



THE BARD GRADUATE CENTER FOR STUDIES  
IN THE DECORATIVE ARTS, DESIGN, AND CULTURE

# QUIET BEAUTY

Fifty Centuries of Japanese Folk Ceramics  
from the Montgomery Collection

MARCH 27 - JUNE 15, 2003

The Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts, Design, and Culture is the premiere venue for *QUIET BEAUTY: Fifty Centuries of Japanese Folk Ceramics from the Montgomery Collection*. The exhibition consists of a hundred extraordinary Japanese folk ceramics, dating from 3000 B.C. to 1985, and is the first outside of Japan to explore this particular range of ceramic production. It will be on view from March 27 through June 15, 2003.



The exhibition examines the unique Japanese reverence for ceramics—a reverence that began in the 16th century and continues in the present—and explores the near-perfect combination of form, proportion, color, texture, line, gesture, movement, energy, and sense of spiritual harmony exemplified by the exhibition pieces. Produced primarily as vernacular ceramics intended for use by farmers, artisans, and merchants, the objects in the exhibition are astonishing in their variety and aesthetic impact.

**Left to right**

Seto Ware Horse-eye Plate

Edo period, late 18th–early 19th century

glazed stoneware

Karatsu Ware Sake Bottle

Takeo Group of kilns

Edo period, 18th century

glazed stoneware

Yatsushiro Ware Platter

Edo period, 17th century

glazed stoneware

Shōdai Ware Jar

Edo period, 18th–19th century

glazed stoneware



## THE COLLECTION

This remarkable display is drawn from The Montgomery Collection in Switzerland, arguably the most important collection of Japanese folk art outside of Japan. Spanning 5,000 years of Japanese art and history, the collection presents a comprehensive survey of technical and artistic achievements. The range of styles and techniques is notable, encompassing prehistoric vessels of the Early Jōmon period and late 20th-century pieces including works by acclaimed potters Kinjō Jirō, Shimaoka Tatsuzō, and the late Hamada Shōji, all of whom were designated Living National Treasures by the Japanese government.



## BACKGROUND

Japan's ceramic history is one of the oldest in the world. The earliest Jōmon pottery dates to 10,500 B.C., roughly 4,000 years earlier than the oldest pieces from Egypt or Mesopotamia, and as old as pieces found in China. Formal appreciation for traditional ceramic craft can be traced to the tea ceremony ritual in the 13th century. The ceremony was performed by monks who had studied Chan rituals in China and brought them back to Japan. It consisted of the communal drinking of a bowl of green tea, which was used as a stimulant to enhance meditation and also had medicinal value. Later, the craftsmanship and simplicity of the tea utensils themselves became a source of contemplation and conversation. The ceremony emphasized the beauty of unadorned, natural materials, as opposed to ornate, luxury goods. While the first generation of Japanese tea masters selected costly imported Chinese utensils, the preference soon shifted to simpler Korean kitchenware and Japanese peasant wares. All of the styles were assimilated into the Japanese folk-ceramic vocabulary. From 1480 to 1650 the tea ceremony was an independent, secular, aesthetic activity that created an atmosphere of creativity and innovation among members of the Japanese intelligentsia.

Prior to 1868 there had been no distinction in Japan between fine art and decorative art. In fact, the concept of "fine art" did not exist there until the Japanese government began inviting American and European scholars to teach art and science. The scholars brought with them Western concepts that differentiated between "fine art" and "crafts." During the same time, the word *kōgei*, which had meant "handmade crafts," came to denote "industrial crafts," a change associated with the advent of factory-made ceramics. As Japanese society and culture experienced industrialization, factory-made Western goods became more fashionable, replacing hand-crafted items.

Japanese folk ceramics descended into near-total obscurity until the founding of the Japan Folk Art (*mingei*) movement, in 1925. The movement was a response to industrialization and sought to revive the appreciation and practice of folk craft. In 1925, Sōetsu Yanagi coined the word *mingei*, which means “the people’s art,” to replace the word *kōgei*. Yanagi, one of the founders of the *mingei* movement, was trained in the West, where he studied both Eastern and Western philosophy. While abroad, he studied and was inspired by the British Arts and Crafts Movement of the 1880s. Yanagi also befriended the British etcher and potter Bernard Leach, who helped him establish a short-lived artist’s commune in Japan. The *mingei* movement built large collections of Japanese, Korean, and Okinawan ceramics and opened a museum devoted to Japanese folk ceramics. The museum exists today, with seven branches in Japan. Jeffrey Montgomery, from whose collection the pieces in *QUIET BEAUTY* are drawn, modeled his collection on the ideas and aesthetics of *mingei*.



