

# From Echizen to Cismar

New Works by JAN KOLLWITZ



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**J**an Kollwitz began his ceramic studies as an apprentice to the potter Horst Kerstan, in Kandern, Germany. For many years, Kerstan kept in contact with Japanese colleagues and employed some of their techniques. In 1977, he experimented with an anagama kiln, a type of wood-fueled, climbing kiln used since the Middle Ages for firing Japanese ceramics and known for its characteristic fly ash glazing. However, Kerstan ultimately remained committed to the German tradition of craftsmanship, while his young apprentice was inspired by Japanese ceramics. Having completed his German apprenticeship in 1986, Jan decided to travel to Japan in order to gain a more intimate understanding of the techniques and spirit of Japanese ceramics.

Equipped with an understanding of the Japanese language, Jan traveled to Tokyo in search of a master who was willing to both take on an apprentice as well as teach a Westerner the fundamentals of Japanese artistic traditions. Many highly-educated Japanese people still believe it is impossible for a Westerner to overcome the great cultural divide. After months of searching with the help of numerous intermediaries, references, and contacts, Jan finally found Nakamura Yutaka, a master-craftsman from Echizen, who conquered the traditional forms and objects as well as their production processes.

ON THE COVER:

Top left:  
IGA HANAIRE  
(Flower vase for tea ceremony in Iga style)  
11.5 x 5.25 x 5.25"  
KJ144

Bottom left:  
IGA HANAIRE  
(Flower vase for tea ceremony in Iga style)  
11.5 x 6.25 x 4.5"  
KJ151

Top right:  
OKE  
(Water-holding vessel for tea ceremony)  
9 x 7.5 x 7.5"  
KJ142

Bottom right:  
IGA HANAIRE  
(Flower vase for tea ceremony in Iga style)  
11 x 5 x 5"  
KJ146



HANAIRE  
(Vase in Jomon style)  
11.75 x 5.25 x 5.25"  
KJ153



YUNOMI  
(Tea cup)  
3.5 x 3.75 x 3.75"  
KJ181



**HANAIKE**  
 (Vase for flower arrangement in the tea room)  
 8.5 x 4 x 4"  
 KJ158



**YUNOMI**  
 (Tea cup)  
 3.5 x 3.75 x 3.5"  
 KJ182

Yukata fulfills his own vision of sculptural ceramics, finding inspiration in Western art as well as through witnessing the excavations of historic workshops in his own region. In a sense, his work balances on a cultural and national margin similar to that of Horst Kerstan. After many careful, modest initiations and Kollwitz's persistence, Nakamura agreed to take him on as a personal student.

The relationship between master and student in Japan is identical to the artistic practice: permeated by Buddhist theory. Taking on a student does not simply involve the teaching of technical skills. More poignantly, it is rooted in the acceptance of a somewhat spiritual companionship, involving a life-long and alternating engagement. The holistic teaching method can include measures that are humbling or even disconcerting, at least from a Western perspective. For example, the master's authority is indisputable. The student can neither question methodologies nor doubt any of his decisions. One possesses knowledge while the other seeks it. These are fundamentally different "aggregate phases" of mankind where there is no middle ground. Both master and student must adhere to the behavioral codes they are assigned, even if they conflict with individual needs or their perceptions of justice. Equipped with the power to issue orders that students must follow unconditionally, the master is similar to an abbot in a Zen monastery. This obedience does not end at the workshop's door. It permeates every aspect of the student's life: leisure time, lifestyle habits, or any other attempts to obtain knowledge.

In Western countries, this form of teaching is commonly referred to as "dark pedagogy." The manner in which an art form develops over the centuries is imbued in a master's every move, independent of personal characteristics or teaching methods. Consequently, the teaching method is characterized by

observation and imitation rather than by lectures or consideration for the student's personal preferences. Naturally, the most important component of learning is relentless practice. Just as a word loses its meaning and sounds empty after a hundred repetitions, the making of bowl after bowl and vase after vase, at some point, also becomes devoid of everything but the process of creation. This process detaches the craftsman from egotism and individuality. Only once the student no longer fights against infinite repetition, follows the unquestionable tradition, and abandons his ambitions to create something extraordinary will he build the foundation upon which he can succeed. Kollwitz was aware that this quest required him to abandon his individuality and his desire for inner fulfillment. He did not intend to infuse Japanese techniques and aesthetics into his own postmodern and syncretistic style, but rather to learn a specific kind of ceramic tradition developed in Japan for centuries.

