

Ceramics

Art + Perception

October 2018

110

USD	\$20
EUR	€18
CAD	\$27
AUD	\$27
GBP	£15

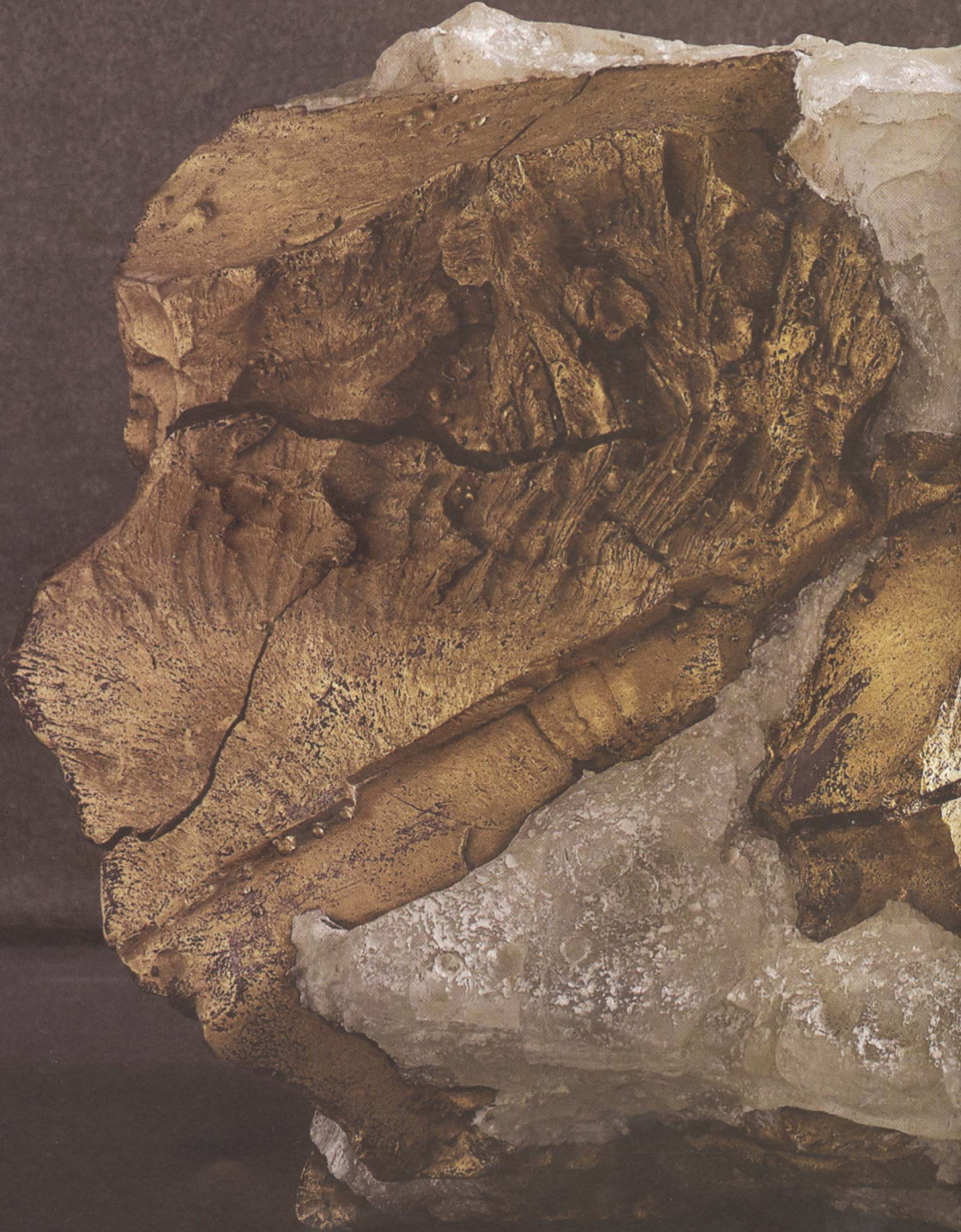


ART

Ogawa Machiko

Elemental Abstraction

Written by Joe Earle





**Crystals and
Memories.** Ogawa
Machiko, 2017, porcelain
and glass, 10 1/4 x 11 3/4 x 9
1/2 in. (26 x 30 x 24 cm). I
mage credit: Omi
Shigeharu.



Ogawa does not so much use clay to achieve self-expression as make herself the means through which the clay reveals its inner strength.



Blue-green Glass-glazed Sculpture, 2012, glazed stoneware, 7 x 19 5/8 x 19 5/8 in. (18 x 50 x 50 cm).
Image credit: Richard Goodbody.

The ceramics of Ogawa Machiko (b. 1946) reflect a lifetime of engagement with unfamiliar cultures and a mindset free from the constraints of nativist essentialism and workshop-based practice. She was born in Sapporo on the northern island of Hokkaido, far from Japan's historic centers of ceramic production. Her family, prosperous and talented in art and music, boasted a long history of interaction with the outside world. Her grandfather, a classic Hokkaido immigrant pioneer and entrepreneur, was a protégé of William Smith Clark, a Civil War hero and educator who helped found Sapporo Agricultural College in 1876 and is celebrated there even today for his valedictory words to his students: "Boys, be ambitious!" Her father was a talented weekend artist and her sisters included a Western-style painter and a pianist. Machiko herself was exposed to foreign languages and culture at an early age, taking piano lessons from a young Québécoise nun at age six, then switching her interest to painting and later printmaking as the family moved from Sapporo to Aomori (in the north of Honshu, Japan's main island) and then to Tokyo. She first encountered the world of ceramics during her high-school years, at the studio of Tsuji Seimei. Although this did not bring about a sudden conversion, she was slowly drawn to the process of handling and working clay, so different than that of painting on canvas.

At Tokyo University of Arts and Music, Machiko studied under three ceramic masters—Fujimoto Nōdō, Tamura Kōichi, and Katō Hajime—who might fairly be described as traditionalists, not just in their styles of working but also in their workshop practice, their old-fashioned ideas about the proper relationship between master and pupil, their faith in the osmotic, non-instructional transmission of skills, and their relative lack of interest in cultural influences beyond East Asian ceramics. With no definite intention of devoting her life to ceramics but simply enjoying the touch and feel of clay, Machiko was determined to follow a different artistic path and learned more through looking at the works of her professors and their predecessors than through hands-on training. She was also drawn to Japan's earliest ceramic traditions, including the products of the *Jōmon* and *Yayoi* cultures, as well as to contemporary art in other media by European modernists such as Lucio Fontana and Constantin Brancusi.

