

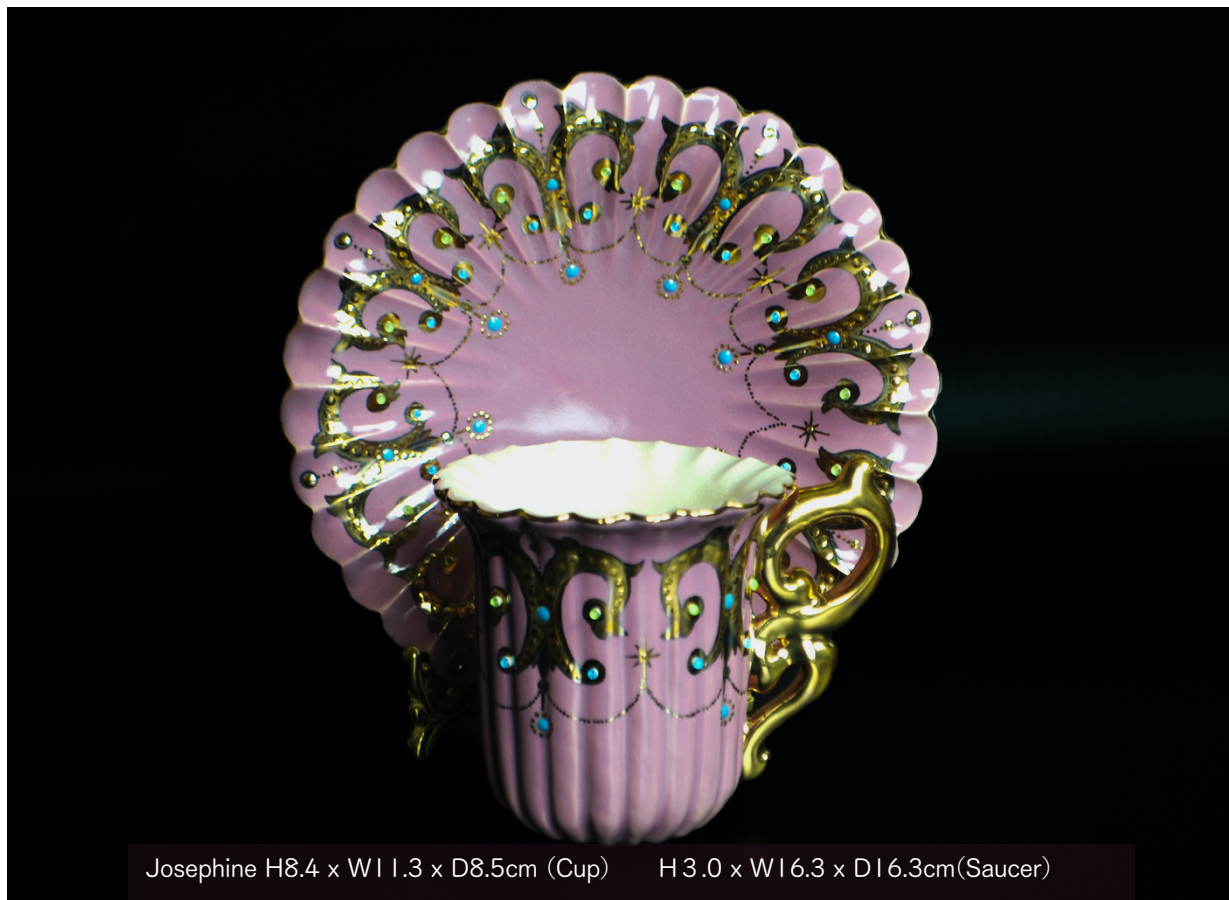
SHIZUKA TAKUBO

FEATURED ARTIST

JUNE, 2022

INTERVIEW WITH SHIZUKA TAKUBO (PART1)

We had an exclusive interview with Shizuka Takubo, who is specializing in cups and saucers for her solo exhibition that will open on June 17. We asked her about the secret story behind the birth of the cup and saucer and her manufacturing method.



Josephine H8.4 x W11.3 x D8.5cm (Cup) H3.0 x W16.3 x D16.3cm(Saucer)

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Shizuka Takubo

1988 Born in Sakura City, Chiba

2015 Graduated from Tohoku University of Art and Design,
Department of Fine Arts, Crafts Course

2017 Graduated from Soichiro Fukai Laboratory, Tohoku
University of Art & Design, Department of Arts and
Crafts, Crafts Research Area, Tohoku University of
Art & Design

Currently based in Chiba, Japan.

—What made you decide to attend Tohoku University of Art & Design in Yamagata?

Takubo : I took gap years because I could not get into the school of my first choice, but in my last gap years, I applied to Tohoku University of Art and Design. Each university has its own color of ceramics, for example, Tokyo National University of Fine Arts for traditional crafts, Tama Art for three-dimensional works, and Musashino Art for crafts that are more design-oriented, etc. Among these, Tohoku University was still new and had no color in a good sense. While I was in the gap years, I secretly went undercover to various universities, but Tohoku University seemed to have the closest relationship between teachers and students, not to mention its small-group educational policy. I was also informed that in the countryside of Yamagata, all the teachers who come from far away stay overnight, so they all have dinner together over drinks and close conversations, which was one of the reasons for my decision.

