

A close-up photograph of a white ceramic bowl. The bowl features a detailed blue dragon pattern, with scales and a flowing mane visible. The lighting is soft, highlighting the texture of the ceramic and the depth of the blue glaze.

RISING DRAGON

Tokuda Yasokichi IV

Foreword

Tokuda Yasokichi IV, recognized today as a remarkable figure both in Japan and internationally, is one of few female leaders of a traditional pottery family in Japan. With this being her first solo exhibition outside of Japan, Tokuda offers visitors stunning ceramic works polished to perfection, with displays of challenging conceptions in ceramic artistry that showcase sleek lines and shimmering surfaces throughout each piece.

Born in 1961, Tokuda Yasokichi IV succeeded her father, Tokuda Yasokichi III, in 2009, who was a revered Kutani potter and one of Japan's "Living National Treasure" artists. Tokuda inherited from her father the techniques and methods of their Tokuda family style of Kutani porcelain production that features *saiyu* glazing. The arrangements and gradations of color play a central role in the ornamentation, rather than the usual pictorial designs of birds, flowers, and figures seen in conventional Kutani ware. Tokuda's personal sensibility as a female artist lends her a unique perspective on the tradition that is reflected in her diverse choices of color and unique interpretations of form.

Tokuda is one of few female heads of a traditional potting lineage in Japan. In traditional art families, the one who succeeds as head of the family is typically determined at birth, and is most often male. Since her father did not have any male successors, he decided to pass on the family's name and practice to one of his daughters. Although it was a challenge to make a place for herself as head artist of the family tradition in a still male-dominated social structure, Tokuda has defined her own signature ceramics and creative voice apart from that of her father. This solo show highlights her impressive achievements.

"Rising Dragon," a delicate yet powerful vessel emanating grace and beauty, is inspired by Tokuda's feelings towards her father, a dragon and the central figure in her life as both father and master artist. This image of a rising dragon came to her when she recalled how her father used to gaze at the river in front of the Tokuda Yasokichi studio, which has also been her favorite place to visit since she was a little girl. Today, Tokuda imagines a dragon, her father, ascending from that river to the sky. "Rising Dragon" (one of a series) was acquired by the British Museum in 2014.

Tokuda's works are featured in a number of museums around the world including the British Museum (London, UK), Ishikawa Prefectural Museum of Art (Kanazawa, Japan), Indianapolis Museum of Art (Indiana, US), and Art Complex Museum (Massachusetts, US). And, in fall of 2017, Onishi Gallery helped to arrange a PBS television program about female artists who lead the traditional art world in Japan. One of the artists introduced was Tokuda Yasokichi IV. The program will air on all PBS stations throughout the year beginning late spring 2018.

Displaying her mastery working with the porcelain form, her initiative as a female leader of this traditional art, and her vision as an innovative artist with an inherited legacy, Tokuda has shaped Japanese traditional ceramics in profound and lasting ways.

Nana Onishi
Owner and Director, Onishi Gallery

Communicating the Beauty of Japan: The Pottery of Tokuda Yasokichi IV

By Masahiro Karasawa, Director of The Art Crafts Section
The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo

Japan changes with the four seasons and these transitions can be felt through its bountiful nature. Again and again, these transitions have been used as the themes and motifs for various artworks, and have inspired the works of many artists.

Tokuda Yasokichi IV, born in 1961, has a studio in Komatsu, located in Ishikawa Prefecture. She can be regarded as a sort of traveler wandering through space and time as she reflects her love for the changes in the seasons as is evident in her works.

The creation by Tokuda Yasokichi IV's "Fresh Ears of Rice" work displays many beautiful colors from the changing of the leaves ranging from white to yellow and then to green, which are an example of the true expression of the prototypical Japanese landscape. With the coming of autumn, the landscape becomes abundant with ripening fruit and the green of the rice plant that has been growing rapidly during the summer, begins to bears golden ears in autumn. The more ears the rice bears, the more the rice plants hang their heads due to their weight and that gives the appearance of the ground covered in a yellow carpet. This image of the landscape that symbolizes Japanese autumn is expressed within the color gradation of the glaze and the image of this scene communicates an emotional experience to the viewer.