It usually requires twelve years for an apprentice to master the Japanese discipline that lies between art and craftsmanship. Jan Kollwitz, who followed the old Japanese tradition with a more stringent attitude than many of his colleagues, patiently took more than twelve years to finally make the central piece of the tea ceremony, the *chawan*. He tried thousands of times to create his own interpretation of the *yamachawan* and the *yunomi* (the smaller and bigger tea cups) before attempting to make smaller, glazed tea bowls for traveling. While doing so, he always kept an old adage in mind: when a young potter fires a *chawan*, it is likely to turn out superficial and influenced by an inherent desire to create art, thereby removing its genuineness. In 2009, when he fired a *chawan* for the first time, Jan Kollwitz finally gave shape to the concept of emptiness central to *chanoyu* and tea ceremonies in general.

From a Western point of view, the difficulty of Japanese apprenticeships may be incomprehensible. Yet, if someone decides to embark on such a journey,



IGA HANAIRE  
(Flower vase for tea ceremony in Iga style)  
8.25 x 4.5 x 4.25"  
KJ164



OHAGURO TSUBO  
(Small jar to hold tooth-blackening material)  
4.25 x 4.25 x 3.75"  
KJ175



TSUBO  
(Jar)  
8.5 x 5.25 x 5.25"  
KJ155



OHAGURO TSUBO  
(Small jar to hold tooth-blackening material)  
4.5 x 4.25 x 4"  
KJ173

they will ultimately learn the balance between technical skills, humble confidence, and serene faith. The potter relies on the spirit within this balance to produce truly great ceramics. In Cismar, just as in Japan, it is customary to place small bowls with rice, salt, and sake on top of the kiln to please the spirit that lives within. This may seem strange at first glance. However, anyone who has sat in front of a humming kiln and experienced its lively warmth, listened to the rhythm of oxidation and reduction, its breathing in and breathing out, and who has seen the white heat inside, the flames flickering through vents and cracks and the vibrating air on its surface, knows, without a doubt, that the kiln's spirit is present and at work. During this time, the spirit takes the role of master, with all of the ambivalence and unpredictability that the position inherits.

The potter, independent of the experience he acquires over years or decades, then inhabits the position of student again. His task is to listen, observe, and serve the developing ceramics by reacting in accordance with what is heard and seen. With every firing, the potter subjugates himself to an existential exercise, illustrating that the tradition of Japanese ceramics does not merely involve creating nice, practical goods. Instead, the craftsmanship of Japanese ceramics is a lifelong exercise where one learns to acclimate to the environment and to harmonize with the world. Ultimately, through his craft, an artist should be able to find a balance with uncontrollable forces. One should also have the ability to simultaneously capture and let go of individual moments. The lifelong journey of developing ceramics radiates a strong message to the silent observers handling them: everything is, indeed, simple.

— CHRISTOPH PETERS

*This text, translated by Jochanan Kollwitz, is an excerpt from the book Japan Beginnt An Der Ostsee: Die Keramik Des Jan Kollwitz, published by Wachholtz in January 2013.*



CHAWAN, HIKIDASHI GURO  
(Tea bowl, pulled-out black glaze)  
3.5 x 4.25 x 4.25"  
KJ176



KABIN  
(Square vase)  
5.5 x 4.25 x 4"  
KJ148



KYOZUTSU  
(Sutra scroll container)  
7.5 x 5.75 x 5.75"  
KJ150



**YUNOMI**  
**(Tea cups)**  
 Left: 2.75 x 3.5 x 3.5", KJ192  
 Center: 2.75 x 3.5 x 3.5", KJ194  
 Right: 2.75 x 3.5 x 3.5", KJ195



**IGA HANAIRE**  
**(Flower vases for tea ceremony in Iga style)**  
 Left: 11 x 4.75 x 4.5", KJ161  
 Center: 11.25 x 5 x 5", KJ160  
 Right: 7.75 x 4.25 x 4", KJ165



**YAMA-JAWAN**  
(Rice bowls)

Left: 2.5 x 6.25 x 6.25", KJ187  
 Top: 2.5 x 6.25 x 6.25", KJ188  
 Bottom: 2.5 x 6.25 x 6.25", KJ189



