they artistic/expressive or social/operational
or both.” For example, after the Ministry of Education established the Bunten
(Fine Arts Exhibition) in 1907, private exhibition societies (bijutsu dantai)
materialized in opposition or as an alternative to it. The role of these societies,
Tomii points out, was to “supplement, rather than supplant” the government salon,
and even those who appeared to oppose it emulated its system for jurying exhibits
and awarding prizes. In addition to hosting exhibits, these stable, formally
organized associations fulfilled the gamut of artists’ personal, professional and
social needs; they also provided training, cultivated patrons, and lobbied those in
power “for the vital significance of art to the national mission.”

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80 Tomii, 228.
81 Alicia Volk, "Authority, Autonomy, and the Early Taishō 'Avant-Garde'," in
Tomii and Yoshimoto, Positions: Asia Critique, 452.
82 Tomii, 232.
83 Modeled after the French salon, the Bunten (1907–18) exhibited only the fine
arts: Western style oil painting (yōga); quasi-traditional Japanese painting (Nihonga); and
sculpture. Ceramics and other crafts were exhibited in the Nōten (The Ministry of
Agriculture and Commerce Crafts Exhibition) which opened in 1913. Over the years, the
national fine-arts salon changed names several times: the Teiten (Imperial Fine Arts
Academy Exhibition, 1919–34), which expanded in 1927 to include an “art crafts”
section; Shin-Bunten (New Ministry of Education Fine Arts Exhibition, 1937–44); and
the Nitten (Japan Art Exhibition, 1946).
84 Tomii, 242. She likens the bijutsu dantai to chūkan dantai (in-between groups)
that functioned in politics, finance and other sectors.
85 Volk, 458.
artists’ groups formed mainly to secure work and a livelihood, "rather than to promote the war or pursue new artistic possibilities." ⁸⁶

Artist collectives certainly flourished amid the chaos that followed World War II, "springing up like bamboo shoots after the rain." ⁸⁷ Membership in some type of organization was still the norm, despite Allied Occupation policies promoting individualism or the fear among intellectuals of losing "subjective autonomy" (shutaisei). ⁸⁸ Artists still felt the need to be part of a collective for identity, camaraderie, protection, and support. Many of the postwar art groups came together quickly, then disbanded or merged with other like-minded groups. Unlike the stable bijutsu dantai, these loosely organized collectives (shūdan) tended to be short-lived, so the lifetime loyalty of a member was not a consideration, and some artists participated simultaneously in more than one shūdan.

Of the many ceramic groups that revived or formed right after the war, the two that were most significant to modern Japanese ceramic art emerged in Kyoto almost at the same time — first Shikōkai (1947–1957) and then Sōdeisha (1948–1998). The name “Shikōkai” (usually translated as the “Society of Four Harvests” or “Four Cultivations”) refers to group’s multi-disciplinary and even metaphysical aspirations, as articulated in its mission statement: “Let us cultivate in the four

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directions and eight quadrants; let us cultivate the realm of the fourth dimension."\(^{89}\) Sōdeisha (Crawling Through Mud Group) was a more down-to-earth group focused on ceramics, as its name suggests. The term “sōdei”, derived from a Chinese essay on ceramics, refers to a glaze scar resembling the trail left by an earthworm.\(^{90}\) The two organizations shared many commonalities, in addition to having offices on the same street. They were opposed to affiliating with mainstream ceramic associations or participating in their juried exhibitions. They also had progressive ideals in common, such as “freedom from regulation, the celebration of artistic individuality, and hunger for contemporaneity . . . with Euro-American modernism.”\(^{91}\)

According to Nakane, “independent similar groups within the same field of activity”\(^{92}\) are apt to compete rather than cooperate and often view each other with hostility, even when they share similar goals and activities.\(^{93}\) So the two factions of Kyoto’s avant-garde probably were rivals competing for leadership of the new ceramic movement. Initially, Shikōkai was the front-runner, but it disbanded after only ten years; Sōdeisha, meanwhile, steadily gained momentum, new members, and positive attention at home and abroad. In Cort’s opinion, it became “the centerpoint for the development of abstract, sculptural ceramics within Japan.”\(^{94}\)

\(^{89}\) From Shikōkai’s statement of purpose, quoted in Cort, “Japanese Encounters with Clay,” 147.
\(^{90}\) Cort, “Japanese Encounters with Clay,” 159; and Winther-Tamaki, 129.
\(^{91}\) Munroe, *Scream Against the Sky*, 132.
\(^{93}\) Ibid., 50.
Shikōkai

