

The Boston Tea Party – March 12-14, 2011!

For three days, ever mindful of the devastating earthquake and tsunami that hit Japan on March 11, Boston celebrated Japanese Tea Bowls and Tea.

Day 1:

The Elusive Tea Bowl:

The weekend started on Saturday, March 12, with the opening of “The Elusive Tea Bowl” exhibition (March 12-April 3, 2011) at Lacoste Gallery in Concord, MA – 90 contemporary interpretations of Japanese Tea Bowls made by 12 Japanese and 18 American artists. The exhibition was curated by noted American ceramic artist and interpreter of Japanese ceramics Jeff Shapiro of Accord, NY.

It was exciting to join over 150 people celebrating the Japanese Tea Bowl form with enthusiasm, gusto, and camaraderie. Adding to the excitement was the opportunity to hear from and talk to two of the Japanese artists in the exhibition – Tsujimura Shirō (b.1947) of Nara and Suzuki Gorō (b. 1941) of Aichi Prefecture – and participate in a box-making and cord-tying demonstration led by Pratt graduate Takuji Matsuda.

Red dots were everywhere, indicating a commitment to good ceramics by interested buyers from the Boston area and visitors from around the country who had flown in for the weekend with its compelling mass assemblage of interlocking activities conceived by Jeff Shapiro and hosted by Peter Grilli of the Japan Society of Boston, Anne Nishimura Morse of the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, Shawn Panepinto of the Ceramics Program at Harvard, Lucy Lacoste of Lacoste Gallery, and Takeshi Hikihara, Consul General of Japan.

Saturday’s festivities were topped off by a celebratory dinner that Lucy Lacoste hosted for 60 of the weekend’s participants, including collectors Peggy and Dick Danziger from NYC, Kurt and Alice Gitter from New Orleans, LA, and Stanley and Mary Ann Snider who had flown back early from Jupiter, FL.

Day 2:

A Day about Japanese Tea Symposium at the MFA Boston:

On Sunday morning, over 300 people stood in a line that snaked throughout the I.M. Pei Lobby of the West Wing of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, waiting to get into Remis Auditorium to hear a day of lectures on Japanese Tea Bowls and Tea. As Eric Zetterquist of Zetterquist Galleries, New York City, said: “It is amazing to see so many turn out for what is still an obscure subject matter – and to have potters, collectors, scholars, dealers, and art historians well represented, too.”

The symposium was part of the Rad Smith Lecture Series, an annual collaboration between the MFA Boston and The Japan Society of Boston.

Peter Grilli, President, The Japan Society of Boston, opened the symposium with a heartfelt remembrance of those suffering in Japan from the earthquake and tsunami. “Why are we doing this?” he asked. “Why are we here and why is Tea meaningful?” He answered: “It is a lifeline to bring hearts and souls together in a spirit of harmony and communication. It is a moment of solace for all of us.” Peter made it clear that we would be honoring Japan in these difficult times by celebrating Japanese art and culture.

Peter then introduced one of Japan’s most distinguished art historians Takeuchi Jun’ichi, Director of the Eiseibunko Foundation and Museum in Tokyo. Takeuchi oversees one of Japan’s great Tea Bowl collections assembled by the Hosokawa family who, over the centuries, were major patrons of Tea in Japan. Takeuchi’s illustrated lecture focused on the major shapes of Tea Bowls before and after the profound influence on *chanoyu* or the “Way of Tea” by Sen no Rikyū (1522-1591). Takeuchi described what he called “the revolution of Sen no Rikyū” on the shape of the bowls as made by Raku Chōjirō (d. 1592) with input from Rikyū, thus allowing Rikyū’s Tea presentations to become “a mixture of old and new” utensils, bowls, art, and artifacts.

Takeuchi ended his presentation talking about how a broken Tea Bowl is like a person who needs to be mended – too precious to let go of. He showed a fascinating film clip of an aged Chinese itinerant “bowl repairman” mending a broken porcelain bowl by wrapping the bowl together with rope, drilling shallow holes from the outside part way through the porcelain, and inserting metal clamps to hold the broken pieces together perfectly. The clamps looked like handmade staples but Takeuchi called them “nails.” The ropes were then removed, and the inside of the bowl was clean, smooth, and ready for use. No glue was used in the process. It was fascinating to watch and realize that the process has come down unchanged from 14th century China like the National Treasure celadons you can see in the collections at Tokyo National Museum and Nezu Museum.

As Nina Burr, Chair, Arts of Asia, Oceania and Africa Visiting Committee at the MFA Boston, said: “I loved seeing the person repairing the Tea Bowl. You got a sense of the tactile nature of the art. Such a contrary aesthetic to me – a bowl being repaired that was as beautiful in being broken and put back together as a perfect, unbroken bowl. I loved those nails bending back into the clay.”

“I just lend my hand to the clay” – Tsujimura Shirō

Next, Jeff Shapiro led a conversation with Tsujimura Shirō and Suzuki Gorō about their work and creative process. Jeff talked about the harmony between the maker and the clay, and Tsujimura said “I just lend my hand to the clay.” Richard Milgrim, potter, commented: “Jeff does a wonderful job translating and giving it an American twist, making Tea and the Tea Bowl more approachable for people who have a burning curiosity and interest even though they may not have studied Tea.”

