

# AYA MURATA

*Object artist*

November, 2022.

## EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH AYA MURATA

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*We had an exclusive interview with Aya Murata, who has been attracting attention for her bold figurative beauty and colorful kneading technique for her two-artist exhibition to be held from November 4th. We asked her about her experience as an artist-in-residence overseas and the meaning behind her works.*



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## Aya Murata

1979 Born in Kyoto Prefecture

1998 Graduated from Kyoto City Doda Senior High School of Arts and Crafts, Lacquerware Department

2000 Graduated from Kyoto College of Arts, Department of Ceramics

2004 Completed the Ceramic Course at Kyoto Prefectural Ceramists' Technical Institute

### ■ How did you get started in ceramics?

I studied lacquer painting at Kyoto City Doda Senior school of art and craft. I was absorbed in creating works of art during my three years of high school, and having discovered the appeal of creating works of art, I had no choice but to attend a university other than an art-related university. When I was thinking about which department to apply for, my lacquer art teacher at the time suggested that I take the ceramics course. It was a simple matter, but when my teacher said that, I thought, "Maybe ceramics is for me, I can do it," and I also wanted to try my hand at clay, so I decided to study ceramics at Kyoto College of Arts.

### ■ How did you come to join Shigaraki Share Studio, where the studio is now located?

I originally came to Shigaraki when I started working as a resident artist at the Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park. After that, I rented a studio in Shigaraki Town and was working there when I was approached by Mr. Sugiyama, the director of Shigaraki Share Studio, who said, "I'm going to open a joint studio. Would you like to join us?" That how it started.



(Pic: Aya Murata's workshop at Shigaraki Share Studio)

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■ You have been an artist-in- in Taiwan, the U.S, Denmark, Finland, and South Korea. What prompted you to start your residency and which country made the biggest impression on you?

My first residency in Taiwan left a deep impression on me because it was the time when I decided that I really wanted to live my life as a ceramic artist. However, I did not originally decide to go abroad to learn what I could not learn in Japan. In the beginning, I had applied to many open competitions in Japan, but I was not successful. However, I was successful in many of the international competitions held in Japan. After much consideration, I came to the conclusion that the odds of winning would be higher with an international jury. Therefore, I decided to actively enter international competitions abroad.

The "Taiwan Biennale" was one of the competitions where ceramic artists from all over the world apply. I entered my best work in the competition, and as soon as I thought, "Okay, Done" I got the response right away, Of course, it was in English. I asked a friend of mine who is fluent in English to look at my e-mail and she said, "They want you to send five more photos" I thought to myself "Usually it's one piece, so why is that?" but I sent them the additional photos, and a few days later, I got reply, "Congratulations! It was only then that I realized that I had not applied for the "Taiwan Biennale," but for a solo exhibition organized by the same museum that hosted the Taiwan Biennale. So, I thought, "What, I'm going to have a solo exhibition in Taiwan? How am I going to transport my work overseas?" I panicked.

There was another Japanese artist, Osamu Kojima, who had been selected for the award, so I asked a mutual teacher and friend of Mr. Kojima to introduce me to him and asked him how he was planning to transport his works. He told me, "I am going to stay and create works as a visiting artist at the National Tainan University of the Arts in Taiwan. When I heard that, I thought, "How is that possible? I thought to myself, "I wonder if you could ask for me, I could do the same" brazenly, even though it was the first time I had met him. With Kojima-san's help, the school was willing to accept me even though I had never met them before. In this way, with the help of so many people, my first residency was started.

My first long-term stay abroad was very memorable, and I gained many experiences, memories, and great friends. I consider Taiwan to be my second home.

After that, I learned that artist-in-residence programs were available in many other countries, and I started going to the residencies, institutions, and countries that I was interested in. After Korea in 2018, COVID-19 started and won't be able to go anywhere for another 3 years but I would love to go back one day.

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## ■What was the best thing about being an art-in-residence abroad?

It was great to be able to live in different countries, of course, but it was also great to be able to procure pigments from overseas. Many overseas pigments are very vivid, and as someone who likes to use flashy colors, I really enjoyed being able to get pigments from the local country. When I was there, I would first buy the smallest unit of pigment from one end of the line to the other and test them all. Then I would buy the ones I liked by the kilo.