The brilliance of color created by the glaze has been passed down from Tokuda Yasokichi IV's father, Yasokichi III (1933-2009) who is the founder of this glazing technique. Tokuda Yasokichi III has been designated a Living National Treasure for his "glaze colored pottery" and in doing so, carved his name into the history of Japanese pottery. His grandfather, Yasokichi I (1873-1956), has studied the works of the Kokutani as well as Yoshidaya color pottery techniques of the Edo period and succeeded in the reproduction of the so-called "Five Colors of Kokutani" in the overglaze colors; Prussian blue, purple, green, yellow, and red. The formula for these colors became the family secret of the Tokudas, transmitted from the First to the Second (1907-1997), from the Second to the Third, and from the Third to the Fourth generations.

From these glazing techniques that were handed down, Yasokichi III developed a new method. Instead of drawing a pattern, it involved an expression via color surfaces. In this regard, by specializing in color, Yasokichi III shifted the expression method from pattern composition to color composition. This was unprecedented in the history of Kokutani coloring and unique to Yasokichi III. While the technique is commonly known as "*saiyu*" color glazing, when Yasokichi III was 50 years old, this technique was named based on the vivid color glazing used (*yōsai*) that brought forth numerous prestigious pieces.

The creation of this expression via glazing was actually due to a firing mistake. When Yasokichi III began using an electrical kiln for use in his work, on one occasion, he forgot to turn off the kiln. The temperature exceeded the melting temperature of the glazing and in doing so, the glaze was liquefied. Ordinarily, in what would be considered a mistake, Yasokichi III saw beauty in that liquefied quality. Triggered by this one accident, after repeated efforts to turn the accidental into the intentional, Yasokichi III was able to bring forth his unique glazed porcelain ware. And this glazing technique had then been handed down to Yasokichi IV.

In March of 2010, Tokuda Junko succeeded the name of Yasokichi IV. Prior to the succession, Junko was creating works of her own compositions and colors that she learned at a technical training institute. However, in 2008, she received the family secret of the glazing formula from Yasokichi III and was handed down the “Colors of Yasokichi”. In following the history of the Tokudas, beginning with Yasokichi I, each had left their own mark, and fulfilled an important role within a particular era. Therefore, the task of Yasokichi IV was to make pieces that use these “Colors of Yasokichi”, but are different from the works of Yasokichi III. Indicative was that the Persian blue reminiscent of Yasokichi III was not used as a main color, and that the forms incorporated a roundedness that expressed generosity.

The first piece debuting the “Colors of Yasokichi” was “In the Distance” (2009). This happened right before the passing of Yasokichi III, when the notification of the selection into The Japan Traditional Art Crafts Exhibition was announced, and was a piece that shared the joy with Yasokichi III. After that, numerous pieces symbolizing the works of Yasokichi IV followed, among them “Rising Dragon” (2010) which incorporates the unique ingenuity of Yasokichi IV that found an expression not seen before in the works of Yasokichi III.

“Rising Dragon” was placed upside down during the firing process, with the base pointing up, so that the flow of the glaze appears to run upwards when placed in the normal upright position after firing. While Yasokichi IV calls this technique “Upside Down Firing”, the image of a dragon rising up into the sky has been expressed via the glazing that runs from the bottom to the top.

Additionally, “Crystalline Green” (2011) presents the image of flowering plants and trees growing towards the sky, bathed by the sun’s rays, along with the flow of pristine water, or “Pine Rhyme” which is influenced by Hasegawa Tohaku’s “Pine Trees Screen” that presents the image of the sound of the wind passing through pine trees in the woods, are examples of expressions that are apparent in the works emerging from the unique sensibilities of Yasokichi IV. Among them, “Crystalline Green” is a piece of monumental significance. It is said to show the determination of the path to be taken by Yasokichi IV after the succession of the name.

From this perspective, the work of Yasokichi IV is based on the Japanese aesthetic of a rich mind and perception, and whether a landscape, environment or event that is experienced as beauty reflects the Japanese sensibilities. It is as if witnessing what constitutes being Japanese.

Moreover in recent years, the color red, which has not been used by Yasokichi III, has become established as the color of Yasokichi IV, and with repeated endeavors towards colors and shapes, a new world of works has begun. The encounter of the Japanese expressions of Yasokichi IV with the Kokutani color “red” may lead to the creation of many new works hereafter. There is much to look forward to.



