

One can find the same preoccupations in the works of Riyo Kim (born in 1980 from a Japanese father and a Korean mother), whose strange creatures invade the spaces of the tea garden and tea room, thus conferring a touch of mystery to an usually peaceful atmosphere and bringing a touch of liberating humour, a breeze of freshness. The *chashitsu* (tea room) enters a new dimension, close to science fiction. Half-animals, half-armoured warriors from whom only one Cyclopean eye is visible, the character-objects born from the hands of Riyo Kim attire themselves with a metallic black skin whose geometrical decorations evoke the most ancient Japanese ceramics. Jōmon pre-historical potteries, which fascinate the young artist, therefore make an indirect entrance in the world of *chanoyu*; temporal limits disappear. In the *tokonoma*, where are usually placed a floral composition, a painting, or a calligraphy, two large eyes seem to follow every gesture of the master and of his guests. Riyo Kim, with his rock star's look, does not hesitate to break the rules and barriers, to associate without any hesitation antinomic universes, the heritage of tradition, for which he nevertheless shows the greatest reverence, and the ebullient vitality of Street art.

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Articles from
"Céramiques japonaises contemporaines"

Born in 1980 from a Japanese father and a Korean mother, Riyo Kim graduated in ceramics at the University of Fine Arts of Ōsaka, his hometown. The strange shapes that emerge from his hands, half armored warriors with only one Cyclopean eye, half animals, take up the most sacred spaces of Japanese culture with a silent strength, but also with a certain sense of humour. The young artist imagines a tea garden and a tea-room where the accessories are covered with a metallic black carapace whose geometrical motives evoke the most ancient of Japanese ceramic arts. The *tokonoma*, the alcove where a painting or a calligraphy usually defines the theme of the tea ceremony, shelters here two big eyes which seem to follow each one of our gestures. Riyo Kim also peoples a moss garden with hooked nose creatures, a small enigmatic tribe, both troubling and endearing.

Riyo Kim undeniably allows ceramics to enter a new era with his works, but also with his *Wheel Performances*. Earth had already been used in numerous happenings before, as soon as the 1950s. For example, in 1955, Kazuo Shiraga, one of the most active members of the Gutai association, did not hesitate to confront several tons of mud in his *Challenging Mud* performance. But Riyo Kim's performances are quite different. They don't have the brutal strength of Shiraga's actions, and respect the tradition of wheelwork, performed on stage to the sound of electronic music and shown simultaneously on a video screen. Riyo Kim does not hesitate to let the clay slip from his hands, then starting afresh with some new material. The contrast between the trendy elegance of the artist's outfit, the modernity of the music and the rustic and immemorial simplicity of the handwork is riveting.

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The goal of these performances is not to create an object which will be presented on a table or in a gallery. Riyo Kim rather celebrates the very gesture of crafting, the dynamic union of hand and earth, and thus succeeds in bringing a younger audience to ceramics. With his happenings as well as with his works, Riyo Kim therefore links in an immense ellipse the most ancient and the most recent steps of Japanese, or even universal, culture. His various interests, in Jōmon art, in the urban forms of contemporary art, or in science fiction (which can particularly be felt in the strange faces of the *Haji Kabane* series), can freely develop in the multiple directions explored by the artist, who navigates with ease from pure plastic forms to utilitarian objects, from the symbols of the highest Asian artistic creation to those of the pop culture of his time.

Riyo Kim, to whom nightclubs are "places of worship" where one can forget the oppression of everyday life and DJs are "oracles revealing their special talents", therefore doesn't shy at breaking the rules, at making barriers fall, and fearlessly mixes universes that usually seem antinomic, the heritage of tradition and the bursting vitality of street art.

Valérie Douniaux

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