



FOCUSING the FLAME
CERAMICS BY Jan Kollwitz

Pucker Gallery • Boston

ALL WORKS ARE STONEWARE WITH NATURAL ASH GLAZE.



Kabin
(Square vase)
6 1/4 x 4 3/4 x 4 3/4"
KJ19

ON THE COVER CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

Iga hanaire
(Flower vase for tea ceremony in Iga style)
12 x 6 1/2 x 6 1/2"
KJ39

Kyozutsu
(Sutra scroll container)
11 1/4 x 8 1/4 x 7 3/4"
KJ33

Kinuta hanaire
(Fulling block-shaped vase)
11 1/4 x 6 1/4 x 6 1/4"
KJ28

Mizusashi
(Water container)
8 x 8 x 7"
KJ7

FOCUSING the FLAME

CERAMICS BY Jan Kollwitz

In ancient Japan, glazing was not considered an essential aspect of ceramics production. Potters found that they could create serviceable high-fired stoneware vessels simply by firing the unglazed clay for up to a week at temperatures of 1,200 degrees centigrade or higher. The kilns these potters used were tunnels dug into the sides of hills, with a flue opened further up the slope. These tunnel kilns, or *anagama*, were relatively inefficient, consuming vast amounts of wood and requiring days of firing to completely fuse the clay body. Inevitably, debris from the kiln roof fell onto some of the pieces, while others slumped from being too close to the fire mouth at the entrance or fired incompletely from being too far away. Estimates of loss in each firing run as high as fifty percent, or even higher.

Yet, the pieces created by this inefficient, time-consuming process, although intended for use as simple, utilitarian vessels, have captured the attention of ceramics lovers for centuries. As early as the late fifteenth century, masters of Japanese tea practice selected works of native unglazed stoneware for use in a mode of tea gathering they referred to as “cold and withered.” This aesthetic approach contrasted with the use of fine Chinese utensils and artworks, which were expensive and more lavish in appearance.

Following the publication of Bernard Leach’s *A Potter’s Book* in 1940, Japanese ceramics approaches and aesthetics became familiar to craftspeople in Europe and North America. From the early 1970s, ever-increasing numbers of potters from the West traveled to Japan to study with masters of traditional ceramics lineages. Most of these potters returned home to establish studios that were based in some way on Japanese ceramics workshop traditions.

Among the more radical transplanted approaches was the use of wood-firing kilns. Some potters who built such kilns based their early designs on the “climbing kilns” (*noborigama*) introduced to Japan from Korea at the end of the sixteenth century. Others, however, built a modified form of the

older *anagama*, using a single above-ground firing chamber of brick to replace the more volatile tunnel constructions used centuries ago.

The potter Jan Kollwitz is one of those for whom wood-fired stoneware proved to have an irresistible fascination. Yet, not content to simply reproduce the outward forms, he has internalized many deep and significant aspects of Japanese culture. His lifestyle, working environment, and finished pieces are influenced by Kollwitz’s understanding of such seminal aspects of traditional Japanese culture such as Zen Buddhism and the tea ceremony (*chanoyu*).

Born in Berlin, Jan Kollwitz now works in the village of Cismar, near the Baltic Sea. His wood-burning *anagama* kiln was built in 1988 by the Japanese master kiln builder Watanabe Tatsuo. It has served Kollwitz well for more than two decades. Over time, Kollwitz has gained the ability to predict with relative confidence which areas of his kiln will yield the effects he desires. Even so, each firing results in surprises that evoke pleasure and wonder. The kiln has become a collaborator—not simply a construction of bricks, but a semi-independent force that adds its own unique contributions to the outcome of each piece.

Kollwitz creates ceramics inspired by Japan out of a respect for the foundations of Japanese culture, not out of a desire to simply imitate Japanese forms, styles, and methods. Examining his pieces, one is struck by his extreme sympathy for Japanese sensibilities. Despite the relatively unpredictable nature of his collaboration with the kiln, Kollwitz’s wood-fired ceramics are exquisite manifestations of what Japanese connoisseurs themselves value most highly in ceramics. This attests to not only his careful selection of materials and construction of forms, but also to his sensitive placement of pieces in the kiln and his intuitive decisions about which examples are chosen to enter his oeuvre.

Some of Kollwitz’s ceramics are notable for their subtlety; others are striking for their dramatic contrasts. Pieces like KJ4,

KJ7, and KJ12 display black scorching (*koge*) on the lower area that is rarely found even on unglazed wood-fired ceramics in Japan. This manifestation links Kollwitz's work with the Japanese ceramic type known as *Iga*, a bold, yet enigmatic ware that reached its height of popularity in the early seventeenth century. *Iga* shares certain characteristics with neighboring Shigaraki, another ceramic type that Kollwitz credits with influencing his work, including rough, off-white clay and typically heavy deposits of incidental glaze.

