

WORKING POTTERS

STUDIO TOUYA

Seagrove, North Carolina BY HITOMI SHIBATA with TAKURO SHIBATA

Involvement with Ceramics

I first became involved with ceramics as an art education major at Okayama University, in Okayama, Japan in 1990. I found ceramics to be the most difficult of the crafts, so I had to work extra hard to become proficient. I chose a concentration in ceramics when I went on to earn a master's degree in art education from Okayama University. In 1996 I became an artist-in-residence at the Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park and it was that experience that made me decide on ceramics as a profession. Takuro earned a degree in applied chemistry at Doshisa University in Kyoto and was working

as an engineer in his hometown of Osaka when, in 1997, he took advantage of an opportunity to become an apprentice at Tanikan-Gama Pottery Company, one of Shigaraki's oldest pottery studios. For a year he wedged clay, cleaned the studio, and delivered pots for his teacher. His apprenticeship also afforded him a chance to interact with many other potters and ceramic businesses in the historic town.

After his apprenticeship, we established a studio and started working as independent potters selling our wares in galleries and to wholesale businesses. We were very young and didn't have much money, but we had big dreams.



The Most Difficult Decision

In 2001, I was offered a Rotary International Scholarship to study at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. We made the big decision to close our studio in Shigaraki for two years and moved to Massachusetts in October 2001. Following my study at UMass-Dartmouth, Takuro and I were invited by Randy Edmonson, Professor Emeritus of Art at Longwood University to give a workshop and lecture at the university, in Farmville, Virginia, in 2002. It led us to become two of the four resident artists during the inaugural

year of the residency program at the Cub Creek Foundation for the Ceramic Arts in Appomattox, Virginia. After the residency, we traveled through Europe briefly on our return to Shigaraki.

We loved our travels and were really attracted to Seagrove, North Carolina, where we had visited our friends, Nancy Gottovi and David Stuempfle. Sometime after our return to Shigaraki, Nancy, who is Executive Director of Central Park NC/ STARworks, offered Takuro an opportunity to help establish STARworks Ceramics. We made a life-changing decision to permanently close our studio in

Career Snapshot

Years as a professional potter

Hitomi Shibata for 21 years (Japan and the US)

Takuro Shibata for 20 years (Japan and the US)

Number of pots made in a year

About 1000 pieces per year including large and small wood-fired pieces

Education

Hitomi Shibata: Okayama University, Okayama, Japan

Takuro Shibata: Doshisya University, Kyoto, Japan

Apprenticeships/Employment

Hitomi Shibata: Artist in residence at the Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park, residency at Cub Creek Foundation, Appomattox, Virginia

Takuro Shibata: Apprenticeship at Tanikan-Gama, residency at Cub Creek Foundation, Appomattox, Virginia

The time it takes (percentages)

Making work (including firing): 80% (of that, making pots is about 40%)

Promotions/Selling: 15%

Office/Bookkeeping: 5%

Where It Goes

Retail Stores: 10%

Galleries/Exhibitions: 10%

Craft/Art Fairs: 30%

Studio/Home Sales: 48%

Online: 2%

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www.starworksnc.org

discoverseagrove.com



1 Takuro Shibata coil building and refining a large stoneware jar in the studio. 2 Takuro Shibata's large jar, 23 in. (59 cm) in height, handbuilt local North Carolina stoneware, wood fired to cone 11, 2016. 3 Takuro Shibata's unglazed platter, 13 in. (33 cm) in length, slab-built stoneware, wood fired to cone 11, 2014. 4 Takuro Shibata's large jar, 24 in. (61 cm) in height, handbuilt local North Carolina stoneware, wood fired to cone 11, 2016.



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Shigaraki, sell all of our equipment and, with three suitcases and one cat, move to Seagrove, North Carolina, in 2005. Takuro began work at STARworks Ceramics and I took a two-year resident-artist position at the North Carolina Pottery Center.

We purchased property between Ben Owen's Pottery and Jugtown Pottery and established Studio Touya in historic Seagrove in 2007. We renovated an outbuilding into a rustic studio and a small house into a sales shop. We recently built a new home for our family of four. Our pots are fired in a Shigaraki-style anagama with an additional chamber. I recently built a small wood kiln designed by Estonian kiln builder Andres Allik, who helped with the construction.

Selling Work

In Shigaraki, we mass-produced pots for the commercial market. That was not necessarily what we wanted to do, but we had to do that in order to make a living. We were interested in wood firing and took any opportunity to participate in firings and learn the craft. Here in Seagrove, we are able to make the pots we want to make using local clays, wood ash from our stove and kiln for glazes, and wood from local sawmills to fire kilns. It is a much slower process, each pot is different and there is time to experiment with the beautiful local clays. It is hard work, but we literally have a down-to-earth lifestyle.

Takuro is the director of STARworks Ceramic Supply, and it is a full-time job. He makes his own pottery before and after work, on



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5 Hitomi Shibata throwing cups in the studio, framed by two slip-decorated jars with sgraffito decoration and a jar awaiting decoration. **6** Hitomi Shibata adding a coil to a large jar. **7** Hitomi Shibata's large jar, 24 in. (61 cm) in height, wheel-thrown local North Carolina stoneware, slip, glaze, wood fired to cone 11, 2016. **8** Hitomi Shibata's large jar, 23 in. (59 cm) in height, wheel-thrown stoneware, local clay slip, ash glaze, wood fired to cone 11, 2016. **9** Front view of the anagama kiln that Hitomi and Takuro Shibata built at Studio Touya in Seagrove, North Carolina.



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10 Studio Touya from left to right: House (and studio), anagama (in background), small wood kiln, (foreground). **11** Large platter by Hitomi Shibata, 22 in. (56 cm) in length, wheel-thrown local North Carolina stoneware, wood fired to cone 11, 2016.

weekends and holidays. I take care of our two boys and make pots while they are in school. The boys are used to the potter's life. They help us fire kilns, and go with us to exhibitions, workshops, and craft shows. Our gallery is open on Saturdays and by appointment. We also have an online store on our website (www.studiotouya.com).

Choice of Location

Shigaraki and Seagrove are both pottery centers, but there are differences. Shigaraki has many auxiliary businesses to support the ceramic industry. Clay companies, co-ops, tool makers, kiln builders, glaze makers, machine shops, box makers, freelance throwers, wholesale businesses, and galleries. In addition, there are the training programs and ceramic art centers like the Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park. There are many jobs related to the production of ceramic ware.

The Seagrove area has approximately 100 potteries and is home to the North Carolina Pottery Center. Seagrove Area Potters Association provides educational and networking possibilities. STARworks Ceramics is located in the nearby town of Star, and specializes in processing native or wild clay bodies as well as selling commercial clays and ceramic equipment and raw materials. They also sponsor lectures, workshops, and festivals. The area has a rich ceramic heritage and is an active tourist destination as well as a crossroads for potters, visiting artists, and historians from around the world. We consider ourselves fortunate to have lived and worked in two great pottery communities.

Advice

It takes time, money, and lots of energy to set up your own pottery studio and business. You need skill, tenacity, intellectual curiosity, and an old-fashioned work ethic.

You need to read, you need to travel. You may need to go to school, work as an apprentice, complete a residency, or take on a part-time job. Success doesn't happen overnight. It is challenging, but there are many opportunities in many places for a young potter. Our field is full of welcoming, generous people.