## ■Where does your inspiration come from?

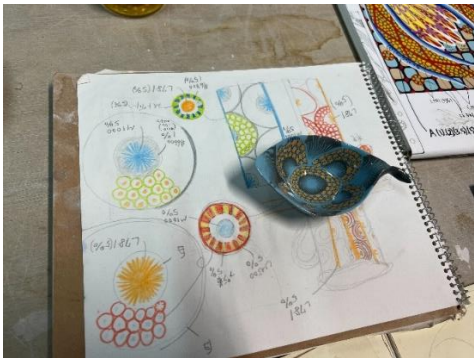
The first object I made was 160 cm in length and was inspired by the interesting shape of a flower on a Buddhist altar. I wish I could be inspired by various objects every time, but that is not my case. More than five years ago, I went to an exhibition in Tokyo that specialized in insects. Although I have never been particularly fond of insects, I remember that I was very much inspired by the patterns and forms of insects at that time. I was especially impressed by the nests of Caddisflies. Needless to say, that was the inspiration for the caterpillar series.

## ■Do you have a meaning behind your work?

My work is based on the theme of life force. In the biological world, things with bright and flashy colors are often poisonous, such as mushrooms, frogs, caterpillars, and spiders. But I think that poison is the life force. If I were to compare that poison to humans, I would say that it is jealousy and ambition, which are not generally considered good things. But I think that it is because of these poisonous feelings that humans enjoy life. Without that, I don't think the energy to want to improve and grow upward is born. I would be happy if you could feel that kind of energy from my work.

## ■What is your production method?

The sketches are really detailed down to which type of color I will use. The clay I use is magnetic clay, and I use an electric oven. First, parts are fired, then assembled into like in kenzan, and fired 4-5 times at 1230 degrees Celsius. The finishing touch is a transparent glaze. As I mentioned earlier, many of the pigments I use for kneading come from overseas.



(Pic : Murata's sketchbook)

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(Photo: Electric kiln used by Murata)

## ■ What are the highlights of this exhibition?

This is the first time for me to make an object-like matcha bowl. Since I have only made ordinary matcha bowls before, this is a memorable first work for me. Since I used the kneading technique, of course I did not use hand-building, but used a mold for the curved part of the bottom, and made a single board for the surrounding area and connected it to the sides.



(Pic : Object-like matcha bowl to be exhibited at Tosei Kyoto gallery)

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## ■When do you find it rewarding?

The work is complete when it leaves the kiln, but in my case, there is the big challenge of transportation, so I feel I have done well when I pack it up, carry it to the venue, and place it safely on the exhibition stand.

## ■Have you ever had any thoughts or concerns in your life as a ceramic artist? And what would you like to challenge in the future?

There are times when I want to take a break because it's so physically demanding. But that is just I want to have a quick rest from marathon running and it is different from wanting to quit the running itself. Basically, I am not the type to have doubts about what I am doing so I don't doubt or question to myself. Of course, there are times when I am troubled by poor sales, but in that case, I think it is a good idea to think about why the sales are not good. Is it the quality of the work or the trend of the times? If it is the quality of the work, you can improve it, and if it is the trend of the times, you can wait and see. My work is flashy, but I think there are times when white is preferred. It would be nice if I could create new works according to the trends of the times, but I am not that dexterous. However, times change. It will not always be the age of white, and I think it would be a good idea to look for a country that is not in the age of white. If your work does not sell well, of course it will be difficult to continue, but I think it is a good idea to get a part-time job. I think there are people who quit pottery because they are too busy with other jobs, but I don't think that means they have given up. They just found what they were looking for in life outside of ceramics, and I think they were happy as a result. I have always taken on challenges, so I would like to continue to take on the challenge of "taking on challenges."

## ■How do you feel about this exhibition with Tomita?

I have often worked with artists who use subdued colors in group exhibitions, so I am looking forward to seeing how my work will line up with Tomita's. Although our styles are different, I think we share a lot in common in terms of the theme of vitality so I would be happy if you would pay attention to that aspect as well.

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

*We look forward to seeing you at the gallery.*