Rising Dragon, 2017

Porcelain with colored glaze (yōsai)

h. 12 1/2 x dia. 16 3/8 in. (31.5 x 41.5 cm)

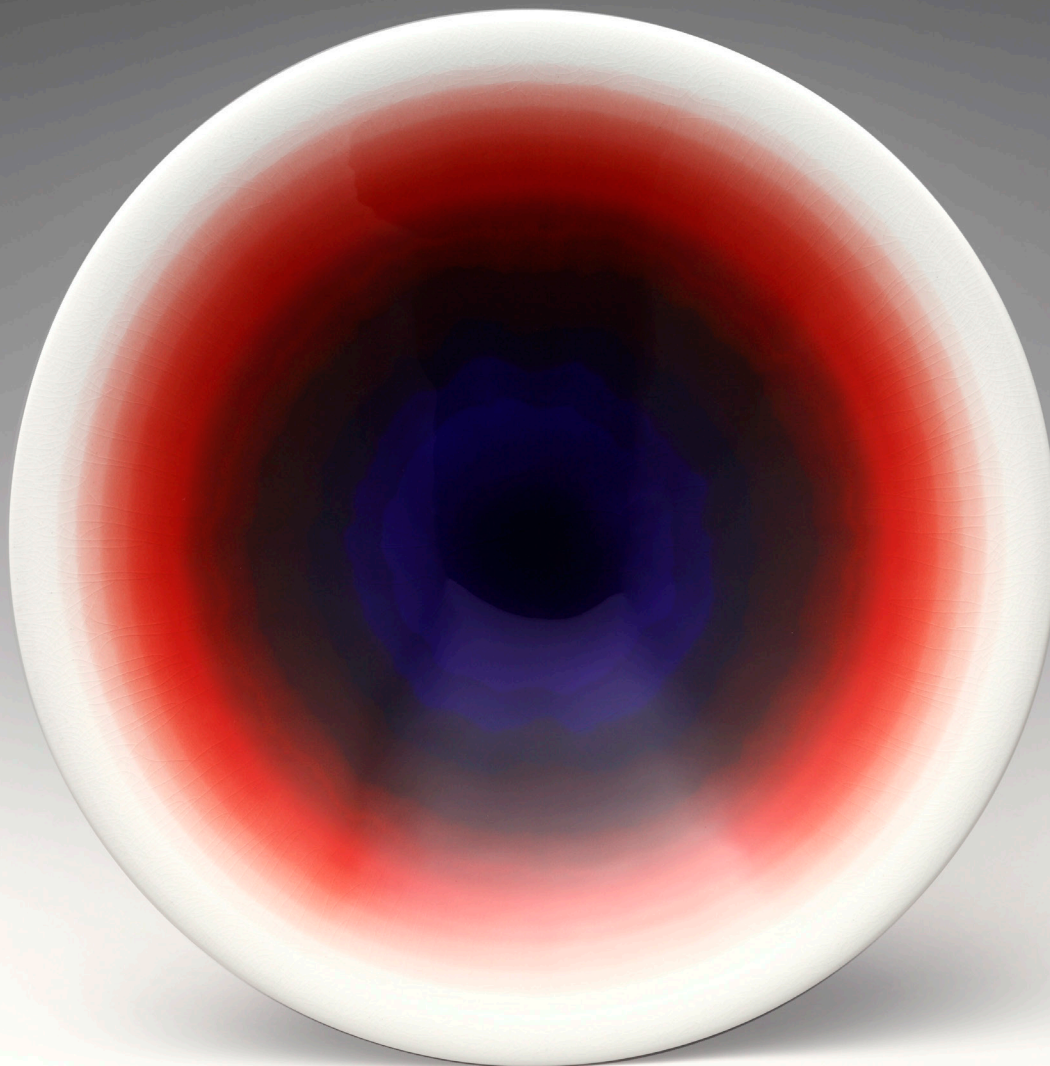
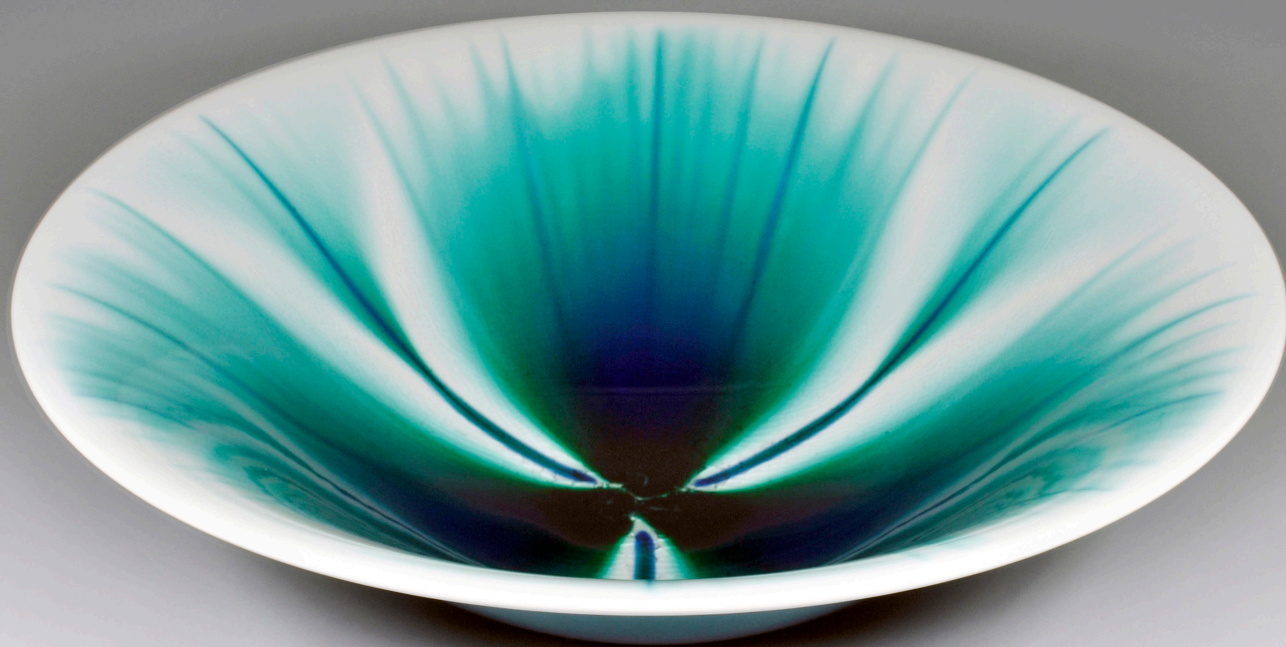