It is the fall of ash that creates the speckling, sheen, glazing, or flow that decorates an unglazed wood-fired piece. Wood ash contains minerals such as silica that do not burn up in the firing, but are blown through the kiln by the kiln draft, falling randomly according to their weight, the strength of the kiln draft, the temperature, and any obstructions that may impede its course. Generally, the surfaces of items that face the source of the kiln draft will receive a heavier deposit or coating of ash glaze. Thus, most unglazed wood-fired pieces have a clear "front" and "back" (KJ17, KJ22, KJ24).

Other surface effects, such as flashing (*hi-iro*) are caused by variations in the kiln atmosphere at certain points in the firing process as well as the location of a specific piece in relation to other pieces. Kollwitz has achieved some arresting contrasts in cool and warm colors as a result of this manifestation (KJ19).

Kollwitz's principal teacher in Japan was the Echizen potter Nakamura Yutaka. Traditional Echizen ware is known for the small jars called *ohaguro tsubo* (tooth-blackening jars). Kollwitz has succeeded in recreating these jars in an eerily accurate manner, to the point that one imagines that they are just how antique Echizen jars must have looked when they were new (KJ20, KJ21). Such an ability to capture the spirit of wares of five hundred years ago is rare even among the best Japanese potters.

An apparent anomaly in Kollwitz's work is his black tea bowls (K23). These bowls are among his rare ceramics that feature applied glaze. Yet even these bowls reflect the way in which firing impacts a work's appearance. These bowls are of a variety known as "pulled-out black" (*hikidashi-guro*), created in the late sixteenth century at the Mino

kilns of central Japan. Potters in Mino discovered that if they glazed bowls with a brown iron glaze and pulled them out in the midst of firing and quenched them in water, the glaze would turn out not brown, but jet-black. Kollwitz performs this operation using long tongs to pull a glowing tea bowl out of the flaming kiln, giving the impression of a serene form of action art.

Not all of Kollwitz's forms are Japanese in origin. Among his pieces are pitchers (not a traditional Japanese shape) and a number of distinctly original jar, vase, and platter forms. Nevertheless, each of his pieces demonstrates his intense focus on achieving a perfect *je ne sais quoi*.

The Kollwitz estate and workshop is located in an old parsonage in Cismar that is a monument of Shaker-esque simplicity and understated elegance. Kollwitz's workshop and gallery reflect a successful marriage between the Teutonic utilitarian approach and the austere aesthetics of a Japanese tea master. Stark white walls and varying warm and cool tones of unpainted wood provide a ready backdrop for his ceramic shapes. Executing all the necessary processes of ceramic production himself, from digging and preparing clay to the actual firing, Kollwitz carries on a lifestyle something like that of a Buddhist monk, and indeed, Zen has had a significant impact on his life.

It is interesting, though not essential, to note that Jan Kollwitz's great-grandmother was the important German printmaker Käthe Kollwitz. In contrast to his great-grandmother's intense artistic focus on social justice and the masses, Jan Kollwitz performs his work in a more solitary mode and with a less concrete, or perhaps, less clearly defined, objective. Even so, his ceramic works, like the poignant prints of his great-grandmother, ably demonstrate art's remarkable ability to move the human spirit.

—ANDREW L. MASKE

Andrew L. Maske specializes in Asian ceramics and ceramics inspired by Asian traditions. He is Assistant Professor of Art History at the University of Kentucky in Lexington. Professor Maske received a doctorate in Japanese Art History from Oxford University. In 2007 he was a Fulbright Research Fellow in the Beijing University Department of Fine Arts, where he studied contemporary Chinese art ceramics.



Ohaguro tsubo
(Small jar to hold tooth-blackening material)
4 x 4 x 4"
KJ21



Iga hanaire
(Flower vase for tea ceremony in Iga style)
10 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ "
KJ30



Kake-hanaike
(Hanging flower vase)
7 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 3 x 3"
KJ17

Chawan
(Tea bowl)
3 3/4 x 4 3/4 x 4 3/4"
KJ22



Chawan, hikidashi-guro
(Tea bowl, "pulled-out black" glaze)
3 1/2 x 4 1/2 x 4 1/4"
KJ23



