

AMA

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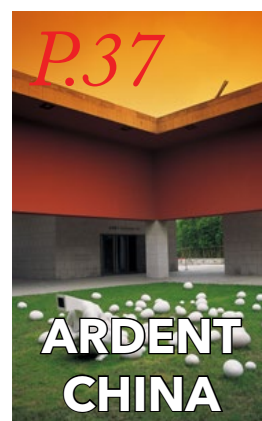
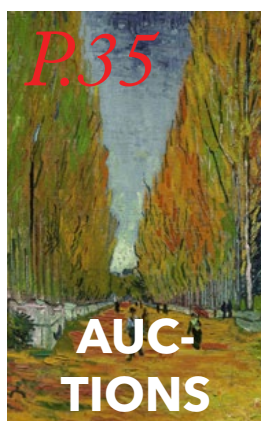
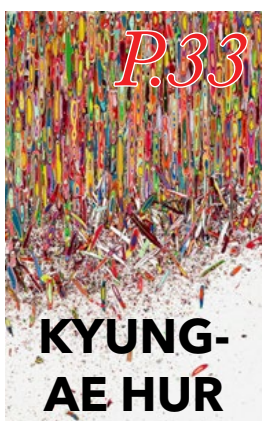
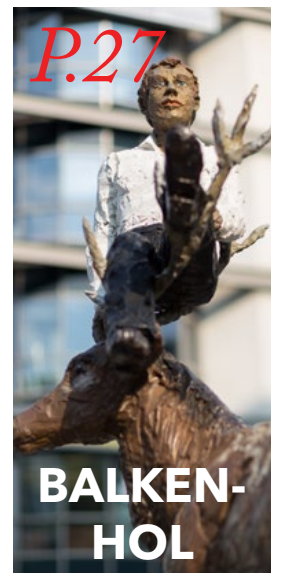
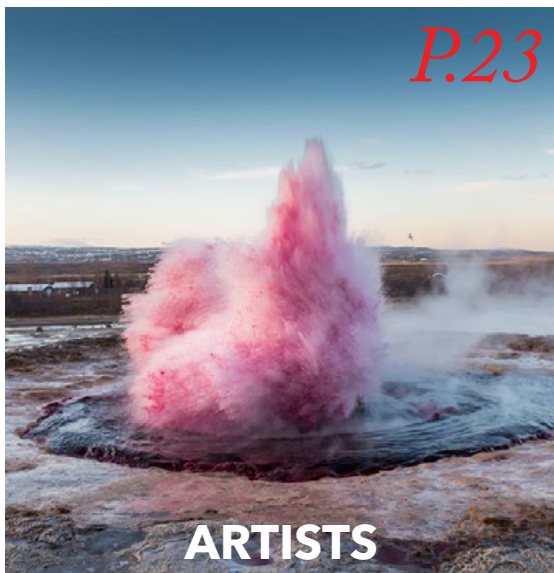
Le Jour ni l'Heure 5417 (1934)
Victor Brauner

Credit: Renaud Camus
Musée d'Art Moderne
de la Ville de Paris

"A DEEP AFFINITY":
SURREALISM AND
NON-EUROPEAN ARTS



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THE JAPANESE TEA CEREMONY

Born in 1947, Jun Iwai is a Japanese ceramic artist who makes traditional Japanese pottery. He has displayed his traditional Japanese works all around the world, having had exhibitions in Germany, Italy, the United States, and Korea, as well as in his native country, Japan. AMA got the chance to talk to the artist about his career, the different types of ceramic art, and his experience of exhibiting his work abroad.





INTERVIEW • JUN IWAI

Could you tell us a bit about your career?

I started off by studying biochemistry at Hokkaido University but I was always very interested in ceramic art, so after graduating from university I went to Kyoto and studied ceramic art there for five years. Afterwards, I went back to my hometown of Sendai and started working with my kiln in my studio there, and I have been doing this for almost 40 years now.

Jun Iwai with Hoin Yamada

Why is ceramics your preferred medium?

I am very interested in ceramic art because I am interested in the traditional Japanese tea ceremony. An important part of traditional Japanese culture, the tea ceremony is the ceremonial preparation of green tea, and is like a performance. I make various kinds of pottery such as flower vases, bowls, cups, and so on, but I mainly make pottery for the tea ceremony. Japanese food won UNESCO cultural heritage status, being classed in the Intangible Cultural Heritage list, and food is also an important part of the Japanese tea ceremony, as during the ceremony we don't only drink tea but also eat special food. I'm currently making pottery (table ware) for some restaurants in Japan.

I use two types of ceramic glazing, one is crystalline glazing and the other is tenmoku glazing. The name tenmoku, a style of tea bowls with black coloured glazing, comes from China. During the Song Dynasty in China, many Japanese monks travelled from Japan throughout the Kamakura Era (800 years ago) to study the Zen temples. These monks returned to Japan with tea bowls that they called *Tenmoku chawan*. The tenmoku chawan masterpieces have long been highly regarded as works or masterworks of art, and even today many of them have been declared national treasures and important cultural assets. In books about Chinese ceramics, Yohen glazing in particular is described to be more "otherworldly" than other Tenmoku tea bowls. Only a few of these still exist in the world, including the three national treasure tea bowls in Japan. Currently in Japan, some ceramicists and I have recreated Yohen tenmoku. And other new forms besides the Yohen have continued to be developed one after another. I've created my own glaze called the Rikka Tenmoku glaze.

ceramic by Jun Iwai

**You have had exhibitions in Europe, the United States, and Asia. Do you think that exhibiting in the West and in Asia are different experiences?**

Yes, it's completely different. I wanted to introduce Japanese pottery to the world so I've had exhibitions in Italy, the United States, Korea, and Germany. In Europe, it's modern ceramic art, but in Asia, it's more traditional ceramic art that is involved with the traditional Japanese tea ceremony and flower arranging. So the atmosphere is quite different when exhibiting ceramic art in Asia as opposed to in Europe or the United States. In 2007, when I had an exhibition in Rome sponsored by the International Antinoo Center for Art, the centre's president, Laura Monachesi, named it "Antinoo" after my new glaze. Antinoo was a Bithynian Greek youth and a lover of the Roman emperor Hadrian. He was deified after his death, being worshipped as a god. Laura Monachesi told me "when Antinoo died in the Nile river, the colour of the sky must have been similar to your Tenmoku glazing."

How would you describe your artistic mission?

At the moment, I've been concentrating on the aftermath of the huge earthquake in Japan that happened four years ago in my hometown of Sendai. I'm trying to make works that will affect people's minds and hearts and help them recover from this disaster.

Do you have upcoming future projects?

I don't have any concrete plans, but if I have the chance to, I'd love to continue exhibiting my works around the world. I haven't had the chance to have my works exhibited in the United Kingdom, so if I get the chance to, I'd love to exhibit there. I'd also love to go back to Italy. ♦