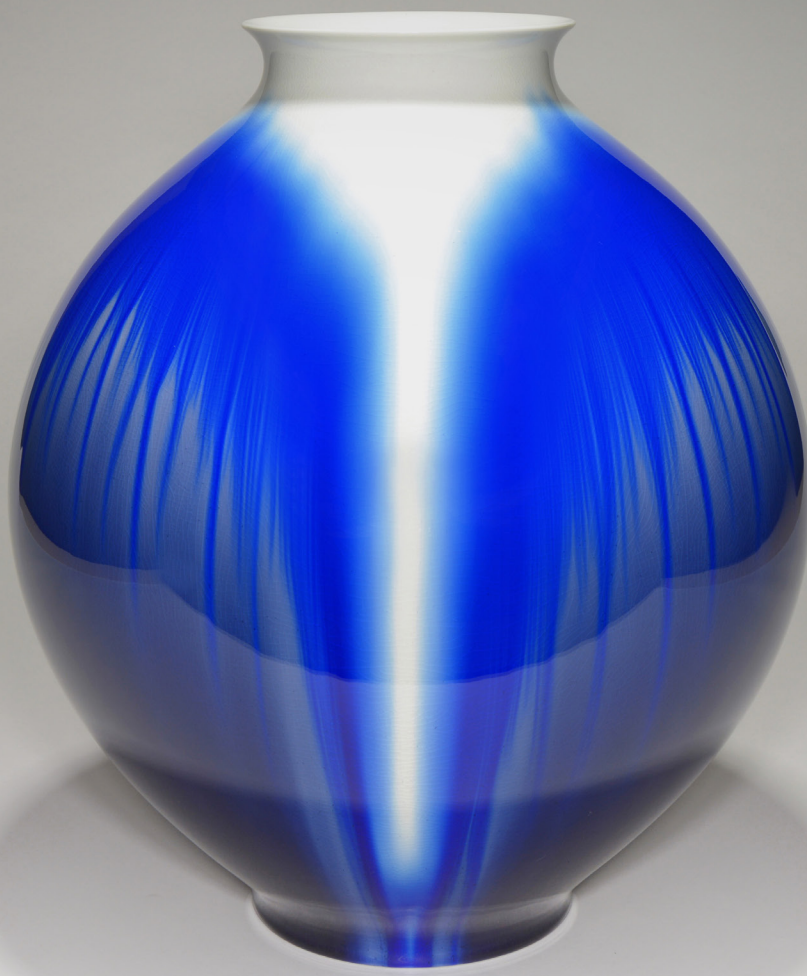
Plate *Shojo* (Ape), 2017
Porcelain with colored glaze (*yōsai*)
h. 4 x dia. 18 in. (10 x 45.5 cm)