**KAKE-HANAIKE**  
(Hanging flower vases)

Left: 7.5 x 3 x 2.75", KJ170  
 Center: 7.5 x 2.75 x 2.75", KJ171  
 Right: 7.5 x 2.75 x 2.75", KJ172





SHIHO SARA  
(Rectangular platters)  
Left: 1.75 x 9.75 x 5.25", KJ178  
Right: 1.5 x 9.75 x 5.25", KJ179



SARA  
(Square plate)  
1.25 x 10.25 x 10.25"  
KJ177



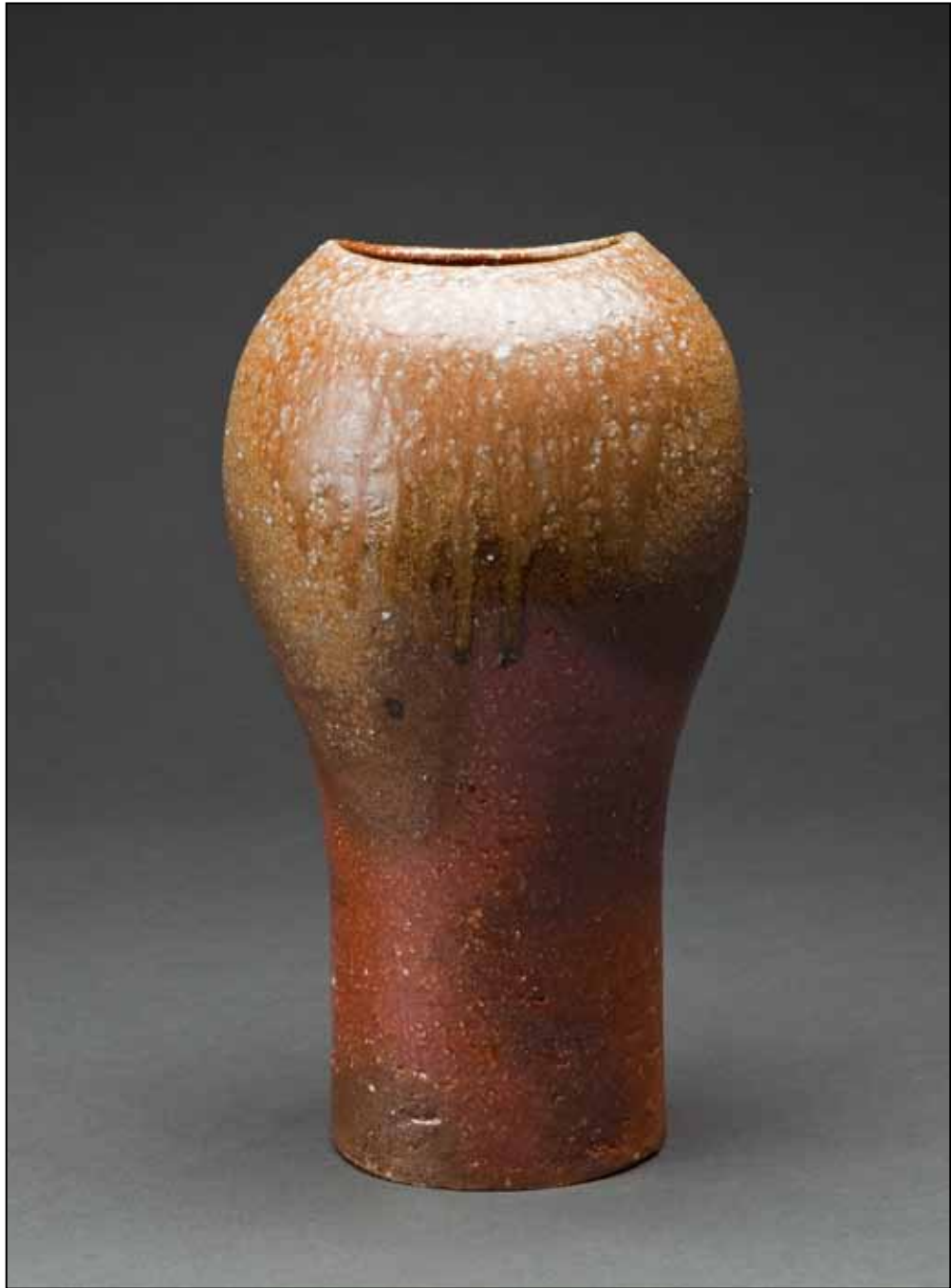
MIZUSASHI  
(Water container)  
7.5 x 9 x 7.75"  
KJ167



