

Art in the Garden

Kizuna: The Rebirth Of Mashiko Ceramics

Summer 2015



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This exhibition brought together the work of 13 Mashiko artists whose styles range from traditional to contemporary including masterworks by the great Living National Treasure artists Shoji Hamada, and his protégé Tatsuzo Shimaoka. A remarkable collection of Shimaoka's work was generously donated to the Garden by his daughter Yoshiko Fudeya in 2014.

At the heart of the exhibition was the work of 11 contemporary potters from Mashiko. With so much lost in the 2011 earthquake, much soul searching (and fundraising) was required to restore their work, their town and their spirit. Former students and friends from around the world sent donations to Mashiko, and in 2013 the MCAA opened its doors as a cooperative center for the promotion and sale of work by Mashiko artists and potters.

THE SIMPLE BEAUTY OF MASHIKO

Mashiko, Japan, is a small town nestled in the mountains three hours north of Tokyo. It is known worldwide for its folk pottery, known as *Mashiko-yaki*, dating back to the 19th century when simple, functional wares were made for everyday use. In the 1920s, Mashiko changed from a manufacturing center to an artists' haven when potter Shoji Hamada (1894-1978) arrived to work with local potters, transforming their work into pieces that were both functional and beautiful. Hamada's belief in the power of traditional folk craft brought the world's attention to the value of work done unselfconsciously by unknown craftsmen, though his work nonetheless reflected the strong sense of individuality that is a part of the modern era. Inspired by philosopher and writer Soetsu Yanagi, Hamada was one of the founders of the *Mingei* (People's Art) movement in the 1920s and 30s, and he is perhaps the world's most famous potter.

A generation later, his apprentice, Tatsuzo Shimaoka (1919-2007), was the second Mashiko potter to gain international acclaim. Inspired by the Mingei movement, he moved to Mashiko to study with Hamada, who encouraged him to find his own path. The son of a *kumihimo* cord maker, he found new meaning in the rope patterns and techniques of ancient Jomon pottery, for which he received his designation as a Living National Treasure in 1997. Both Hamada and Shimaoka shared their craft and their ideals generously with international students who traveled to Mashiko to study.

KIZUNA

Kizuna is a phrase often repeated in Japan since the devastating earthquake and tsunami of 2011. Loosely translated as "the bonds between people," it means that we are all part of one family and need each other's help in order to survive both physically and emotionally. Such was the case in Mashiko, where potters' studios, kilns, and priceless works were destroyed. The earthquake of 2011 hit Mashiko hard, destroying Hamada's kiln and many priceless pieces, as well as the kilns and work of many of the potters who continue to work in Mashiko today.

"Kizuna became the rallying cry in Japan following the earthquake," said Diane Durston, the Arlene Schnitzer Curator of Culture, Art and Education. "It reminded everyone that only by working together could they rebuild their homes and their lives. Money poured in not only from elsewhere in Japan, but from the many artists and potters abroad who had studied with Living National Treasures Shoji Hamada and Tatsuzo Shimaoka in Mashiko."



This exhibition celebrates not only the strength of the ties that bind potters in this one pottery town in Japan, but the ties that bind across oceans and which brought like-minded artists to each other's rescue.

DIANE DURSTON,
THE ARLENE SCHNITZER
CURATOR OF CULTURE,
ART AND EDUCATION



This exhibition is held in collaboration with the MCAA as well as the Oregon Potters' Association, who featured Mashiko artists in their annual Ceramic Showcase in May 2015.

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📷 All Photos: Jonathan Ley

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