



PIONEERS of JAPAN'S SÔDEISHA CERAMIC MOVEMENT

# BIRDS of DAWN

Published in conjunction with the exhibition “Birds of Dawn: Pioneers of Japan’s Sōdeisha Ceramic Movement,” organized by Joan B. Mirviss, Ltd., New York, from March 16 - April 29, 2011.

Names are given in Japanese sequence with family name first.  
In the case of Japanese individuals residing abroad, their names are given according to Western custom with family name last.

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FRONT COVER

**Suzuki Osamu (1926-2001)**  
*Hanayagu tori;*  
**Flamboyant Bird**  
**1991**  
22.63 x 10.0 x 5.25 inches  
Stoneware with red slip and ash glazes

BACK COVER

**Yamada Hikaru (1923-2001)**  
*Kokutō no sukuriin;*  
**Smoke-blackened Screen**  
**1983**  
16.0 x 16.0 x 4.0 inches  
Smoke-blackened stoneware  
Collection of Pilar Conde

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# INTRODUCTION

This publication and the related exhibition span more than fifty years of the work of the founders of Sōdeisha — Suzuki Osamu, Yagi Kazuo and Yamada Hikaru. They are the realization of my dream to present this influential avant-garde ceramics movement to the American audience in a comprehensive manner.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, at a time of severe resource scarcity in Japan, a group of ceramic artists with similar visions came together in Kyoto to promote a new style of non-traditional sculptural ceramics. The result was the Sōdeisha movement, which included an exhibition system that gave the participating artists freedom from the established orthodoxy and provided a vehicle for artistic dialogue. The name Sōdeisha, derived from a Chinese ceramic term for a glazing fault, translates literally as “Crawling through Mud Association” and was meant to express the artists’ complete absorption with their earth-bound medium.

Breaking free from traditional ceramics, these artists also looked to poetry, music, surrealism, cubism, ancient art forms, and Western literature as points of departure. Inspired by diverse European artists such as Joan Miró, Paul Klee, Constantin Brancusi and Pablo Picasso, they created work—complete with poetic titles—that they termed “objets” borrowing the French term, but with clear links to Japanese culture. Unlike sculptors or painters, they viewed clay as the basis of their art. While this medium demanded finely honed techniques and processes, it also enabled them the flexibility to explore a wide range of themes and forms. As early as 1951, the work of these Sōdeisha artists was shown in Paris, at the Musée Cernuschi, together with that of numerous other Japanese ceramists and made a significant impression on the European audience of the time. Work by Yagi Kazuo was acquired by savvy Americans as early as 1950 and by 1962 had entered the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

The art of Suzuki Osamu, Yagi Kazuo and Yamada Hikaru has captivated me for nearly three decades. My unforgettable encounters with both Suzuki and Yamada at their exhibitions and their homes, towards the ends of their lives, are memories I will cherish always. In addition, it has been wonderful to get to know some of the Yagi and Yamada family members and their encouragement has proved to be essential. I have been acquiring and selling works by these artists since the 1990s and all but one work in the catalogue section are either currently available or have passed through my hands at one time.

This publication marks my thirty-fifth year as a professional in the world of Japanese art. It may be surprising to some that although my initial focus as a dealer was on prints and paintings, my earliest start was in clay, back in 1972, when I traveled the length of Japan with a few other college students on a two-month ceramic tour. But I did not enter this field professionally until 1984 after being dazzled by the exhibition at the Smithsonian Institution, “Japanese Ceramics Today,” organized by the pioneering patron, Kikuchi Tomo. To this day, her Suzuki Osamu “Horse” sculpture stands as one of my all-time favorites. Since that seminal exhibition, and several others—especially Frederick Baekeland’s widely-seen “Modern Japanese Ceramics in American Collections,” Joe Earle’s “Contemporary Clay: Japanese Ceramics for a New Century,” and Louise Cort’s and Bert Winther-Tamaki’s groundbreaking “Isamu Noguchi and Modern Japanese Ceramics”—the appreciation of modern and contemporary Japanese ceramic art in this country and abroad has increased exponentially.

First I wish to thank my dream team of writers who enthusiastically supported this project with their excellent essays—Glenn Adamson, Joe Earle and Rupert Faulkner. The incredibly knowledgeable Louise Allison Cort, Curator of Ceramics at the Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, most graciously accepted the role of “reader” and her insights proved invaluable.