YUNOMI  
(Tea cups)  
Left top: 2.75 x 4 x 4", KJ196  
Left middle: 2.75 x 3.5 x 3.5", KJ197  
Left bottom: 2.75 x 4 x 4", KJ198  
Center top: 2.75 x 3.75 x 3.75", KJ199  
Center bottom: 2.75 x 4 x 4", KJ200  
Right: 2.75 x 4 x 4", KJ201



HANAIRE  
(Vase in Jomon style)  
12 x 5.25 x 5"  
KJ152



HANAIRE  
(Vase in Jomon style)  
11.5 x 5.25 x 5.25"  
KJ154



HANAIKE  
(Vase for flower arrangement in the tea room)  
9.25 x 4 x 4"  
KJ159



IGA HANAIRE  
(Flower vase for tea ceremony in Iga style)  
7.25 x 4.25 x 4"  
KJ166



IGA HANAIRE  
(Flower vase for tea ceremony in Iga style)  
11.25 x 5.5 x 5.25"  
KJ145

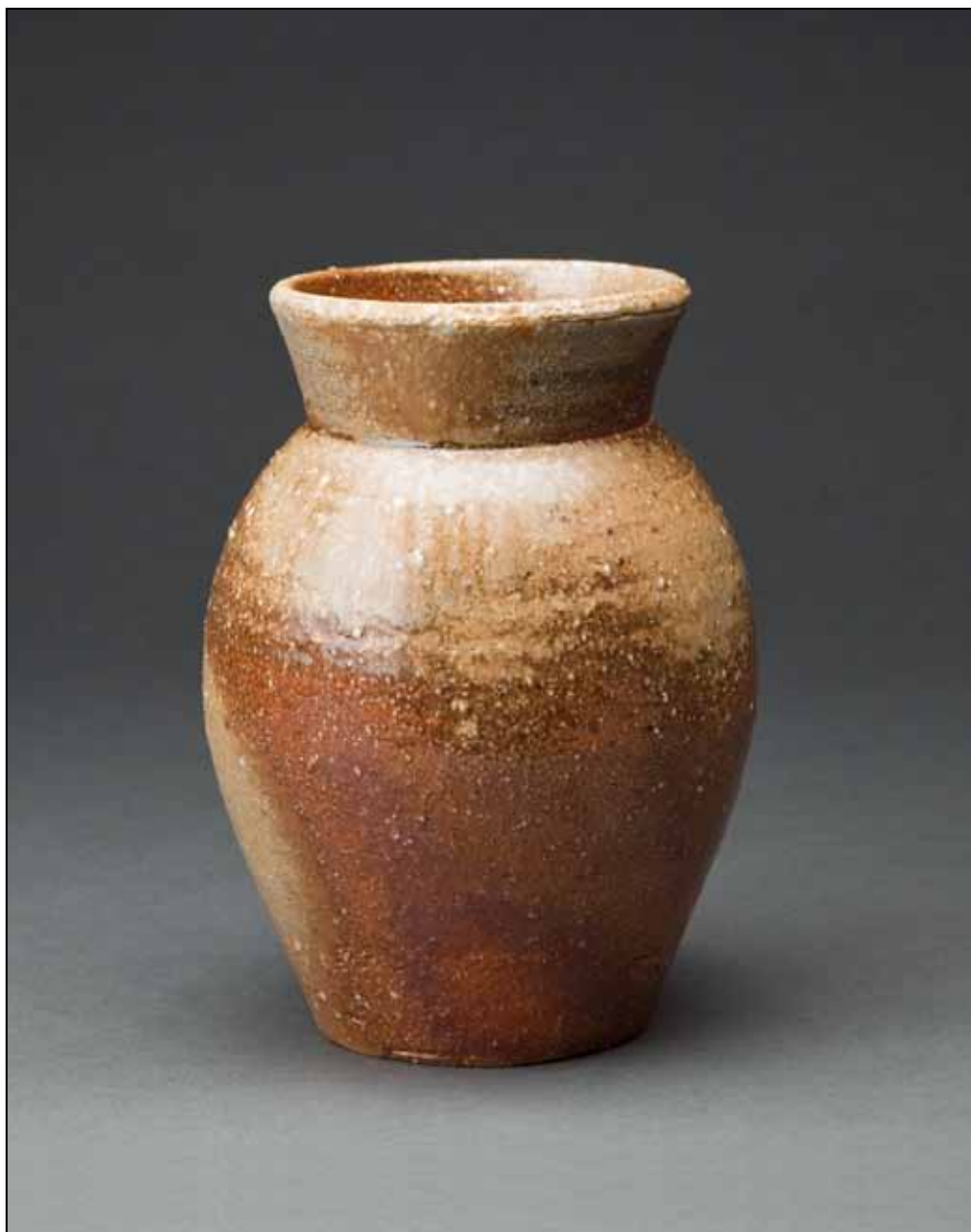


KABIN  
(Square vase)  
5.75 x 4.25 x 4.25"  
KJ169

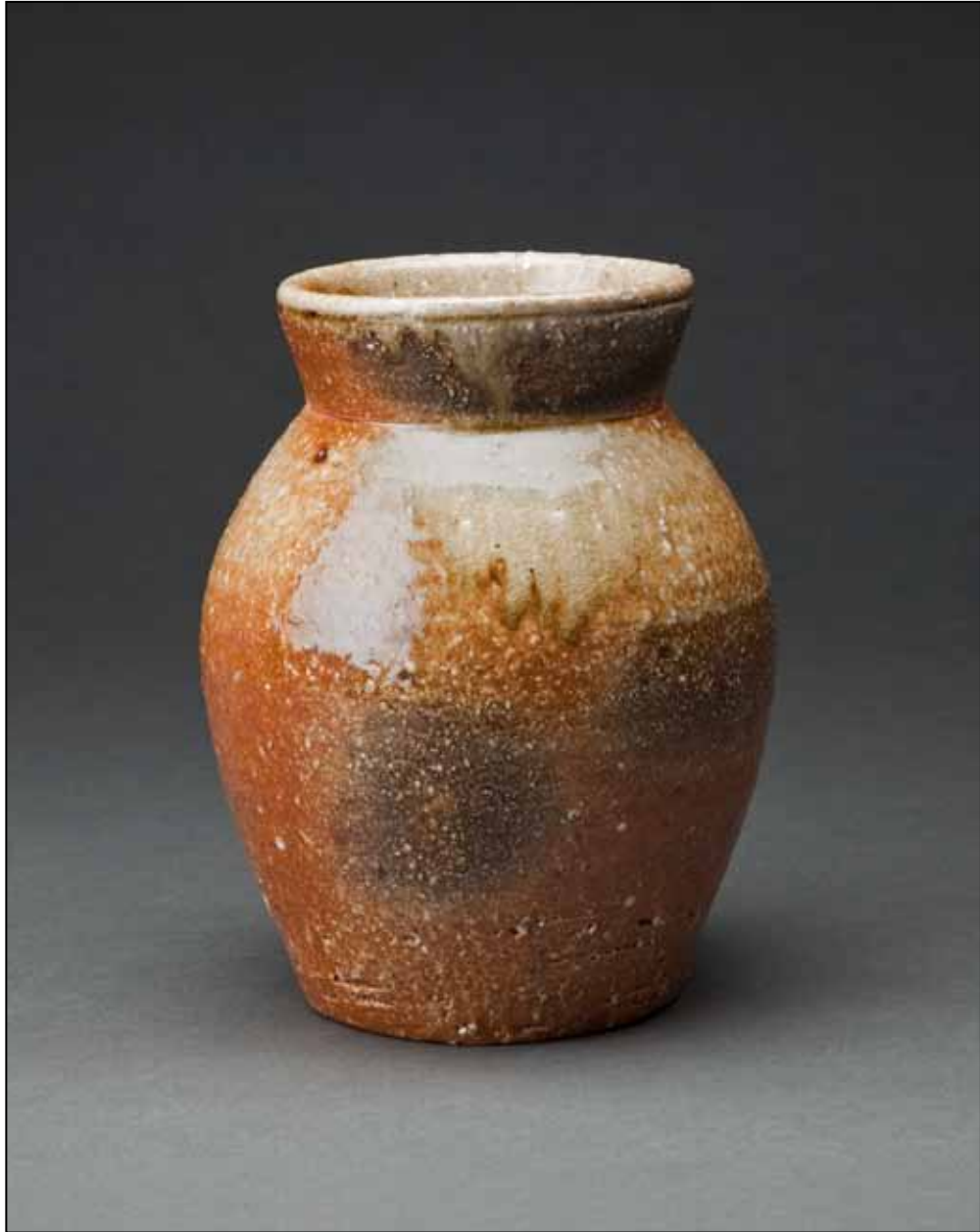


KABIN  
(Square vase)  
5.5 x 4 x 4"  
KJ147





TSUBO  
(Jar)  
8 x 4.75 x 4.75"  
KJ156



TSUBO  
(Jar)  
8 x 4.75 x 4.75"  
KJ157



KYOZUTSU  
(Sutra scroll container)  
11.25 x 8.75 x 8.25"  
KJ141



OKE  
(Water-holding vessel for tea ceremony)  
8.75 x 7.5 x 7.25"  
KJ143



KYOZUTSU  
(Sutra scroll container)  
7.5 x 6 x 6"  
KJ149



OHAGURO TSUBO  
(Small jar to hold tooth-blackening material)  
4.5 x 4.25 x 3.75"  
KJ174



MIZUSASHI  
(Water container)  
8.5 x 8.5 x 7.75"  
KJ168



YUNOMI  
(Tea cup)  
3.5 x 3.75 x 3.5"  
KJ180



YAMA-JAWEN  
(Rice bowls)  
Left: 2.5 x 6.5 x 6.5", KJ184  
Right top: 2.75 x 6.5 x 6.25", KJ185  
Right bottom: 2.5 x 6.25 x 6.25", KJ186