Shikōkai held its founding ceremony on November 17, 1947, and three months later opened its first exhibit, at the Asahi Art Gallery in Kyoto; the group hosted two more exhibits in 1948, at galleries in Osaka and Okayama, and participated in an avant-garde *ikebana* exhibition in Osaka. Shikōkai also displayed artwork by Kandinsky and Noguchi’s terra-cotta sculpture at its sixth exhibition, July 22–30, 1950, at Marubutsu Department Store in Kyoto. The source of this extraordinary momentum was the group’s founder and leader, 45-year-old Uno Sango (1902–1988), the fourth son of Uno Ninmatsu I. Uno Sango was a well-established potter in his own right who had been designated “holder of Kyoto skills” in ceramics by the government in 1942. The ten ceramic artists who initially joined him were much younger men who had grown up in the intellectual vacuum of wartime Japan and knew nothing about Western art. Uno wanted to “open their eyes to the world of plastic art other than their specialty.” Ultimately, he envisioned a group composed of artists from different disciplines who would work in their own areas of interest but come together as a group. He hoped not only for the synergistic effect such cross-fertilization might produce, but that exhibiting with painters and sculptors would help elevate modernist ceramics to a fine art form, above the level of traditional crafts.

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95 Cort, “Japanese Encounters with Clay,” 212. Incidentally, Noguchi studied ceramics with Uno Ninmatsu I for five months in 1931.
97 *Hayashi Yasuo*, interview by Okumura and Sakagami (2011).
The earliest and most pivotal interdisciplinary connection Uno created for the group was with the leaders of the avant-garde school of flower arranging (zen’ei ikebana). Teshigahara Sōfū, also a sculptor and painter, founded the Tokyo-based Sōgetsu School of ikebana in 1926. He modernized the traditional art form with his large-scale surrealist assemblages incorporating found objects and industrial materials, a style called “objet ikebana.” Mishōryū School master Nakayama Bunpo inspired Hayashi to create Cloud and other early pieces by requesting vases that were so avant-garde they would be hard to use for flower arrangement. The young ceramic artists reaped many benefits from their association with the ikebana masters: creative stimulation and an incentive to experiment, a market for their

Figure 13. Sogetsu School avant-garde ikebana arrangement. Teshigahara Sōfū, Sogetsu School: Best of Ikebana (fig. 58), 69.
unconventional ceramics, opportunities for their work to be seen in *ikebana* exhibitions, and credibility as avant-garde artists. The collaboration ended in the early 1950's as Shikōkai members matured and came to resent their subordinate status in the relationship and the casual treatment of their artwork.

In 1949, Uno acted on his goal to diversify Shikōkai and unilaterally invited painters, sculptors and a photographer to join the group. Unfortunately, his attempt backfired on two levels, causing internal and external discord. He failed to seek group consensus and did not adequately explain his intentions to the newcomers, so "neither the original young members, who persistently advocated avant-garde ceramic art, nor the new members fully understood why it was necessary for them to unite together as a group."98 Instead of producing creative synergy, the incorporation of other disciplines was a divisive act that weakened Shikōkai and contributed to its early demise.

Uno's authoritarian leadership style and mishandling of Shikōkai's diversification were not the only causes of the group's disintegration. Members' geographic dispersal and diluted loyalties undermined the group's solidarity. By the mid-1950's, many of the members lived too far from Kyoto to attend meetings regularly,99 and some also began participating in a new, more progressive group, the Contemporary Art Discussion Group (Gendai bijutsu kondankai, 1951-57), or Genbi for short, that was open to all Kansai area artists and craftsmen engaged in the

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99 Hayashi Yasuo, interview by Okumura and Sakagami (2011).
plastic arts. Economic difficulties stemming from the loss of the *ikebana* market forced Shikōkai members to look for new sources of income, and some turned to the world of crafts. Uno’s abandonment of avant-garde principles to help organize a mainstream craft association, Nihon kōgeikai (Japan Crafts Society), was the ultimate blow that broke the group apart. Shikōkai no longer had a mission that could unite its current members, nor the revolutionary ideology and zeal to attract new followers. In any event, Japan’s progressive art world was experiencing a “paradigmatic shift from *kindai* to *gendai* (modern to contemporary), moving away from the abstractions of high art for the poetry of quotidian existence.” Shikōkai’s exhibition-based style of collaboration was superseded by an action-oriented model that brought practitioners from the arts and technology together in an informal relationship based on creative activity. One of the earliest examples was Tokyo-based Jikken kōbō (Experimental Workshop, 1951–57), composed of visual artists, musicians, poets, a lighting designer and an engineer. Their theatrical productions confronted the materialism, consumerism and mechanization of life in postwar Japan. In the Osaka-Kobe area, Yoshihara Jirō founded Gutai (1954–1971), a name that means “concreteness,” reflecting the physicality of Gutai productions and members’ struggle to maintain individuality within community. In his famous action painting/performance piece *Challenging Mud* (*Doro ni idomu*, 1955), Shiraga Kazuo wrestled with mud, sand and rocks to express his opposition to

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100 Genbi was organized by Yoshihara Jirō, who later founded The Gutai Group, and avant-garde calligrapher Morita Shiryū, who helped establish the Bokujin-Kai (Ink Human Society) in 1952; Shiraga Kazuo, another future Gutai member, participated in Genbi as well.