Bowl *Suicho* (Crystalline Green), 2017
Porcelain with colored glaze (*yōsai*)
h. 6 x dia. 20 1/2 in. (15.5 x 52 cm)



Jar Mizuho (Fresh Ears of Rice), 2017
Porcelain with colored glaze (*yōsai*)
h. 13 x dia. 14 1/2 in. (33 x 37 cm)



Jar *Romei* (Waterfall), 2017
Porcelain with colored glaze (*yōsai*)
h. 15 1/2 x dia. 13 3/4 in. (39.5 x 35 cm)



Vase *Shoin* (Music of the Wind), 2018
Porcelain with colored glaze (*yōsai*)
h. 21 5/8 x dia. 18 1/2 in. (55 x 47 cm)



Jar *Romei II* (Waterfall II), 2017

Porcelain with colored glaze (*yōsai*)

h. 15 1/2 x dia. 12 1/4 in. (39.5 x 31 cm)



Jar *Shojo* (Ape), 2017
Porcelain with colored glaze (*yōsai*)
h. 15 x dia. 14 3/4 in. (38 x 37.5 cm)

TOKUDA Yasokichi IV



Born in 1961, Tokuda Yasokichi IV succeeded her father upon his death in 2009, Tokuda Yasokichi III, a revered Kutani potter and one of Japan's "Living National Treasure" artists. Tokuda inherited from her father the techniques and methods of their Tokuda family style of Kutani porcelain production that features *saiyu* glazing. The arrangements and gradations of color play a central role in the ornamentation, rather than the usual pictorial designs of birds, flowers, and figures seen in conventional Kutani ware. Tokuda's personal sensibility as a female artist however, lends her a unique perspective on the tradition that is reflected in her diverse choices of color and unique interpretations of form.

Tokuda is one of few female heads of a traditional potting lineage in Japan. In traditional art families, the person who succeeds the family head is typically determined at birth, and is most often male. Since her father did not have any male successors, he decided to pass on the family's name and practice to one of his daughters. Although it was a challenge to make a place for herself as head artist of the family tradition in a still male-dominated social structure, Tokuda has defined her own signature ceramics and creative voice apart from that of her father.

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| 2018 | <i>Rising Dragon</i> , Onishi Gallery, New York, US |
| 2013–2018 | <i>Asia Week</i> , New York, US |
| 2017 | <i>The 64th Japan Traditional Kōgei Exhibition</i> , Japan
<i>Solo Exhibition</i> , Takashimaya, Kyoto, Japan |
| 2016 | <i>The 72nd Contemporary Art Exhibition</i> , Ishikawa Prefectural Museum of Art, Ishikawa, Japan
<i>The Power of Colors</i> , Musée Tomo, Tokyo, Japan |
| 2015 | <i>SOFA Chicago</i> , Illinois, US
<i>Tradition Reborn: Contemporary Japanese Ceramics</i> , Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indiana, US
<i>360th Anniversary Kutaniyaki Exhibition</i> , Kutaniyaki Art Museum, Ishikawa, Japan |
| 2014 | <i>Contemporary Japanese Ceramics</i> , Embassy of Japan, Washington D.C., US |
| 2012 | <i>The Inaugural Biennale of the Tea Ceremony Today – Utility and Form</i> , Musée Tomo, Tokyo, Japan |

SELECTED PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

British Museum, London, UK; Ishikawa Prefectural Museum of Art, Kanazawa, Japan; Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indiana, US; Art Complex Museum, Duxbury, Massachusetts, US



ONISHIGALLERY

521 West 26th Street, New York, NY 10001
212 695 8035 / info@onishigallery.com
onishigallery.com