

healthy, but providing a light-hearted symbol of hope for a good life and a better future.

Tashima also looks at the irony of our new-found obsession with all things organic. To Tashima, while we have developed a better opinion about organically grown produce, it is strange that such things as chocolates, canned foods, liquor, and tobacco can all be labelled organic. One example is *Organic Banana in Supermarket* (2011), a life-size multiple-fired stoneware ceramic of a clean-cut young man emerging from a large peeled banana. Wearing a pink shirt, khaki pants, and a fashionable wrist watch, he is the epitome of an upscale urban dweller. Attached to the banana are processed products of our contemporary times: Cornflakes, maple syrup, pancake mix, chocolates, and canned drink, as if by proximity they too can become healthy foodstuffs. What is significant about these products is that they are all supposedly organic. The man of course is Hiro, and by emerging from the peel as if he is the banana itself, he declares the proverbial, "You are what you eat." The figure also holds a carton of organic miso soup in one hand, and a package of microwavable rice in the other, as if trying to decide among all these products which ones he should eat. Thus Tashima expresses the modern dilemma about how to care for ourselves in light of the conflicting messages sent by commercially-driven purveyors of food.

In preparation for shipping an exhibition of the *Banana Se-*

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ries to Tokyo, Tashima heard the terrible news about the earthquake and tsunami that hit the east coast of Japan. At first he lamented that the nature of his works would be too happy for the sudden change in

circumstances and that the exhibition would be cancelled. The show was ultimately mounted even though aftershocks and power outages continued for weeks. After seeing the resilience of the people on television and the outpouring of support into the country, Tashima realized how much the people needed hope and humour to see their way through a difficult period.

He quickly included a new banana work in response to the disaster, yet one with a more serious message, *One For All, All for One, United We Stand* (2011). In this sculpture, two free-standing figures each hold donation boxes with pleas in Japanese for donations to the relief cause. Wearing school uniforms, they are high school students from the big cities who collect money from commuters in the train stations all over Japan. As Tashima explains, "I specifically made this piece to raise money for the earthquake victims. Just like the sign the students hold up, my piece is a call for assistance—it was my way of helping the cause." The proceeds from the sale of this work went to the earthquake victims. Tashima was able to see the affect his sculptures had on the people when he stayed in Japan for two weeks during the run of the show. While suffering from aftershocks and black-outs one month later because of the nuclear

power plant shut-down, people still came to see the exhibition to find a little joy in their lives.

Upon his return to the United States, Tashima created *Black Chocolate Rain Banana Series*, (2011), a bitter-sweet reflection of our times. For this piece, Tashima fashioned a smartly dressed business woman who emerges from an organic banana peel clutching her purse and wearing an optimistic smile. Referring to the rain that falls after a nuclear explosion, chocolate pours down from her umbrella with a black bird perched on it—perhaps an ominous portent of the dire



One For All, All For One, United We Stand,
26 x 10 x 10 cm, multiple-fired stoneware, handbuilt firing temp: cone 5, 2011