101 Tomii, 234.

totalitarianism. He also articulated this idea in an essay, “The Formation of the
Individual,” stating, “the stronger a person’s will, the more they can resist external
forces.”

Sōdeisha

“We originally came together as a group because we felt that as individuals
we were isolated, but that together we could support and encourage each other... In
the early stages, we shared each other’s problems and, although we were in conflict
with each other at times, we were like a family,” Yagi wrote in 1977, on the occasion
of Sōdeisha’s thirtieth anniversary. This close-knit group was founded in 1948 by
Yagi and two younger associates, Yamada Hikaru and Suzuki Osamu. All were
Kyoto potters whose primary interest was in their material. Though they professed
avant-garde principles, Sōdeisha members were at first too enmeshed in Kyoto’s
ceramic establishment to easily break away from its aesthetic conventions,
dependence on the wheel, and adherence to the cardinal rule of function. They
eventually recognized the limitations of applying modern surface designs to foreign
historical models and sought more expressive possibilities. Inspired by Picasso’s
and Noguchi’s asymmetrical hand-built forms, they started manipulating their
vessels into irregular shapes with multiple and/or off-centered openings. Then, in

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103 Tiampo, 386. Shiraga’s essay, accompanied by photographs of his
performance, was published in the fourth issue of the group’s journal Gutai.
104 Australian Gallery Directors’ Council, Sōdeisha: Avant-Garde Japanese
Ceramics (n.p.: Australian Gallery Directors Council, 1979), exhibition catalog, 63.
105 Matsui Yoshisuke and Kanō Tetsuo also were founding members, but they
resigned in in 1949. Previously, they were members of the Young Pottery-makers’
Collective (Seinen Sakutōka Shūdan) with Yagi, Yamada and Suzuki.
1954, Yagi constructed a series of pieces, the most memorable of which was *Mr. Samsa's Walk*, that launched the group in a bold new direction. Sōdeisha members also rejected ornamentation and the use of beautiful glazes, even leaving much of their work unglazed. Their departure from accepted standards and practices was, in Louise Cort’s view, the group’s “central contribution to the liberation of modern Japanese ceramic form.”

According to Faulkner, Sōdeisha achieved national recognition in 1959 when its members’ work was “given pride of place” among the avant-garde pieces displayed in a contemporary ceramics exhibition at the Tokyo National Museum of Modern Art. Sōdeisha’s influence expanded steadily due to members’ collective and individual efforts maintaining an ambitious exhibition schedule. In its first seventeen years, Sōdeisha hosted twenty-eight group exhibitions, holding one


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107 Faulkner, 65.
every year at the Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art and usually another at a gallery in Tokyo. In addition, Yagi, Suzuki, and Yamada exhibited individually and often won prizes at national and international competitions. Sōdeisha members were successful in the commercialized art market as well, due to their group’s clear identity and Yagi’s forceful personality. Despite its growth, Sōdeisha remained unified by its core of original members; it included twenty ceramic artists by 1960. Hayashi even joined in 1962, staying with the group until 1977. Although Yagi died in 1979, Sōdeisha carried on until 1998, when it disbanded after its fiftieth exhibition.
SOCIAL CONFORMITY AND CONNECTEDNESS

In the traditional society of Gojōzaka, conformity would have been the norm, a valued attribute that contributed to social compatibility and the maintenance of community, whereas idiosyncratic or individualistic behaviors would not have been welcomed as they weakened group unity. Moeran points out that “when a potter is accused of not making a traditionally shaped teacup, he is really being accused of stepping out of line from the rest of the pottery households and attempting to go things alone.” Hayashi’s independent nature and lack of training in ceramics set him apart and deprived him of opportunities that would have come from personal connections within the ceramic system. As the first one to “step out of line” with Cloud, he also must have borne the brunt of the establishment’s condemnation. In fact, his unorthodox pieces “were treated like junk and bombarded with humiliating comments at the community kiln.” Yagi, on the other hand, was well connected to the ceramic community and initially more compliant with its norms, so his advancement was assured. By the time he produced Mr. Samsa’s Walk in 1954, modernist ceramics already had gained some degree of acceptance, largely due to the popularity of the Picasso exhibitions. Avant-garde pieces had even been included in the 1950 exhibit of Japanese ceramics at Musée Cernuschi in Paris, and art critics at home were debating how to evaluate such unconventional work.

While both artists were part of Kyoto’s avant-garde circle, Yagi’s affiliation was more moderate and thus better tolerated than Hayashi’s involvement.