Tsujimura is self-taught, produces his work without apprentices, and creates traditional Korean and Japanese forms with simple or natural ash glazes. He is prolific and keeps his inventory buried on his mountainside where, he says, “it ages like wine.” Nina Burr commented, “Tsujimura spoke in the way that his pieces come out – clean, direct, and warm. He had a lot of feeling and simplicity of bearing, which translates exactly into his work.”

Suzuki is a prolific producer of playful lunch boxes, chairs, plates, Tea vessels, and large jars. He has a fresh Oribe style (updating a style that originated in early 17th century Japan) with whimsical designs of geometric patterning, crows, lamps, taxis, and nude women accented by brushed, dripped, or poured green and black glazes. He graduated from a ceramic training school in Seto, produces his work with the help of apprentices, and is known for his patchwork pieces of broken and reassembled pots using gold lacquer “repairs” that are an integral part of the artistic concept.

Both have work in “An Unspoken Dialogue with Tea” exhibition (February 12, 2011-September 23, 2012) at the MFA Boston (see photos), and the symposium took a break to give participants an opportunity to view the exhibition.

“An Unspoken Dialogue with Tea” exhibition at the MFA – mixing the new and the old:

Like Sen no Rikyū, the combination of old, new, and a variety of styles was especially exemplified in the thoughtful and thought-provoking **An Unspoken Dialogue with Tea** exhibition. The exhibition was co-curated by Tea enthusiast and authority Dick Danziger of New York City and Anne Nishimura Morse, William and Helen Pounds Senior Curator of Japanese Art, Department of Art of Asia, Oceania, and Africa at the MFA Boston.

Participants were thrilled with the exhibition. Comments included:

- Richard Milgrim, potter from Concord, MA, and Kyoto, Japan: “This is a great exhibition and symposium because they are digging seriously into the dialogue about Tea and Japanese ceramics.”

- Shoko Aono, Director of Ippodo Gallery, NYC: “A brilliant exhibition. Dick Danziger shows a sense of humor and joy in putting these pieces together with wonderful combinations of rough and smooth, old and new, quiet and bold. Each piece is alive so much!”
- Cynthia Altman, Curator, Kykuit, the Rockefeller Home in Tarrytown, NY: “The combination of modern and older pieces is fascinating, and I love Suzuki Gorō’s stacked boxes – the design, the combination of colors, and the reference to traditional Oribe is beautiful.”
- Sam Morse, Professor, Departments of Art, Art History, and Asian Languages and Civilizations at Amherst College, Amherst, MA: “I like seeing one group in connection with another group like the Suzuki Gorō box from 1990 juxtaposed with John Weber’s traditional Oribe-style side dishes from the Momoyama-Edo period (1600-1620s).”



Suzuki Gorō’s three-tiered box, 1990. (Photo by David Root)



Traditional Oribe-style ceramic dishes (*mukōzuke*), c. 1600-1620. (Photo by David Root)

- Sadako Ohki, The Japan Foundation Associate Curator of Japanese Art, Yale University Art Gallery: “The baskets add a lot and remind people that a Tea house would be decorated with flowers. It’s fun to have one picnic basket closed and one open to show the compact Tea utensils that can be packed inside. Nearby is a *sumi* basket to hold the charcoal – all are part of Tea.”
- Tsujimura Shirō, potter from Nara, Japan, looking at the case containing two Tea Bowls from the MFA collection – one made by Raku Chōnyū (1714-1770), the seventh-generation head of the Raku family, and one made by Tsujimura himself in 2003 in the Korean Ido style: “The old and the new next to each other. That can happen in America but not in Japan. In America, you put the emphasis on the work. You exhibit work side by side without regard to who made the work or when. It is very important.”



Tsujimura Shirō’s 2003 Tea Bowl of the Ido type juxtaposed with Tea Bowl by Raku Chōnyū (1714-1770). (Photo by Alice North)

- Louise Harter, potter from Bethany, CT, and teacher at the Creative Arts Workshop, New Haven, CT: “This exhibition is terrific, and the MFA needs to show more Japanese ceramics. I enjoy the contemporary Japanese ceramics shown in this exhibition very much.”
- Dr. Kurt Gitter, collector of Japanese paintings and contemporary ceramics: “The exhibition is excellent. The choices are wonderful. I was impressed with the work of contemporary ceramics and baskets from the Stanley and Mary Ann Snider collection.”
- Takeuchi Jun’ichi, Director of the Eiseibunko Foundation and Museum in Tokyo: “At first, I was surprised that this exhibition mixed old and new – and masterpieces were next to new work. Then, I realized that’s what Sen no Rikyū did – he brought together objects from China, Korea, and Japan. This experience is a new future for me. I will look at Tea Bowls and utensils differently and endeavor to open new possibilities for the world of Tea.”