YUNOMI  
(Tea cup)  
3.5 x 3.75 x 3.5"  
KJ183



Yunomi  
(Tea cups)  
Left top: 2.75 x 3.75 x 3.75", KJ190  
Left bottom: 2.75 x 3.75 x 3.75", KJ191  
Right: 2.75 x 3.5 x 3.5", KJ193





## BIOGRAPHY Jan Kollwitz

Jan Kollwitz was born in Berlin, Germany in 1960 and now lives in the village of Cismar. He is known for creating ceramics modeled on Japanese techniques. After studying with Horst Kerstan in Kander, Germany for three years, Kollwitz became the personal student of Yutaka Nakamura in Echizen, Japan, for two years. Nakamura taught him the ancient firing methods associated with anagama kilns, as well as the traditional Echizen methods of making vessels. Equally formative for Kollwitz was his friendship with the ceramicist Kazu Yamada, a pupil of Tokuro Katos. Together, Kollwitz and Yamada initiated plans to build an original anagama wood-burning kiln in Germany. The kiln was constructed in Cismar in 1988 by master kiln builder Tatsuo Watanabe, from Mino, Japan. The wood-fired anagama kiln is unique in that the firing takes place in a single chamber with the pots. The unglazed clay vessels are placed into the kiln where they are fired around the clock

for four consecutive days. New wood must be added to the fire every three minutes. In 1300°C temperatures, flying ash melts onto the clay in a natural glaze, which can range in color, depending on the position of the vessel in the kiln, from a clear green