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109 Hayashi, interview by Okumura and Sakagami.
Shikōkai’s interdisciplinary ventures (mild when compared to those of Jikken kōbō and Gutai) were too advanced for Kyoto’s conservative ceramics establishment which considered mixing with other media a serious breach of custom. Also, Shikōkai’s desire to elevate ceramic art above the level of craft must have demeaned the status of the traditional craftsmen and caused additional bad feelings in the community. Arrogance is detested in Japan, Lebra says, because it is perceived as “looking down on others...and sometimes elicits retaliation by the person who suffers a loss of face.”110

110 Lebra, 128.
Emphasis on rank in that vertically structured society injected fierce competition into every situation, creating a breeding ground for contention within which like-minded individuals and groups engaged in a continuous struggle for primacy. The rating of organizations occurs on all levels of society (e.g., government ministries, companies in the same field, or households in a village), and it usually is based on a group’s longevity, with the oldest organization awarded the highest rank of *ichi-ryū* (first-rate). This means that Shikōkai initially would have had a higher rank than Sōdeisha due to its earlier establishment in Kyoto; and it would have been difficult for Sōdeisha to reverse the order, because once rank was determined, it customarily was maintained.¹¹¹ A group could improve its status, however, “through the acquisition of additional political and economic power and influence,”¹¹² which suggests that Sōdeisha might have been motivated to acquire those game-changing assets in order to improve its position in the competitive ceramic world.

Understandably, Sōdeisha members would have been reluctant to promote a rival group because, as Nakane points out, the rank of a group had a significant effect on the status of its individual members, and those belonging to a high ranked group tended to look down on members of the lower ranked group.¹¹³ So when Suzuki Osamu was interviewed for *Bijutsu kōgei* magazine and was asked if there were any

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¹¹² Ibid., 88.
¹¹³ Ibid., 109.
other groups making ceramic *objets,* he reportedly said that there were none.¹¹⁴ Meanwhile, Shikōkai still existed and had an office down the street from Sōdeisha’s office.

The pressure for higher rank that drove similar groups to compete also impelled individuals of the same status (*dōryō*) to try to surpass each other and attain the privileges of a higher rating. This was the case in Kyōto, where only those at the peak of the pecking order had the right to strut "proudly up and down the middle of the sloping lanes in the potters’ quarter, while others kept to the side."¹¹⁵ It was a well-known fact that bitter rivalry existed between top-ranked ceramic masters Kiyomizu Rokubei VI (1901-1980) and Kusube Yaichi (1897-1984): "When a journalist went over to one’s house, it was forewarned that the other’s name must never be mentioned. Such was the tense artistic air in Kyōto in the 1930s to the 1950s."¹¹⁶ Yagi’s family lived next-door to the Rokubei household, and his father was Kusube’s former schoolmate and colleague in Sekidōkai. The contentious relationship of the two masters easily could have influenced Yagi’s ideas about how rivals interacted.

As a young man, Yagi cared about what others thought of him.¹¹⁷ Desiring recognition and status, he longed to have work accepted in the government salon so he could “put on the face of an artist when walking up and down Gojozaka... Until

¹¹⁴ Hayashi Yasuo, interview by Horikawa (2014).
¹¹⁵ Cort, “Crawling Through Mud,” under “Context.”
then I had not walked in the center of the road but stayed to the side." 118 Society’s emphasis on rank and the high stakes of Kyoto’s competitive ceramic scene intensified Yagi’s ambitious tendencies, I argue, as did the pressure of family expectations and the size of his fathers’ footprint. In addition, I suspect Yagi needed to assuage insecurities that lingered from his early difficulties as a student in art classes and rejection by salon juries. His self-critical nature made him judge himself as harshly as he judged others, with his “cold and penetrating eye . . . always directed inward on himself as well as toward the outside world.”119

Yagi’s competitive tendencies surfaced, it seems, even when he was trying to be helpful. For instance, in 1953, Yagi helped Tsuji Shindō put test pieces into the kiln when the sculptor was still new to ceramics. Tsuji related how Yagi loaded his own work and then he “put mine into the least-desirable space at the top of the chamber.”120 Yagi also was notorious for his sharp tongue and penchant for belittling opponents in public, especially when drinking. Uchiyama Takeo, director emeritus of Kyoto’s National Museum of Modern Art, had been part of Yagi’s social group in his youth and had not only witnessed Yagi’s ability to “hurt the other person’s feelings with his inner claws,”121 but had experienced it himself: “It was easy enough listening with interest as he attacked someone else. . . However, it

wasn’t much fun when his claws were directed at me.”

Yagi even bragged in his memoirs about enjoying the sport and being able to maintain the right balance between his own gratification and his adversary’s pain.

We often have fun trying to hurt each other just a little. You couldn’t inflict too much pain because it could mean the end of the friendship. So, rather than being too cruel we’d just be a little bit cruel while also licking the wounds inflicted on us. There is a certain creativity in this activity and I must say it can become an art form.

Yagi obviously had the ability to disable an adversary, but he would have had to rely on indirect tactics, perhaps innuendo or the strategic placement of gossip, since open display of hostility was taboo. Moeran noted the prevalence and power of gossip “in an art world which takes on its organizational form primarily as a result of networks and personal connections.” He acknowledged the common use of gossip as a way to communicate in private what can’t be stated in public, but he affirmed that “some gossip is undoubtedly malicious.”