Vessel in Jomon style
11 3/4 x 6 1/4 x 5 1/2"
KJ8



Ohaguro tsubo
(Small jar to hold tooth-blackening material)
4 x 4 x 4"
KJ20



Pitcher
9 1/4 x 8 1/2 x 6"
KJ16

Yama-jawan
(Rice bowl)
3 ¼ x 6 ¼ x 6 ¼"
KJ65



Yama-jawan
(Rice bowl)
3 ¼ x 6 ¼ x 6 ¼"
KJ64



Iga hanaire
(Flower vase for tea ceremony in Iga style)
7 ½ x 4 ¼ x 4 ¼"
KJ35



Iga hanaire
(Flower vase for tea ceremony in Iga style)
7 ½ x 4 ¼ x 4 ¼"
KJ3



Iga hanaire
(Flower vase for tea ceremony in Iga style)
10 ¼ x 5 x 5"
KJ12



Kinuta hanaire
(Fulling block-shaped vase)
9 x 5 ¼ x 5 ¼"
KJ11



Hanaike
(Vase for flower arrangement in the tea room)
9 x 4 3/4 x 4 3/4"
KJ5



Kinuta hanaire
(Fulling block-shaped vase)
10 x 5 3/4 x 5 3/4"
KJ29



Sara
(Square plate)
1 x 10 x 10 1/4"
KJ54



Kabin
(Square vase)
5 1/2 x 4 x 4"
KJ48



Kyozutsu
(Sutra scroll container)
7 1/2 x 6 1/2 x 6 1/2"
KJ46



Hanaike
(Vase for flower arrangement in the tea room)
9 x 4 ¾ x 4 ¾"
KJ38



Iga hanaire
(Flower vase for tea ceremony in Iga style)
11 x 5 ½ x 5 ½"
KJ31

Oke
(Water-holding vessel for tea ceremony)
8 3/4 x 7 1/2 x 7"
KJ32



Oke
(Water-holding vessel for tea ceremony)
9 x 7 1/2 x 7 1/2"
KJ10



Yunomi
(Tea cup)
2 3/4 x 3 3/4 x 3 3/4"
KJ66

Yunomi
(Tea cup)
2 3/4 x 3 3/4 x 3 3/4"
KJ67

Kyozutsu
(Sutra scroll container)
7 3/4 x 6 x 6"
KJ4

Iga hanaire
(Flower vase for tea ceremony in Iga style)
11 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ "
KJ6



Tsubo
(Jar)
7 x 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ "
KJ26



Chawan
(Tea bowl)
3 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 5 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 5 $\frac{3}{4}$ "
KJ61

Tsubo
(Jar)
10 x 7 1/4 x 7 1/4"
KJ27



Iga hanaire
(Flower vase for tea ceremony in Iga style)
8 1/4 x 4 1/4 x 4 1/4"
KJ36



Sara
(Small bowl)
1 1/4 x 4 1/4 x 4 1/4"
KJ56

Sara
(Small bowl)
1 1/4 x 4 1/2 x 4 1/2"
KJ55

Shiho sara
(Rectangular platter)
1 1/2 x 10 x 5 1/4"
KJ57



Hanaike
(Vase for flower arrangement in the tea room)
7 1/2 x 3 x 2 3/4"
KJ50



Hanaike
(Vase for flower arrangement in tea room)
8 3/4 x 5 x 5"
KJ37



Yunomi
(Tea cup)
3 3/4 x 3 3/4 x 3 3/4"
KJ60



Hanaike
(Vase for flower arrangement in the tea room)
7 1/2 x 2 3/4 x 2 3/4"
KJ51



Mizusashi
(Water container)
7 1/4 x 7 1/2 x 7 1/2"
KJ34

Yunomi
(Tea cup)
3 ¼ x 3 ½ x 3 ½"
KJ58



Echizen tsubo
(Jar in Echizen style)
8 ¾ x 7 ½ x 7 ½"
KJ25



Iga hanaire
(Flower vase for tea ceremony in Iga style)
12 x 6 ½ x 5"
KJ14



Iga hanaire
(Flower vase for tea ceremony in Iga style)
11 1/2 x 6 x 6"
KJ40



Iga hanaire
(Flower vase for tea ceremony in Iga style)
10 3/4 x 5 1/2 x 5 1/2"
KJ45

Ohaguro tsubo
(Small jar to hold tooth-blackening material)
5 x 4 3/4 x 4 3/4"
KJ62



Ohaguro tsubo
(Small jar to hold tooth-blackening material)
5 x 4 1/2 x 4 1/2"
KJ63