The objects in the exhibition are arranged in chronological order and subdivided by region of production. Included are cooking beakers; wine jars; storage jars; grinding and mixing bowls; plates, dishes, and bowls in stoneware and porcelain; saké bottles and flasks; oil-drip plates; sculptural alcove ornaments; and flower-arranging vases. The exhibition includes a number of rare ceramics. Especially noteworthy is the Montgomery Collection's Momoyama Period (1568–1615) Bizen Ware saké bottle, considered one of the best of its type in the world.

The objects have been selected by Robert Moes, former head of the Asian Art Department at the Brooklyn Museum of Art and guest curator of the exhibition. Moes is a highly respected scholar of Asian art who has organized more than 15 exhibitions exploring various areas of the field, for the Denver Art Museum, Brooklyn Museum of Art, Asia Society, and Japan Society. Among his publications are *Southeast Asian Ceramics* (1975), *Auspicious Spirits: Korean Folk Paintings and Related Objects* (1983), and *Japanese Folk Art: A Triumph of Simplicity* (1992). He was also guest curator for Art Services International's 1995 exhibition *MINGEI: Japanese Folk Art from the Montgomery Collection*, which traveled to art museums in North America and Europe.

## CATALOGUE

The exhibition is accompanied by a 224-page, full-color catalogue, published by Art Services International. An extensive series of essays by curator Robert Moes traces the development of folk ceramics from prehistoric techniques to those of the 21st century. The catalogue includes an essay by Rupert Faulkner, senior curator, Japanese Art, Asian Department, Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

This publication fills a void in ceramics scholarship and is expected to become the most recognized handbook on Japanese folk ceramics. Numerous comparative illustrations as well as detailed drawings of kilns are included. Forming, decorating, glazing, and firing techniques are explained in detail, with reference to Korean or Chinese precedents where applicable. Decoration motifs are interpreted in terms of shamanic, Shintô, Taoist, Confucian, or secular beliefs where relevant. Most important, the compelling strength and dignity of the ceramics themselves are highlighted.

## RELATED PROGRAMS

An array of lectures, panels, and other offerings will be presented in conjunction with *QUIET BEAUTY: Fifty Centuries of Japanese Folk Ceramics from the Montgomery Collection*. For further information, please call 212-501-3011, or e-mail [programs@bgc.bard.edu](mailto:programs@bgc.bard.edu).

## EXHIBITION TOURS

Group tours of *QUIET BEAUTY: Fifty Centuries of Japanese Folk Ceramics from the Montgomery Collection* may be scheduled Tuesday through Friday between 11:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., and on Thursday until 7:00 p.m. Advance reservations are required for all groups. For further information, please call the Bard Graduate Center Gallery at 212-501-3023 or TTY 212-501-3012, or e-mail [gallery\\_assistant@bgc.bard.edu](mailto:gallery_assistant@bgc.bard.edu).

## GENERAL INFORMATION

The Bard Graduate Center is located at 18 West 86th Street, between Central Park West and Columbus Avenue in New York City. Gallery hours are Tuesday through Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Thursday from 11:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Admission: \$3 general, \$2 seniors and students (with valid ID). For further information about the Bard Graduate Center and upcoming exhibitions, please visit our website at [www.bgc.bard.edu](http://www.bgc.bard.edu).

*QUIET BEAUTY: Fifty Centuries of Japanese Folk Ceramics from the Montgomery Collection* is organized and circulated by Art Services International, Alexandria, Virginia. The national tour has been sponsored by the Drs. Ben and A. Jess Shenson Foundation, Mitsubishi International Corporation, and Toshiba International Foundation. Generous support for this exhibition at the Bard Graduate Center has been provided by Constance and Harvey Krueger.

### Back cover

Tokoname Ware Okimono Depicting Ebisu; Edo period, late 18th–early 19th century; stoneware

### Front cover

Karatsu Ware Bowl; Edo period, late 17th century–early 18th century; glazed stoneware



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