Even a nonverbal signal as subtle as a dismissive twist of the lips is an effective way to discredit someone in a society where “people are inordinately sensitive receptors of social stimuli.” This finely tuned awareness of others’ opinions, Lebra says, when combined with a typically high level of emotional vulnerability, makes wounding people an easy and “effective strategy for social sanction. When Ego wants to punish Alter, all he has to do is to

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122 Ibid., 12-13.
125 Lebra, Japanese Patterns of Behavior, 48.
show his or someone else’s displeasure, to allude to Alter’s misbehavior, or more severely, to embarrass Alter in front of others.”

Uchiyama observed that Yagi "enjoyed covering his traces, rarely 'revealing his sources.'" When asked which artists helped him break away from utilitarian ceramics, he credited Noguchi and Picasso, as well as the abstract sculpture of Tsuji Shindō. Yagi had to have been aware of Hayashi’s sculptural work in late 1940 and early 1950, when he himself was searching for a new direction, but he never would mention Hayashi as one of his sources. That is not surprising, since Yagi probably wouldn’t credit a rival, especially someone ten years his junior.

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128 Ibid., 15.
129 What did seem surprising was the absence of any sign of relationship between Hayashi and Yagi at the start of their careers. They worked in such proximity and undoubtedly participated in some of the same avant-garde events. Were they never heard discussing each other’s work, or debating their divergent views on art and ceramics? Aoyama Wahei noted an equally curious absence of interaction between two of Yagi’s former students, Akiyama Yo and Takiguchi Kazuo, saying “Kyoto potters are usually a closely knit bunch, and the lack of connection is somewhat puzzling.” Aoyama Wahei, Chapter 2: "Takiguchi Kazuo and Akiyama Yo," *Kyoto — To Travel the Past, In Search of the New* (December 17, 2004), accessed February 22, 2016, http://www.e-yakimono.net/html/jcn-3.html.
"Hayashi has never made the splash in Japan that Yagi Kazuo . . . and Suzuki Osamu have," claim Frederick Baekland, Japanese ceramics connoisseur, and Robert Moes, former head of the Brooklyn Museum Asian Art Department.130 “Five of the six prizes he won from 1950–86 have been at foreign international ceramics exhibitions . . . and his work is better represented in foreign than in Japanese museums.” This statement regarding Hayashi’s lack of recognition in Japan comprises the first public acknowledgement of an issue the artist has wrestled with for decades in private.

Hayashi suspects that the suppression of his career at home stemmed from the positive reception his piece Human Body received in the 1950 Exposition d’Art Japonais at Musée Cernuschi in Paris.131 This was the first exhibit of Japanese art to be held abroad since before the war, and thus it was an important opportunity for the nation to regain international prestige.132 Koyama Fujio, then curator of ceramics at the Tokyo National Museum, initiated a national open competition in Japan to attract as broad a spectrum of potters as possible, not only those connected to the government sponsored exhibition, major schools and associations, but members of avant-garde groups as well as unaffiliated potters. He and Serge Elisséeff, assistant director of the Cernuschi Museum, used a merit-based process to

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131 Hayashi Yasuo, interview by Horikawa (2014).
132 *Exposition d'Art Japonais* was at the Musée Cernuschi November 28, 1950–March 1951; in Vallauris July–September 1951; and in Kamakura February–March 1952.
choose forty-nine artists, including a few who were young and unknown, which surprised even the media:

Kyoto newspapers reported with astonishment that the judges had not simply focused on the work of the leading figures in the Kyoto ceramics world, as would be expected for a comparable exhibition in Japan, but instead had chosen broadly from Kyoto’s ‘great kilns, middle kilns, and new kilns.’

Koyama anticipated that this democratic process would displease the elders, so he “was careful to credit Elisséeff (the outsider who could dare to defy convention) with sole responsibility for the selection.”

Yoshikawa Itsuji accompanied the exhibition to France and reviewed it for the French journal *Art d’aujourd’hui*. He and the French art critics praised Noguchi, Tomimoto Kenkichi, Uno Sango, and Hayashi for being "focused on the art, not the techniques,” and they only noted the technically excellent pieces of the traditional masters for their lack of flexibility and spirit. In Japan, where status surpasses merit, such unorthodox evaluations never would have been published. Anyone who is not top rank “rarely has a chance to enjoy public appraisal and prestige,” instead, an inferior, like Hayashi, is expected to “support and protect the superior’s status even at the cost of his own status” or incur retaliation. When Yoshikawa returned to Japan and reported on *Exposition d’Art Japonais* at a ceramics

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133 *Kyoto Shinbun* (1 August 1950), quoted in Cort, “Japanese Encounters with Clay,” 105.


