

MIKIKO TOMITA

Object artist

November, 2022.

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH MIKIKO TOMITA

We conducted an exclusive interview with Mikiko Tomita, whose geometric patterns and outstanding sense of color have been attracting attention in preparation for her upcoming two-artists exhibition to be held from November 4. We asked her about the source of her inspiration and what she values in her life as a ceramic artist.



One flower opens with five petals Tea bowl : H10.2 x W14.0 x D16.0cm Pedestal : H2.0 x W14.3

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Mikiko Tomita

1972 Born in Hirakata City, Osaka Prefecture

1996 Graduated from Kyoto City University of Arts, majoring in ceramics

Kyoto City University of Arts, Graduation Works Exhibition (Alumni Association Encouragement Prize, Tomimoto Prize)

■ How did you get started in pottery?

When I took the entrance examination for Seika University, I had to choose a course. I had always liked "making things" such as plastic models, handicrafts, and crafts, and I thought it would be interesting to make things with clay, so I chose this course. After that, I could not give up on my first choice, Kyoto City University of Arts, so I took the entrance exam again and transferred. However, I enjoyed my first year of pottery making at Seika, so I decided to keep studying ceramics.

■ How did the geometric pattern get started?

When I was in elementary school, I lived in Portugal for about a year because of my father's work. When I traveled around Portugal and Spain at that time, I sometimes visited areas where Islamic culture flourished. There, I saw for the first-time buildings with Islamic decorations and azulejo tiles in Lisbon, and I was captivated by the detailed geometric patterns that seemed to go on forever. I was also fascinated by the intricate patterns of the local folk art, which I loved so much that my father used to buy them for me. So, I became more and more familiar with such patterns.

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I was also inspired by the dense and decorative religious decorations in the main halls of temples that I visit during Obon and Ohigan. I also went on a backpacking trip with friends to Turkey, Spain, and Thailand during my college years and saw the decorative arts of those countries, which I think was also significant.

■ Are you also inspired by insects and plants?

Yes, I am. The area around this work studio is now concrete, but in the past, it was all grass and there were fields. So, I used to dismantle cicada shells and observe caterpillars there. I also grew up looking at my father's plant and insect books, National Geographic, Newton, etc. I liked looking at things that were a little creepy, such as electron microscope diagrams of insects and cell diagrams of the human body. I still often observe the patterns on insects' backs and the shape of the web of the female spider.

■ What has inspired you lately?

Until now, I have often ended up with somewhat biased works, where space is space and life is life, and although I feel a sense of accomplishment after the work is done, I often feel that something is missing. Recently, I decided to reconstruct the individual images of inspiration that I had been feeling. In doing so, I realized that the evolution of life, the wonder of life, and the patterns and regularities of insects, which are not found in humans, are all connected to the single concept of the "universe". In other words, what I had been inspired by individually until now was not actually individual, but all connected to the same sense of "universe". Once I began to see things in this way, I think my work became more coherent.

■ Did you find it difficult to find a balance as a writer and mother of two?

Yes, I receive many invitations to participate in exhibitions, but I often have to turn them down in tears because my own schedule makes it too difficult. Even I managed to accept an offer, I often end up being work until very last minutes. Even when I plan my work schedule with plenty of

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time to spare, my children's schedules come in, and in the end, I am often not able to do everything as planned.

Until my early 40s, I was still very active and wanted to work hard and participate in more exhibitions, but I was also stressed about having to take care of the house, and sometimes I was too hard on my family. However, what I can't do now can't be helped, and there is no point in pushing myself too hard to do something I can't do. I have started to think about how I live my 50s, 60s, 70s, and 80s, and I hope to enjoy my ceramic life in the future. I will continue to do it until I am 80 years old.



(Pic: The work studio of Tomita)

■ You also offer pottery classes, how did that come about?

This studio was originally built by my parents, and I opened the pottery school about 26 years ago. Each of my pieces takes a long time to make, and since I cannot make a large number of pieces, the earnings from my work alone are not enough to cover the costs, which is why I started the class.

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(Pic : Sign board of pottery class)

■ What are some of the best things about teaching a class?

I think it is talking with my students. When I am working on my own work, I often concentrate too much on my own work, and I tend to be too busy with my own work, so it is refreshing to be able to talk with my students and learn about various things. Also, since the students who come here are not here to make objects art, but to make vessels for daily use, I am often asked about things that are not in my field, such as kohiki, underglaze painting, and kneading. I also study and prepare to teach my students, which is very helpful to deepen my understanding of different fields. But I also close when I am busy preparing for an exhibition, so I don't charge a monthly fee and let people just come in whenever they want from 10:00 to 16:00. Some people stay all day, others are busy with housework or work and leave after a short time, so there is no specific rule in this class.

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■ Do you have any concerns about your production?

I sometimes have problems with materials, such as cracks that suddenly appear even though I have been making the same type of pots as before. In such cases, I try to find the cause of the problem by changing the clay mixture myself, or by asking the advice from other artists. Sometimes, when I ask other artists, they tell me that the quality of their soil has changed a little, which is very helpful. However, even if I find the cause of the problem, I have to find a way to deal with the problem together, such as getting used to the new soil and making adjustments, so it is very difficult.

■ What is your production method?

First of all, bisque-fired, and then glazing, after that main firing. After layered with the first and second overglazed painting, gold painting is applied as a last step. The main firing is done in an electric kiln at 1230 degrees Celsius for about 16 hours. The clay I use varies depends on the technique. For hand-twisting, I use semi-porcelain clay, which has the consistency of clay, and for casting, I use porcelain clay. For glazes, I use both purchased glazes and glazes that I have mixed myself.



(Pic: electronic kiln of Tomita)

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■ Which is done first, the inside or the outside of over glazed painting?

The overglaze painting is done from the inside. If you do it from the outside, you run the risk of accidentally touching the outside of the painting while you are working on the inside. The first overglaze painting is done inside and outside, the second overglaze painting is done inside and outside.



(Pic :The work desk of over glazed painting)

■ What is the most difficult part of the production process?

The most difficult thing is to create the shape that I want to make. For example, if I want to create a reproducible "shape of this matcha tea bowl," I have to use casting instead of hand-twisting. However, since I am not a casting type of artist, it takes a lot of time to prepare and set up the process of making a plaster mold, considering how many parts to divide it into and how to remove it to make a prototype. In my case, the image of the shape I want to create comes first, so I have to choose which technique to use later.

Large pieces are basically hand-twisting, but that is a different challenge from casting, because the pace of drying must be adjusted to avoid breakage.

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■ Is there anything you would like people to pay attention to in this exhibition?

Until now, I have often given titles to my vessel pieces that have no particular meaning, but from this exhibition, I have decided to put a clear meaning into the titles of my works. To be honest, there is a limit to what can be conveyed by looking at a work without explanation, so I wanted to convey the meaning of the work by looking at the title. Therefore, I would be happy if you could look at the work and the title and think about it. Also, this time, I made the vessels consciously so that the viewer can feel the sense of the world even though they are vessels, so I hope you will pay attention to that as well.

■ Do you feel about this two-person exhibition with Aya Murata?

Although we are different in form, I think we share the same biological, decorative and inspirational aspects and favorite books. I think we share the same sensibilities and points of view. I am looking forward to seeing how their works will be displayed in the gallery.

Two artist Exhibition of Mikiko Tomita & Aya Murata will be held from Friday, November 4 to Saturday, November 26, 2022.

We look forward to seeing you at the gallery.