



## Hitomi Shibata

*“It’s an interesting experiment to mix old pots and new pots [in this exhibition]. I wish we potters could all meet, gather, and talk face-to-face. Old potters would be very surprised how the North Carolina wood-firing tradition is continued by so many diverse potters. We are builders of pottery history in this area with lots of contributors. That’s not about families or names, but a blended community that works together.”*



**Hitomi Shibata** (b. 1971) is from Takamatsu, Japan, a port city on the Seto Inland Sea on the island of Shikoku. She remembers the first time she saw a pot being thrown thirty years ago by Professor Onoyama at Okayama University, one of Japan's national universities in western Japan, where she was studying art education.

"It was like a miracle," she says. "I had never seen wheel throwing until then."

She learned other crafts as well during her studies, but ceramics was the most challenging to her—so Hitomi spent most of her time in the pottery studio, to better her skills. Over time, she dreamed of becoming a professional potter.

She received both an undergraduate and a master's degree in education from the university, both with a ceramics concentration, and then headed to Shigaraki, one of the six major pottery centers of ancient Japan. This historic pottery village east of Kyoto is where clay wares were first produced as long ago as 1278. Hitomi became an artist-in-residence at the Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park and solidified her interest in becoming a ceramic artist.

In Shigaraki, she met her husband Takuro and through a series of educational and professional opportunities, they moved to Seagrove, North Carolina in 2005. Hitomi spent

two years as the artist-in-residence at the North Carolina Pottery Center, followed by seven years as studio coordinator at nearby STARworks Ceramics in Star, North Carolina.

In 2007, the Shibatas bought their land on Busbee Road in Seagrove established Studio Touya (Japanese for pottery house) near two of the Jugtown community's most widely-respected potteries, Ben Owen Pottery and Jugtown Pottery. Over time, the Shibatas helped to build a simple and elegant modernist home on the property for themselves and their two sons, Ken and Tomo (age 12 and 10). The property also houses a small shop which was an old home on the site; she and Takuro's small studios, made from an outbuilding; and a large Anagama wood-fire kiln (2009) with a salt chamber, beside a smaller Bourry box wood-fire kiln (2015), both of which the couple and their friends built to fire the work they create from local wild clay with locally-sourced wood and glazes made from ash from their woodstove and kiln.

In 2017, Hitomi became a member of the esteemed International Academy of Ceramics (IAC).

Hitomi finds inspiration in nature and in the forms made by the pottery masters of Japan years ago.

"Without gas or electric kilns, chemistry information, schools, or books,

those potters made beautiful pots by using their knowledge and experience," she says admiringly.

The Seagrove tradition is one that Hitomi has come to know and respect—the discovery of clay, kiln building methods, and how the area potters lived and passed on their traditions to the next generation—the tradition is very meaningful to her.

She describes her work now, 15 years after moving to Seagrove, as a mix of cultures. She is not a pure North Carolina traditionalist, but blends what she learned about thousands of years of pottery tradition in Japan with what she has learned in Seagrove about "turning and burning."

She also treasures the many beautiful pots she is surrounded by in her home, made by good friends she and her husband have met during their travels in Japan, England and throughout the United States. A "who's who" of international wood-fire potters have befriended she and Takuro over the years, and many of them visit with the Shibatas in Seagrove, where they are known for their hospitality and for Hitomi's irresistible Japanese cooking and baking.

"To me, pots are the containers that hold my good memories and remind me of good friendships," she says.

**Hitomi Shibata** (Seagrove, Randolph Co., NC)  
Sunset Sky. Coil-built using local Seagrove area clay and slip. Decorated with red iron oxide. 2019. 15.5" H.