135 Hayashi Yasuo, interview by Okumura and Sakagami (2011).

136 Nakane, 68.

137 Ibid., 49.

138 Lebra, *Japanese Patterns of Behavior*, 81. Lebra illustrates this point with a story from the popular novel *Shiroi Kyotō* in which a surgeon named Zaizen “allows his own professional reputation to rise beyond that of” his department head who then seeks revenge for this humiliation “by plotting to bar Zaizen as his successor.”
conference, "he was surrounded and attacked by the elders . . . because their own work didn't get attention."\(^{139}\) Fearing loss of face, the elders suppressed all mention of the exhibition in the Japanese media.

Hayashi’s punishment for his unseemly success appears to have begun with his exclusion from the 1951 exhibit of contemporary Japanese ceramics held in Faenza, Italy. It too was curated by Koyama, who included the Sōdeisha artists but not Hayashi, despite — or because of — Hayashi’s success in Paris (and possibly Koyama’s wish to avoid conflict). The influence of politics and factionalism on the selection or exclusion of Japanese craftsmen for foreign exhibitions in the 1950’s seems to have been a fairly common phenomenon. Favoritism might have been a factor in the exclusion of Tomimoto Kenkichi and certain other major ceramic artists from the 1956–63 American exhibition of Japanese craft, *Japanese Life Culture*, curated by Koyama as well. Either factionalism or interpersonal conflict motivated Rosanjin to withdraw from a 1956 exhibit at the Chicago Art Institute when he found out that Tomimoto was participating.\(^{140}\)

By the 1970’s, Hayashi’s work was earning recognition abroad and major awards in international ceramic competitions. In 1972, he was awarded First Prize at the *International Competition of Contemporary Artistic Ceramics* in Faenza, Italy; First Prize at the *International Ceramics '73*, University of Calgary, Canada; Grand Prix d’Honneur in the 1974 *Biennale Internationale de Céramique d’Art de Vallauris*, France, and Médaille d’Or in the 1986 Biennale; and Grand Prémio in the 1987

\(^{139}\) Hayashi Yasuo, interview by Okumura and Sakagami (2011).

\(^{140}\) Jones, 263–66.
Bienal Internacional de Óbidos, in Portugal. In Japan, between the years 1958 and 1985, he had “twenty-five one-man shows in Tokyo, Kyoto and Osaka, and he was asked to execute at least eight large-scale public commissions.”\textsuperscript{141} Kimura Shigenobu, art director of Kobe’s National Museum, classified Hayashi’s work as ceramic sculpture in the mode of Tsuji Shindō and said Hayashi’s pieces were “subtle in design especially in the combination of concave and convex portions.”\textsuperscript{142} Finally, in 1994, Hayashi was honored with the Kyo-ten Prize at the Kyoto City Exhibition. However, Hayashi still receives little or no credit, at home or abroad, for his early, and most important, innovations—being the first in Japan to create ceramic \textit{objets}, and devising a native system for organizing space based on the Kofun era \textit{chokkomon} design. Hayashi certainly didn’t get the attention that the Japanese-American sculptor Isamu Noguchi received for exploring his Japanese heritage; Noguchi’s use of Kofun-era \textit{haniwa} figures is noted routinely in discussions of his abstract ceramics and his influence on Yagi and other young Japanese potters who wanted to create work based on their own culture. As early as 1950, Hayashi’s abstract ceramic sculptures demonstrated his successful synthesis of ancient and modern, Eastern and Western elements. That same year, Yagi was still concerned with the surface of his vessels and how to harmonize “the painting themes of modern French artists such as Picasso and Klee with the \textit{shibui}\textsuperscript{143} flavor of the Japanese potter’s wheel.”\textsuperscript{144}

\textsuperscript{141} Baekland and Moes, \textit{Modern Japanese Ceramics in American Collections}, 189.  
\textsuperscript{143} The online dictionary \textit{Jisho} defines \textit{shibui} as “astringent” (tart like the taste of an unripe persimmon) or “austere; elegant (and unobtrusive).” \url{http://jisho.org}. 

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In Japan, one is not supposed to complain about being slighted or treated unjustly. Resignation (akirame) seems to be the expected response, the wise and mature attitude that “provides a tension-reducing alternative to the loser in a culture obsessed with success and status-elevation.”\textsuperscript{145} Hayashi abided by this norm during the early days of his career, believing (rather naively) that devotion to his art ultimately would be rewarded. He eventually grew frustrated by his lack of recognition in Japan and the establishment’s expectation that he sacrifice himself for the good of the field. As a youth during the war, he had been willing to do that for his country, but not this time. “My only way to protest was through my work,” Hayashi said, “by creating my work with all my soul.”\textsuperscript{146}

Yagi’s rise to prominence was enabled by the ceramic establishment, as was Hayashi’s marginalization. Yagi was canonized in the 1970’s by Inui Yoshiaki, a powerful figure in academic and cultural circles who was a professor at Kyoto University and curator at National Museum of Modern Art. According to Winther-Tamaki, Inui’s monographs and catalogue essays framed Yagi’s work as the exemplification of Japanese ceramics’ distinctive flavor, à la Nihonjinron (discourse of Japanese people), a long-standing national discussion aimed at identifying characteristics unique to the Japanese people and culture. Inui deemphasized Yagi’s modernist sculpture (too close to Western art) and stressed his connection to the