Early on, a number of people opened doors for me in Japan and I must acknowledge the generosity and assistance of those individuals: Yagi Akira and Sakiyo; Yamada Akira, Mizuho and Yuri; Kusaka Chieko; Aoi Masami; Kikuchi Tomo and Koike Kimiko; Nakamura Yukio; Ohara Noriko; Murata Shiro; Kuroda Koji; and the Kososhi Family. In addition to Amie Cooper, our patient and reliable project coordinator, my gallery team has proved indispensable and indefatigable throughout this project and special thanks must be given to Nami Hoppin for her graphic ingenuity and meticulous attention to every detail, and to Rie Nakano and Martin Gewirtz for their patient efforts. Richard Goodbody's superb photography, spanning the entire length of this project, is readily visible throughout this publication. Equally essential, I also thank my many loyal and wonderful clients, both private collectors and museum curators, without whose support none of this would have been remotely feasible. On a personal note, I wish to express my eternal thanks to my husband Bob Levine, who shares my passion for this field and himself purchased our first work by Suzuki Osamu more than twenty-five years ago when I could not afford to do so.

Joan B. Mirviss



FIG 1 Sōdeisha group members at the seventh *Sōdeisha* exhibition, October 1952. Left to right (front) Nakajima Kiyoshi and Yamada Hikaru; (back) Kanzaki Kenzō, Yagi Kazuo and Suzuki Osamu. Courtesy of Yagi Akira and Yamada Akira.



OPPOSITE  
20 *Bakei*;  
Horse Figure  
1982  
20.0 x 7.0 x 6.0 inches  
Stoneware with red slip and ash glazes

RIGHT  
21 *Ten ni itaru kumo*;  
Cloud Rising toward Heaven  
1989  
24.5 x 17.5 x 7.25 inches  
Stoneware with red slip and ash glazes



BELOW

**50 *Tetsuzō gan - hana tsubo*;  
Flower Vase with Iron-glazed  
Floral Pattern**

**1959**

10.25 x 6.0 inches

White *shigaraki* clay with black iron glaze

Similar work exhibited and published:

YAGI 1980 pl. 35; YAGI 1981 pl. 22; YAGI

2004 pl. 35, p. 62. Similar work won Grand

Prize at the Second International Ceramic

Competition, Belgium 1959.

Collection of Carol and Jeffery Horvitz

OPPOSITE

**51 *Tetsu-e tsubo - shō chō*;  
Vessel with Designs in Iron Glaze -  
Flying Bird Motif**

**1959**

10.0 x 8.0 inches

White *shigaraki* clay with combed design in

black iron glaze

Similar work exhibited and published: YAGI

1980 pl. 34; YAGI 1981 pl. 21; YAGI 2004

pl. 34, p. 62.





BELOW

**78 Silver-glazed screen**

ca. 1993

22.0 x 15.75 x 3.5 inches

Glazed stoneware

Exhibited: *Contemporary Clay: Japanese Ceramics for the New Century*, Japan Society, New York 2006. Exhibited and published: YAMADA 2004 pl. 298, p. 241.

Collection of Stanley and Mary Anne Snider

OPPOSITE

**79 Gindei sukuriin;**

Silver-glazed Screen

1993

25.38 x 16.0 x 4.13 inches

Glazed stoneware

Exhibited: 45th *Sōdeisha Memorial Exhibition*, Fukuoka Prefecture Art Museum, Kyushu 1993; Gallery Nakamura, Kyoto 1993. Exhibited and published: YAMADA 1994 pl. 200, p. 88; YAMADA 2004 pl. 285, p. 121.





Joan B. Mirviss has been an expert and leading dealer in Japanese art, specializing in modern and contemporary ceramics, *ukiyo-e* prints, paintings, and screens for thirty-five years. Mirviss has organized numerous contemporary ceramics exhibitions, bringing the work of celebrated artists as well as hitherto unknown talents to the attention of the American public. She is responsible for placing the work of Japanese ceramic artists in the collections of over thirty-five museums in this country. In addition to her numerous articles for museum publications, magazines and journals, she curated the 1995 exhibition for the Phoenix Art Museum and Los Angeles County Museum of Art and co-authored the accompanying book, *The Frank Lloyd Wright Collection of Surimono*. In 2000, she curated the exhibition and wrote the publication, *Jewels of Japanese Printmaking: Surimono of the Bunka and Bunsei Era* for the Ota Memorial Art Museum in Tokyo.



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