

NEW CERAMICS

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# KENICHI HARAYAMA'S

## Nonobjective Minimalism

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**K**enichi Harayama is a Japanese sculptor who creates non-objective artworks. As he says, he likes to create work that reflects the desire to “see what he has never seen.” He strives to deliberately form his work, rather than rely on process as a mode of expression. Beauty and human expression lie at the heart of his studio practice.

Harayama was born in 1972 in Machida-City in Tokyo and grew up in a middleclass family. His mother was artistic and worked in graphic design and textiles. It was from her that Harayama became interested in art. Harayama studied art in the Department of Craft and Design at Kanazawa College of Art. At the time, the prevailing aesthetic of modern ceramic sculpture did not sit convincingly with the young man. Professors were insular and seldom showed images of artwork being made in the outside world. There was little contact with other schools. His peers’ work lacked originality, and he felt their ideas seldom had “potential for expansion.” (He remembers a student who used gunpowder to explode clay; good form but the concept did not have “long legs.”)

Instead of earning a Master’s degree, Harayama chose to go to Tajimi to learn “more real information” about ceramics. Tajimi-City is famous as a center for production ceramics and for the Mino Ceramics Museum. In 1996, when Harayama moved to Tajimi, he began work on design research and development at Tajimi City Pottery Design and Technical Center (ISHOKEN.) Two years later, he began to teach classes at ISHOKEN and eventually helped manage the program. ISHOKEN is a small city-funded school that focuses exclusively on ceramics instruction. With rustic facilities and a talented faculty, the school has produced extraordinary artists. Their graduates include Kentaro Kawabata, Akio Niisato, Hattori Tatsuya, Takura Kuwata, Kenji Gomi, Chie Masamori, Oe Norikazu, Tsubusa Kato and Masato Komai. An article about these graduates, Japanese Contemporary Ceramics and Tableware in the Tajimi and Seto Region, appeared in “New Ceramics” Magazine in 2015. Although ISHOKEN is not widely

below - “time, air, gravity”, porcelain, glaze, w 60, ø 40, h 45cm (foremost left work), 2010  
opposite page - “gyle”, earthenware, w 60, ø 35, h 60 cm, 2016





**His structural clay coils became a rhythmic, hypnotic surface design and texture. The deceptively simple organic forms are carefully and sensitively controlled with smooth gentle curves and transitions.**

known outside Japan, it offers exceptional instruction opportunities and embraces foreign students. Ljubica Jovic-Knezevic is one of their European graduates. Recently ISHOKEN created a program expressly for foreign students.

For the first couple of years in Tajimi, Kenichi had no studio and did not make artwork. Instead, he talked to artists who create more original work, the kinds of artists he sought during his studies. After those years of discovery, Kenichi rented a space in a defunct factory. His first works were large, simple coil built forms with visible construction technique. His structural

clay coils became a rhythmic, hypnotic surface design and texture. The deceptively simple organic forms are carefully and sensitively controlled with smooth gentle curves and transitions. Harayama created this work for ten years and exhibited it in many Japanese museums.

He also exhibited in two international venues, the Mino International Competition (several times) and the 54th Faenza International Competition of Contemporary Ceramic Art in Italy. At the 7th MINO competition in 2007, Harayama was awarded the Judges' Special Prize. These works convey the emotional feeling of his touch with clay. Deceptively simple, they are about touch

and elemental essential form.

More recently, after a trip to see the otherworldly desert landscape in California, Harayama started new work where he put aside traditional techniques to embrace a more child-like approach to building sculpture. The works that emerged were rougher and resemble landscape. Last year at the Roemhild International Ceramic Symposium, Harayama started to work with pigmented clays and created works that were influenced by an appreciation of gyres and vortices. He sees these as physical manifestations of the discipline of Physics and as something that timelessly depicts the human spirit. He understands this is an artistic interpretation of these concepts.

In March of 2016, Harayama accepted a position as Associate Professor of Education at Nara University. In Tajimi, Harayama will leave behind his studio, but he will also move from a large warehouse building that he transformed/subdivided into a living space and a storage space for his art. More than half the building is raw space where he stored his work, and here he



"galaxy", earthenware, slip, w 120, ø120, h135 cm, 2008

"friction", earthenware, w 60, ø 40, h 40 cm (foremost work), 2013





Installation "The light court", earthenware, slip, 2015 (each works made between 2002 and 2007)

created his own beautiful landscape populated by dozens of his coil-built forms. Within this warehouse, on the left side, Harayama built a structure within the building, and this contains about four rooms that served as his home. Accessed through a frosted glass door with the word "Harayama" stenciled on it, one enters a large living room that is made entirely of extremely carefully crafted particleboard that is worked to a furniture-grade standard. There is a long curved "window" that is made of opaque corrugated plastic. The floor and walls are polished particleboard, immaculate and perfect. Arranged in the space were a few sculptures, and a simple hammock served as the only furnishing. This room is remarkable because it is made of inexpensive materials with carefully chosen contents. Like his work, he has used common materials in a new way to achieve a spare, elegant, understated, subtle, minimalist beauty.

One wonders what masterpieces Harayama will create in the coming years in Nara. He reports that he enjoys his new job tremendously and that it affords him more time to create.

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Kenichi Harayama was born in Tokyo in 1972. In 1996, he was graduated from the Department of Craft Design of Kanazawa College of Art. Immediately afterwards, Harayama started working for Tajimi-City Pottery Design and Technical Center, (ISHOKEN). In 2016, he was appointed Associate Professor at Nara University of Education. Harayama has exhibited widely including at major international ceramic competitions including Mino (five times) and Faenza (one time). He also has had solo exhibits at several Japanese museums and in 2015 he was invited to make art at the international symposium in Roemhild.