\textsuperscript{144} Asahi Shimbun, 28 March 1950, quoted in Cort, “Japanese Encounters with Clay,” 161.
\textsuperscript{145} Lebra, 254.
\textsuperscript{146} Private communication with Hayashi, September 23, 2014.
“myths and traditions of the pottery world” and crafts,\textsuperscript{147} even though Yagi consciously avoided “the chance effects of the kiln (yōhen), the spontaneous blisters and blushes loved by Japanese tea masters.”\textsuperscript{148} The Nihonjinron discourse of the 1970’s was designed to highlight cultural and racial qualities that would “explain and justify the nation’s financial competitiveness.”\textsuperscript{149} During the 1950’s, there had been a similar surge of cultural nationalism, though the intention then was to fend off Western dominance. In both instances, the methods and currency were the same—the conceptualization, preservation and promotion of “traditional” crafts, to symbolize the essence of Japanese culture. The government “hammered craft firmly into the box of ‘tradition’,”\textsuperscript{150} and encouraged potters and other craft artists “not to achieve innovation or express artistic ideas but to preserve ‘traditional’ techniques.”\textsuperscript{151}

For a few decades after the war, the boundary separating avant-garde art and craft remained permeable, and ceramics were included with the fine art media in multi-disciplinary exhibitions that focused on modernism rather than genre or media. For instance, during the 1950’s and 1960’s, Hayashi participated in such nonspecific shows as Ashiya Municipal Exhibition, Kyoto’s Exhibition of Avant-Garde Artists, Modern Art Fair in Kobe and Osaka, Exhibition of Non-Figurative Art in Osaka, Exhibition of Excellent Works of Contemporary Art in Kyoto, and Selected Art Exhibition by Mainichi Newspapers in Kyoto. By the 1970’s, however, the schism

\textsuperscript{147} Winther-Tamaki, 137.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{149} Winther-Tamaki, 137.
\textsuperscript{150} Jones, 22.
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid., 282.
between modern art and Japan’s traditional art forms had deepened once more. Ceramic art was forced back into the craft category and again restricted to exhibits devoted to ceramics or shows featuring the decorative or applied arts and crafts. Ceramics, no matter how avant-garde or abstract, were excluded from contemporary art exhibits which favored the usual fine art media, plus work made from lightbulbs, money, skin, mud, etc. -- every material except clay.

The art establishment’s renewed segregation of art and craft must have frustrated Hayashi and others who had struggled to elevate their medium and expand exhibit opportunities. Yagi, on the other hand, was able to operate on both sides of the divide. In 1962, he began producing a line of tableware with Yamada Hikaru under the name Mon kōbō (Corner Workshop), and he often referred to himself as “just a tea-bowl maker;” all the while creating and being celebrated for his avant-garde ceramic sculpture. Having Mr. Samsa’s Walk and his other kiln-fired objets promoted as “emblems of national identity”152 only enhanced his status.

152 Winther-Tamaki, 136.
CONCLUSION

The spirit of liberation that occupied Japan right after the war fostered hope and progressive thinking. It emboldened young ceramic artists to assume control of their own affairs and defy convention, which ultimately led to a new direction in kiln-fired clay. Though initially scorned by the conservative establishment, the innovative work of Hayashi Yasuo and Yagi Kazuo developed into the field of nonfunctional ceramic art, for which Yagi usually receives sole credit. Meanwhile, Hayashi, the intrepid trailblazer, is barely recognized, and references to him in the literature are hard to find, despite his monumental body of work and a career that spans seven decades.

Hayashi attributes the suppression of his career to his youthful success in Japan’s first postwar international art exhibition, at Musée Cernuschi. The praise he, the youngest artist, received in France, was considered politically incorrect in Japan, and it undoubtedly provoked resentment among the senior masters, leading to his exclusion from subsequent domestic and international exhibitions. However, the persistence of Hayashi’s professional difficulties in Japan suggests the involvement of additional elements, the first being his basic incongruence with the elitist ceramic culture. In that reactionary, convention-bound world, a nonconforming individualist was certain to be estranged, especially someone lacking pedigree, social support, or formal training. Yagi, on the other hand, was more in harmony with his society and

\[153 \text{ Okumura, 144. More than 470 of Hayashi’s pieces were accounted for in 1998. The number would be larger today, since Hayashi is still producing work.}\]
blessed with the attributes for success. He had been well trained in ceramics, had a strong network of family and community ties, and possessed a forceful personality and good social skills.