I enjoyed my university life surrounded by friends, but I still strongly felt inferior because I could not get into the school of my first choice. I was in the countryside, so there were no galleries nearby, and I was holed up in the mountains, creating as if I were in a hurry to survive, as if I were fighting an invisible enemy. But I think that also gave me a lot of energy.

—What makes you to start making ceramics?

Takubo: In my case, I did not go to university with the intention of doing ceramics, but rather to study architecture or stage design. However, as I studied, I began to think that I wanted to do something that I could make into an independent business, and I decided to pursue this path because I had always loved ceramics so much that I went to antique fairs. However, as I studied

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art history at university, I realized that pottery was perceived as being at the bottom of the art world compared to painting and sculpture, and that there was a discrepancy between the value of pottery and what I thought of as pottery. Therefore, I thought it was necessary to establish vessels as art, and this led me to my current style.

—How did your cup and saucer come to be?

Takubo : In terms of how to deal with works of art, I wanted to spend a long time with each piece and compete with it, rather than mass production. When I thought about this as my axis, I was faced with a choice between three fields: tea ceramics, three-dimensional artifacts, and traditional crafts. When I was struggling with the thought of having to choose between three options, sculptor artist and my professor Soichiro Fukai approached me and said, "Why don't you create a new field? To do so, you must study history, learn about the present, and create the future. His words made me realize that it was right. I felt that I should not be confined to those three fields, but should compete in what I consider to be my field of art. I have always been a big tea lover, to the point that I have a collection of teas at home, so the field of cups and saucers came naturally from there. As I studied the history of tea, I learned that the tea culture that developed in the West was influenced by the Japanese tea ceremony. Nowadays, it doesn't matter if it is from the West or the East anymore but I thought it would be interesting to work on Western culture that developed under the influence of Japan, as if we were importing it back. Also, Western cups and saucers were strongly influenced by the Industrial Revolution, which shifted to machine production, so I thought it would be new to work on such cups and saucers by hand, piece by piece, using a unique Japanese technique.

—Where does the inspiration for your work come from?

Takubo : Inspiration for my work comes from reading books. In graduate school, I studied history of contemporary ceramics, history of ceramics since the Meiji era, history of tea, and history of cups and saucers. It was very interesting to see how the Japanese tea culture was received in the West and how it was transformed into a culture. I was also into the portraits of Queen Elizabeth, and I used her unique dress patterns and corsets as inspiration for my designs. I also read fashion magazines to add my own originality.

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The work on the cover of this article was inspired by Josephine, Napoleon's first wife. The vertical lines on the surface of the piece are fluted, a decorative style that replaced the rococo style popular during the reign of Marie Antoinette. It was often used in furniture design, and was also used for cups and saucers, which is where I got the idea for this piece.

—It looks very even, but are you using any molds at all?

Takubo: That's right. This kind of shape may only come to life when a mold is used, but I use semi-porcelain clay and twist everything by hand, including the handles, without using a mold.

—Can you tell us more about your manufacturing process?

Takubo : The pre firing temperature varies from piece to piece, but it is between 700 and 800 degrees Celsius. For pieces that are to be finished using sandpaper, the pre firing temperature is raised to about 800 degrees Celsius to harden them. The piece on the cover of this issue is not particularly hard, so is fired at 750-780 degrees Celsius.

I use an electric oven to do the main firing for about 13-14 hours. At this time, it is still pink and white. The beads are then decorated on the base and fired at about 800 degrees Celsius, and the temperature is further lowered to fire the beads on the surface. The melting temperature of the beads varies depending on the color, so the temperature must be adjusted accordingly. The temperature is then lowered further to fire the gold and palladium.

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(Pic: Decoration of the base in progress)

I am not good at drawing, so I often design with dots, and I use a brush or a toothpick to add lines.

—Your works featuring seashells are also fascinating, could you tell us more about this series?

Takubo : The title of the piece with the motif of a seashell is “Marcella” The English word for porcelain is "Porcelain" and the word is said to be derived from the Italian word "Porcella," meaning treasure shell. Porcelain was produced in the West much later than in Japan and China, where alchemy was used to produce porcelain for as long as 250 years. It is surprising, isn't it? It is said that because it was difficult to produce porcelain at that time, people came to love shells, which were considered as beautiful as porcelain. Therefore, even after porcelain was successfully produced, many cups and saucers with shell motifs were made and continue to be made as a tradition. There are many different ways to express seashells, depending on the kiln, and there are many different types of seashells, so I also wanted to try.

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(Marcella series with seashell motif)

In the second part of the interview, we ask Ms. Takubo about the potters who have influenced her and what she thinks about making ceramics on a daily basis. Please look forward to it.

<<<continued in Part 2>>>