to a light, mat beige. Smoke and flames add red and grey coloration to the clay pots, and in some areas the firing even yields a deep blue. The kiln firing is based on the experience and knowledge that Japanese ceramicists gained over four centuries in creating the kind of artistic pottery associated with the tea ceremony. Kollwitz completed a Fellowship at Villa Massimo in Rome, Italy in 2011 and was the 2012 recipient of the Prefectural Cultural Award, "Kulturpreis Ostholstein." He continues to exhibit his work widely in Germany and abroad and has been represented by Pucker Gallery since 2011. His works are included in significant public collections including the Art Institute of Chicago, the British Museum in London, the Keramik-Museum of Berlin, and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

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JAN KOLLWITZ



IGA HANAIRE  
(Flower vase for tea ceremony in Iga style)  
Left: 12 x 5.25 x 5.25", KJ162  
Right: 9.25 x 4.25 x 4", KJ163

## DATES:

29 October through  
4 December 2016

## OPENING RECEPTION:

29 October 2016  
3:00 PM to 6:00 PM

*The public is invited to attend.  
The artist will be present.*

## CREDITS:

*Design:* Leslie Anne Feagley  
*Editors:* Destiny M. Barletta and Aubrey Catrone  
*Photography:* John Davenport

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Sunday 10:30 AM to 5:00 PM

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