Belonging to a group was, and still is, the norm in Japan, proof of an individual's compliance and social acceptability. In addition to fulfilling members' personal, social and professional needs, the group was an important source of identity, so its collective rank and reputation really mattered. Of the two avant-garde ceramic groups that formed in postwar Kyoto, Shikōkai was the more blatantly anti-establishment. After it disbanded, Hayashi struggled for several years without group support. The fact that he joined Sōdeisha indicates the level of desperation he must have felt as an unaffiliated artist. Unlike Shikōkai, down-to-earth Sōdeisha confined its activism to pushing the limits of clay, so it was able to maintain good relations with the ceramic community. The group's longevity and consistent identity aided members' efforts to achieve success in the marketplace.

The most injurious element in Hayashi's situation, I contend, was the ubiquitous system of rating that activated rivalry and injected competition into every activity and situation in Japan. The desire for top rank drove ambitious Yagi to exploit Hayashi's vulnerability as an outsider. The suppression of Hayashi's career by the establishment gave Yagi a clear path to ascendancy in the field and the title of founder of nonfunctional ceramics. His legacy was guaranteed in the 1970's when his work and process were made to symbolize the uniqueness and superiority of Japan's culture.
The government's privileging of traditional crafts in the 1950's had a significant and lasting effect on artists producing sculptural ceramics. Creative originality, instead of being an asset, rendered them ineligible for the highest rank in ceramics—Living National Treasure status, reserved for potters who replicated traditional techniques and who participated in the *Japanese Traditional Arts and Crafts Exhibition (Nihon dento kogeiten)*.\(^{154}\) Avant-garde ceramicists like Hayashi soon were excluded as well from the world of contemporary art and denied access to its exhibitions because their work was made of fired clay and thus defined as craft.

Looking beyond the personal perspective of these artists to a broader view of the field, many questions and possible topics for research come to mind. For instance, how have viewers’ perceptions of Japanese visual culture been affected by the separation of art and craft and the segregation of important artists such as Akiyama Yo (b. 1953), Nakamura Kimpei (b. 1935), or Fukami Sueharu (b. 1947), whose work is exhibited in a separate craft gallery at Tokyo's National Museum of Modern Art?

How has the exclusion of ceramic art from the world of contemporary art affected young practitioners? Ueda Jumpei (b. 1978), 2005 MFA graduate from Kyoto City University of Arts, feels ceramics is at the bottom of the Japanese art world’s invisible hierarchy, and he wonders “how many artists’ identities are formed in response to that.”\textsuperscript{155} Aono Chia (b. 1974), who received her MFA in 1999 from Tama Art University, Tokyo, says she uses clay because she enjoys the process, “but that doesn’t mean that I want the finished product to be limited to being viewed only within the realm of ‘ceramic art.’”\textsuperscript{156} From an art historical perspective, how has the segregation of this medium skewed current and future scholarship? Art historian


\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., 17.
Meghen Jones believes it has altered the discourse on modern Japanese art.

“Scholars and curators of modern Japanese art history have tended not to consider the role of craft, including ceramics, as intrinsic to” its history. This omission “from the majority of histories and institutions of modern art,” Jones claims, “perpetuates classification systems initiated in the late nineteenth century.”  

The starting point of this thesis is the inception of abstract, nonfunctional ceramics in Japan, with a focus on the two young men who were responsible for its origination. The backdrop for their story is the deeply stratified, convention-bound world of ceramics whose constraints loosened just enough right after the war for the avant-garde movement to take root. This study explores the social norms that advantaged one artist over another, and the pressures that fostered rivalry among groups and individuals. It also depicts some of the dichotomies that divided Japan’s art world at that time (e.g., the classification of art and craft; original expression versus technical proficiency), and international art trends that impacted Japan’s avant-garde (e.g., the shift from modern to contemporary art). Ultimately, it is hoped this paper reveals the complexity of the situation within which Hayashi Yasuo and Yagi Kazuo introduced abstract nonfunctional ceramics and establishes the idea that the emergence of this art form was more complicated than has been thought.

\[^{157}\text{Jones, 21-22.}\]


VITA

Hartford, Connecticut was where I was born. I earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Publications and Art at Simmons College in Boston, Massachusetts, while also attending the Museum School of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. In New York City, I worked as an Editorial Assistant in the Children’s Book Department at W.W. Norton Publishing Company; Art Editor for Children’s Books at E.P. Dutton Publishing Company; and Manager of the Book Review Department at R.R. Bowker’s *School Library Journal*, while taking art classes at the New School for Social Research and the Art Students’ League. In Lexington, Kentucky, I earned a Master of Arts Degree from the University of Kentucky, College of Communication, while working as Communications and Media Specialist at the University of Kentucky Markey Cancer Center, and then as Communications and Public Information Specialist at the Kentucky Department for Public Health, Adult Health Branch. I earned a Master of Fine Arts Degree at the University of Kentucky, College of Fine Arts; served for a semester as Instructor of Introduction to Art at Bluegrass Community and Technical College, Lawrenceburg Branch, and for a semester as a University of Kentucky Teaching Assistant for Foundations in Art. I also served as Fiber Studio Instructor at the University of Kentucky for several semesters, while working on a Master of Arts Degree in Art History.

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