Below, as displayed in the MFA exhibition, are three “choices” of *Toriawase* (array of carefully selected combinations of Tea utensils). Such “choices” can include: Tea bowls (*chawan*), fresh water containers (*mizusashi*), Tea caddies (*chaire*), Tea scoops (*chashaku*), kettles (*kama*), waste-water containers (*kensui*), Tea ladles (*hishaku*), flower containers (*hanaire*), and incense containers (*kogo*). (Photos by Maiko Behr)



Choice
#1
(2 views)



Choice
#2



Choice
#3



“Tea is about making choices”

A highpoint of the day was the delightful illustrated conversation between the exhibition’s co-curators Anne Morse and collector Dick Danziger. Morse introduced Dick, saying: “I have learned from Dick the importance of

looking at objects very, very carefully. Since the late 1970s, Dick has studied at Princeton and Yale and participated

In exhibitions there and at Smith College and co-taught a seminar at Yale as well as having lectured on numerous occasions. In addition, he and Peggy have created experiences to make Tea more accessible for all of us through exhibitions and advocacy. Dick has been my teacher and guide as we looked through the MFA collection and created **An Unspoken Dialogue with Tea** with both serious intent and a sense of humor.”

Dick added: “The juxtapositions were meant to be amusing and meaningful. The cold water jar, for example, is an absolute pastiche in the shape of a bucket – a reference to the well bucket Rikyū used – and fun to use with the other references to Cizhou (early Ming Chinese), Buncheong, and Kenzan school Kyōyaki.”

“Someone doing Tea,” Dick said, “is making choices all the time – about what is selected for a particular Tea, how things are arranged, the food and drink to be served, and who is invited.” He showed a Tea caddy from his collection, “poetically named *White Dew*” that “has a full wardrobe” of six cloth bag covers, each designed to convey a different impression to the guest at a Tea, and he mourned the loss of boxes and bags in many non-Japanese collections, thus orphaning the pieces.

Dick noted that, with Tea, “you are dealing with a complete suspension of belief. The Tea house is likely to be in the middle of an urban setting but looks like the end of a wooded path. The path transports you to a plastic space that comes alive with the utensils and food you assemble in concentration on the guests of the moment.”

In considering adding a Tea Bowl (either new or old) to their collection, Dick and his wife Peggy first drink Tea from it to experience its feel and look with Tea in it. Then, it is imagined in the context of other utensils with which it may be paired. Then there are the intangibles of provenance and how a guest might enjoy it.

References and human connections are important, too. “In the world of Tea and Japanese Art,” Dick said, “there are very few degrees of separation for so many of us. For us, it began in 1974 on a Japan Society trip to Japan led by Rand Castile – Peter Grilli was also then at Japan Society in New York and added his impact and knowledge to make the trip special. Then, in 1979 when the Chanoyu Exhibition took place at Japan Society, Takeuchi-san was the Gotoh Museum curator who stayed for months with the Exhibition in the States. A year or so later, Yanagi Takashi, the Kyoto scholar-dealer, took a group of us, including John Rosenfield (who at Harvard taught so many in the field, including Anne Morse) on a *Matsutake* hunt and mountainside outdoor lunch and Tea. Today, Yanagi’s son Koichi represents Tsujimura-san in this country as well as one of his *deshi* (students), former Prime Minister Hosokawa Morihiro who now makes Tea wares. The circle closes again with Takeuchi-san who now directs the Hosokawa family museum.”

In the Q&A afterwards, Eric Zetterquist mentioned, “You and Peggy were pioneers as collectors and must have felt alone.” Dick responded: “We were only alone among people for whom English was a first language.” He went on to urge other collectors: “Do it! And do it with a passion!”

Tea Ceremony Demonstration

Allan Palmer, the Tea master who represents the Urasenke School in Boston, gracefully presented a *chanoyu* with insightful explanations of each motion, each utensil, and the many traditions behind them that started 400 years before with Sen no Rikyū. He concluded by thanking the MFA “for this day of appreciation of Tea” and encouraging everyone to “come and see the exhibition often!”

Day 3:

Visiting Artists Workshop at the Ceramics Program at Harvard

Shawn Panepinto of the Ceramics Program at Harvard graciously hosted over 110 potters, collectors, art students, and Japan enthusiasts fortunate enough to be able to watch Japanese master potters Tsujimura

Shirō and Suzuki Gorō and American artists Jeff Shapiro and Richard Milgrim demonstrate the process of throwing, trimming, and glazing Tea Bowls (see photos).



Opening remarks to the Workshop at Harvard: Tsujimura Shirō, Richard Milgrim, Shawn Panepinto of the Ceramics Program at Harvard, Suzuki Gorō, Jeff Shapiro, and Peter Grilli. (Photo by David Root)



Jeff Shapiro and Suzuki Gorō throwing Tea Bowls. (Photo by David Root)



Tsujimura Shirō throwing a Tea Bowl. (Photo by David Root)



Suzuki Gorō trimming a Tea Bowl. (Photo by Alice North)

Respectfully submitted by Alice and Halsey North