Hanaire
(Flower vase for tea ceremony)
12 x 5 1/2 x 5 1/2"
KJ44



Sara
(Large bowl)
2 3/4 x 18 x 18"
KJ42



Sara
(Large bowl)
2 3/4 x 17 3/4 x 17 3/4"
KJ43

CREDITS:
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JAN KOLLWITZ

Biography

Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 2012 Pucker Gallery, Boston, Massachusetts, USA
Museum Eckernförde, Germany
- 2011 Kunsthandel Klefisch, Cologne, Germany
Praxisstipendium Villa Massimo, Rome, Italy
- 2010 Käthe Kollwitz Museum, Cologne, Germany
Museum für Ostasiatische Kunst, Berlin, Germany
- 2009 Künstlermuseum Heikendorf, Germany
- 2008 Ostholstein-Museum, Eutin, Germany
Museum Kellinghusen, Germany
- 2007 Käthe Kollwitz Haus, Moritzburg, Germany
Goethe-Institut, Hamburg, Germany
Philipps Art-Forum, Bochum, Germany
Studio Pels-Leusden, Berlin, Germany
- 2005 Museum Kellinghusen, Germany
Bürgergalerie Neumünster, Germany
Kunstraum - B, Kiel, Germany
Töpfermuseum, Duingen, Germany
- 2003 Studio Pels-Leusden, Berlin, Germany
Rosenthal Studio-Haus Galerie, Hamburg, Germany
- 2002 Museum im Schloss Bad Pyrmont, Germany
Zen-art Galerie Hennig, Hamburg, Germany
- 2001 Ostholstein-Museum, Eutin, Germany
EKO-Haus der japanischen Kultur, Düsseldorf, Germany
Zen-art, Galerie Hennig, Hamburg, Germany
- 2000 Landhaus Nösse, Sylt, Germany
- 1999 Galerie Faita, Hamelin, Germany
Emslandmuseum Schloss Clemenswerth, Sögel, Germany
- 1998 Galerie Objekta, Kreuzlingen, Switzerland
Rosenthal Studio-Haus-Galerie, Hamburg, Germany
Studio Pels-Leusden, Berlin, Germany
- 1997 Galerie Rosenhauer, Göttingen, Germany
Galerie beim Roten Turm, Sommerhausen, Germany
Schlossgalerie Weiher, Bayreuth, Germany
- 1996 Galerie Lommel, Leverkusen, Germany
Loes & Reinier, Deventer, Netherlands
- 1995 Zen-Galerie, Hamburg, Germany
- 1994 Galerie Charlotte Hennig, Darmstadt, Germany
Keramikmuseum der Stadt Frechen, Germany
- 1993 Schleswig-Holsteinisches Landesmuseum, Germany
Kloster Cismar, Germany
- 1992 Lauenburgischer Kunstverein, Büchen, Germany
- 1991 Galerie Theis, Berlin, Germany

- 1960 Born in Berlin, Germany
- 1983–1985 Studied with Horst Kerstan, Kandern, Germany
- 1986–1987 Studied with Yutaka Nakamura, Echizen, Japan
- 1987–2012 Exchange with Kazu Yamada, Echizen, Japan
- 1988 Construction of wood-fired anagama by Tatsuo Watanabe in Cismar, Germany
- 1988 Workshop established in Cismar, Germany
- 1990–2012 Exhibitions in Germany and abroad
- 2011 Fellowship at Villa Massimo, Rome, Italy
- 2012 Recipient of the Prefectural Culture Award, "Kulturpreis Ostholstein"

Public Collections

- Schleswig-Holsteinisches Landesmuseum Schloss Gottorf, Schleswig, Germany
- Kunstsammlungen der Veste Coburg, Germany
- Käthe-Kollwitz-Museum, Berlin, Germany
- Keramik-Museum, Berlin, Germany
- Grassi-Museum, Leipzig, Germany
- Kreissparkasse Köln, Cologne, Germany
- Hällisch-Fränkisches Museum, Schwäbisch Hall, Germany
- Keramion Frechen, Germany
- Sparkassenstiftung Schleswig-Holstein, Kiel, Germany
- Sparkasse Ostholstein, Eutin, Germany
- Emslandmuseum Schloss Clemenswerth, Sögel, Germany
- Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg, Germany
- Peter Siemssen Foundation, Ratzbek, Germany
- Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Berlin, Germany

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Change Services Requested.



Echizen otsubo
(Large jar in Echizen style)
28 ½ x 28 x 28"
KJ24

FOCUSING the FLAME
CERAMICS BY Jan Kollwitz

DATES:

5 – 28 May 2012

OPENING RECEPTION:

5 May 2012

3:00 to 6:00 PM

The public is invited to attend.

The artist will be present.