

# Art in the Garden

Hosokawa Morihiro:  
The Art of Life, a Rebirth in Clay

Spring 2017



# Hosokawa Morihiro: The Art of Life, a Rebirth in Clay

I find making pottery is a bit like Zen meditation. My mind concentrates on the task at hand, although I can't say I become completely detached from everyday life. When working with forces that have always existed, like clay and fire, I feel reduced to something insignificant, and yet completely at ease with myself.

H O S O K A W A M O R I H I R O



Are the words above those of a humble potter? Or are they those of a 20th-century Japanese prime minister and 18th generation descendant of a *daimyo* family of feudal lords that dates back to the 14th century? Remarkably, they are one and the same.

In celebration of the Grand Opening of the Cultural Village, Art in the Garden presented a glimpse into the creative life and work of former Prime Minister Hosokawa Morihiro, who left a career in politics behind in 1998 and retired at the age of 60 to Yugawara, a small coastal town in Kanagawa southwest of Tokyo.

With 600 years of family history as warriors, tea masters, calligraphers, and poets behind him, this modest Renaissance man spent a year and a half reinventing his life starting with a traditional apprenticeship with renowned Nara potter Tsujimura Shiro. Today Hosokawa practices the art of life—tending his vegetable garden, writing Zen inscriptions in calligraphy, and spending time in his studio where he makes the simple ceramic tea bowls, jars and rustic Buddhist sculptures that express an inner life of modesty and compassion, far removed from the battlefield of modern politics.

“My main interest is pottery for the tea ceremony. In fact, the only thing I make is bowls used for drinking matcha green tea. Cups and bowls made in other countries are symmetric all around, but traditional Japanese tea bowls are often a little irregular in shape, and they may have scorch marks or some

other ‘imperfection.’ It’s important that each bowl have its own personality. That’s what makes them fascinating.”

H O S O K A W A M O R I H I R O

As a descendant of some of the daimyo tea masters of centuries past, he follows his own Way of Tea in a uniquely-designed teahouse cum tree house that defies conventional practice. He is guided on the new path by his admiration for some of the great artists and original thinkers of the past—Chojiro (1516-1592), the first generation in the Raku family of potters, and Hon’ami Koetsu (1558-1637), the revered potter, lacquer artist, calligrapher, and founder of an innovative artists’ colony in Kyoto whose originality and creativity moved Hosokawa to reinvent his



own life four hundred years later. Today, this accomplished artist, calligrapher, painter, and poet expresses a love of simplicity and originality in his work and in his life.

His inheritance of the samurai's respect for *Bunbu-Ryodo*, the Twofold Path of Pen and Sword, reveals itself subtly in his expressions, for example that “being cultured means being sympathetic” and “modesty is the virtue of all virtues.” Reflecting the spirit of Zen Buddhism and of Bushido, the warrior's code of honor, he embraces the simple art of life with ideals that have meaning for us today, beyond borders and time.

#### ONE EXHIBITION, TWO LOCATIONS

The Way of Tea plays a primary role in the cultural programs of the Portland Japanese Garden and we are honored to have this exhibition of work by former Prime Minister Hosokawa to open the new Cultural Village.

As the first Art in the Garden exhibition in the new facilities, *Hosokawa Morihiro: The Art of Life, A Rebirth in*

*Clay* took place in both the Pavilion Gallery and the new Tanabe Gallery, located in the Jordan Schnitzer Japanese Arts Learning Center.

#### IN THE TANABE

A celebration of seasonality was on view in the Tanabe Gallery with seven seasonal pairings of calligraphy scrolls and ceramics that evoke subtle changes in the seasons as they are observed in the Way of Tea. Tea presentations were conducted in the Yanai Classroom during the Grand Opening and in the Cathy Rudd Cultural Corner at various times throughout the two-month run of the exhibition.

#### IN THE PAVILION

The exhibition in the Pavilion Gallery included a variety of ceramic tea wares and bamboo tea scoops (*chashaku*), as well as sculptural objects, such as Buddhist figures, pagoda, and lion dogs. A portable teahouse anchored the installation in the Pavilion, and featured a display of tea utensils in place to provide a context for his work.



**SPONSORED BY:**



Mora Chartrand and Linda Grant

This exhibition was guest curated by Chief Curator and Deputy Director of Nezu Museum in Tokyo, Dr. Nishida Hiroko, in collaboration with Portland Japanese Garden Exhibition Manager, Mami Takahashi, and Arlene Schnitzer Curator of Culture, Art, and Education, Diane Durston.



 All Photos: Courtesy of Yoshihiro Saito, Eisei-Bunko Museum Collection, and FUTO Co.,Ltd.

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