

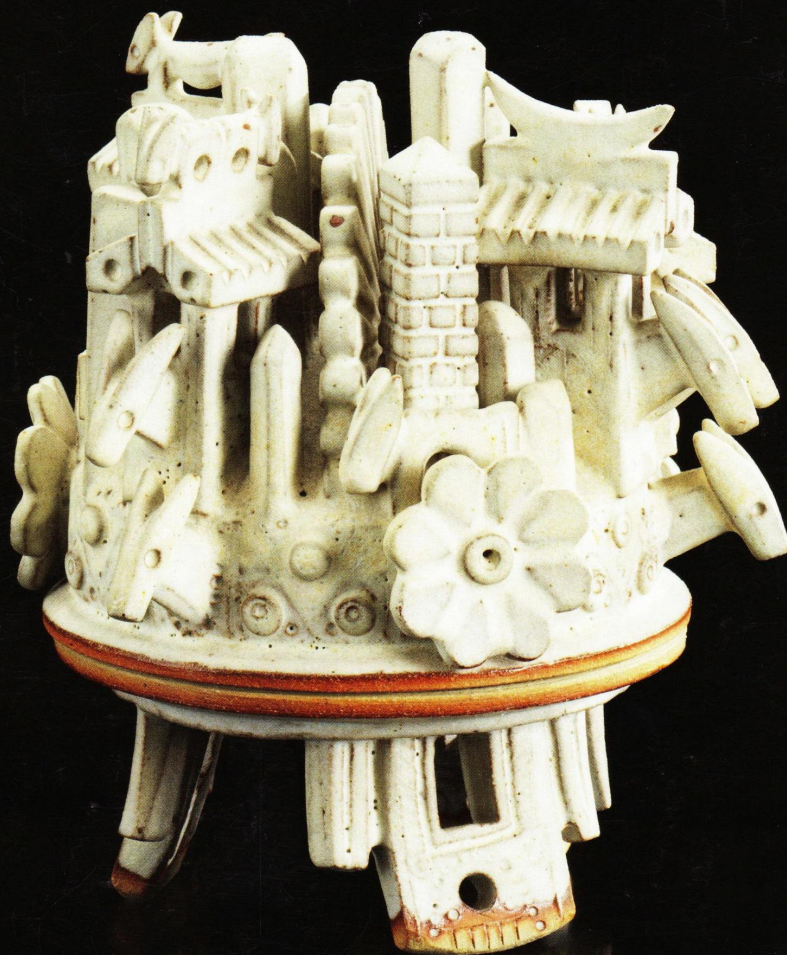
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CERAMIC REVIEW

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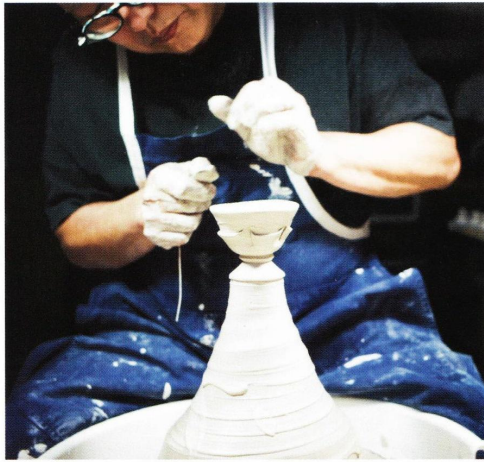
**FOR CERAMICS
SINCE 1970**

THE FANTASY WORLDS OF
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WOOD-FIRING TRADITIONS
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Fluid *dynamism*

Ahead of Takeshi Yasuda's show at Goldmark Gallery, *CR's* Isabella Smith spoke to the potter to discuss his preoccupation with porcelain

Most discussions of artists begin with a description of their origin. For Takeshi Yasuda, that seemingly unavoidable introductory gambit is never entirely simple. 'If somebody asks me, "Who are you?", my answer is that I am a British potter, Japanese trained, and that for the last 15 years I have been working in China.' He adds: 'As I have lived and worked in a British environment, I think it is fair to call me a British potter.'

Yasuda trained at the Daisei-Gama Pottery in Mashiko, Japan, from 1963 to 1966, and established his first studio there. Moving to Britain in 1973, he taught at art schools and universities across the UK until 2005, when he began serving as director of the Pottery Workshop in Jingdezhen, China, then going on to establish his own studio in the Jingdezhen Sculpture Factory. This spring, Yasuda is returning to his origins – part of them, anyway – with a solo exhibition at Goldmark Gallery in Uppingham, England. It will feature around 200 new works in celadon-glazed porcelain, often highlighted with touches of gold, silver and platinum: his pellucid blue-green bowls, cups and platters can appear brimming with the gleaming metals.

AN ARTIST'S WORK

What is now Yasuda's signature style represents a dramatic inversion of earlier interests. 'When I started my pottery in the 1960s, I thought the most fascinating aspect of making was the possibility of producing something called "art"; he explains. 'I had a very strong prejudice against precious materials and fancy techniques. Transforming objects into art using the most mundane materials and techniques – that's what I thought of as artists' work. So throughout my career I never thought of working with precious materials: making art with porcelain would be the easiest of things, like making copper red or oil-spot tenmoku.'

Yasuda's 'prejudice' manifested in the making of reduction-fired ash-glazed stoneware: what is often termed in this country, for better or for worse, as 'brown pots'. After circumstances forced him to work with an electric kiln, Yasuda focused on sancai – earthenware with streaked

green, yellow and white lead glazes in the historic Chinese tradition – and then moved on to exploring his own version of creamware, a mellow off-white body made famous by Josiah Wedgwood in the 1780s. 'At the time, I didn't think I was prejudiced against porcelain. But much later, in my 60s, I realised that that is what it was,' he explains.

Attempting to make something fresh with that most prestigious of clays has become Yasuda's preoccupation for the last two decades. Work in the forthcoming Goldmark exhibition is, he says, 'a continuation of this 20-year progress. There are many examples of porcelain from the 1000-plus years of its history. I am always looking for some new beauty in the material.'

CLAY IN MOVEMENT

His exploration has manifested in pots that are loose and asymmetric – undoubtedly refined yet avoiding politeness, they twist tradition in subtly different directions. Stemmed cups are thrown off the hump and then assembled seemingly casually; throwing marks are left untouched and pots unturned, highlighting the fluid dynamism of clay in movement. A key part of Yasuda's aesthetic is his ragged, rippling rims. Demonstrations of the technique behind the latter are startling. Few expect the potter, when lifting a wet pot off the wheel, thrown with a thick ring at the rim, to violently invert the batt – thereby hurling down a doughnut of clay, leaving behind those trademark rims. 'I am trying to find another side to porcelain's beauty: that has been my challenge for the past 20 years, and I am still searching,' he says, adding: 'This is always my aim, my enjoyment, my life.' 📧

Takeshi Yasuda is at Goldmark Gallery in Uppingham, England, 11 May–8 June; goldmarkart.com

