

'Hold me close, a grain at a time '

Kazuhiro Kawai



i'm lovin' it, 2022

From December 17, 2022 (Sat) to February 4, 2023 (Sat), KOTARO NUKAGA, Tennoz is pleased to announce 'Hold me close, a grain at a time', Kazuhiro Kawai's first solo exhibition in Japan.

Born in Ibaraki Prefecture, Japan, in 1984, Kawai studied at the Chelsea College of Arts in London before eventually returning to Japan where, after some time working for a company, he studied ceramics at the Kasama College of Ceramic Art. Currently based in Ibaraki Prefecture, his works are exhibited both in Japan and internationally.

Kawai's works are characterized by their peculiarly unique color palettes and charmingly grotesque, organic forms. Various colors, shapes, and minuscule grain-like bumps layer on top of each other and melt together over the surface of the works, exuding an eroticism that captures our instinctual, innate fascination. Container, craftwork, or art- whatever we may call it, Kawai describes his work as "a conflict between the calculated calmness of working

backward from the fired piece, and the sensation of playfully working with clay in the moment." Approaching the current exhibition with this characteristic humor of his, Kawai this time attempts to communicate with society by directing his focus to a specific era and place.

'Hold me close, a grain at a time' takes 1990s Shibuya as its inspiration. The Shibuya that Kawai idolized in his youth intersects with Shibuya, the social icon where boundless trends were born, inviting viewers back to the hustle and bustle of those days. The title of this exhibition, which pays homage to the 1991 Japanese film "Nami no Kazu Dake Dakishimete" (also known in English as "Hold Me! Hold Me! Hold Me!"), directed by Yasuo Baba, is an introduction to the world of that time and an expression of Kawai's innermost feelings as an artist. The 1990s were also a time when various issues of identity started to be actively questioned, and the definition of what was societally "normal" was being reconsidered. In recent years, as the ideological climate has come to advocate the acceptance of diversity, it has become a social trend to embrace various identities and differences as expressions of individuality. However, whether the structure of inclusiveness created by the majority, which presumes uniformity, will solve all these problems or not will surely become an important topic of discussion.

To think of identity entails the consideration of one's "difference" in relation to the social majority. This concept first became an issue for individuals after the modern era. By eliminating difference and attempting to organize society through "stable identities", the post-modern social structure created an idea of "correctness" that gave birth to individuals who became "strange" in relation to the majority. Modern society expected its people to exist in a "correct" way, indoctrinating them to self-censor and discipline their own strangeness.

In his book "Gendai Shisou Nyumon" (2022, Kodansha Gendai Shinsho), Masaya Chiba, a philosopher and professor at Ritsumeikan University, explains that French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995), in one of his most important earlier books "Difference and Repetition" (2010, translated by Osamu Zaitzu, Kawade Bunko), suggests the idea that "the world is created from differences." Deleuze critiques fundamental thinkers in Western philosophical history such as Nietzsche and Plato, who shaped the contemporary norm of prioritization of identity, and even takes his critique as far back as pre-philosophical activities. He argues that within the dichotomy of "identity/difference," identity does exist as principle, but only secondarily— as a temporary state generated out of difference.

From the modern era until the present, humans have often believed that identity rather than difference is at the heart of being, and have continued to use this binary to reinforce its importance. In "Difference and Repetition," Deleuze states that if "difference" is a necessary premise for shaping the world, then the "identity/difference" dichotomy does not hold up. He opposes "difference," a characteristic of the individual, to the whole that it is outside of, deconstructing this dichotomous structure. However if, as Deleuze says, "difference" precedes "identity," then "normal" is a concept that is created post-facto and is not universal to humankind, but can change depending on

the society and the times. Furthermore, in the disciplined society after the modern era, this understanding of "normality" causes problem-consciousness to become invisible in the majority mindset, birthing thoughtlessness.

Kawai's works question us about the "normal" that arises in the gulf between "difference" and "identity". Kawai's works, which he purposefully calls containers, do indeed have holes at the top, and their shapes suggest a sense of everydayness, lulling the viewer into familiarity. However, at the same time, the unique colors and grotesque forms give our viewing experience a firm visual jolt. Kawai's works hang in a state of suspension through their rejection of labels and refusal to be organized into categories or genres, creating a middle ground that is not anywhere and escaping the dichotomous structure of "identity/difference" that society has created.

Many ceramic artists from previous generations have said that when they work with clay, a form naturally takes shape. Kawai deeply shares this attitude of yielding oneself to the clay. As Kawai explains of his creative process, "Clay is a material that can communicate through form due to its plasticity, and can be a medium that embodies the inner self." Kawai also mentions that it is impossible to completely control the firing process. His approach is steady and simple, seemingly the opposite of the pop phrases "90s" and "Shibuya". While searching through his own memories, emotions, and intimately personal starting points, he molds and tints the clay, fires it towards the image of the completed work in mind, and sometimes, he fails; and then he repeats this process over and over again. In this exhibition, "the 90's" and "Shibuya" are the keywords that serve as the point of connection between the artist and audience. These keywords and their numerous corresponding images will function as the starting point for us to discover the depth of Kawai's pieces, or perhaps even find an entirely new perspective from which to view his work. We look forward to welcoming you to the show.

EXHIBITION DETAILS

'Hold me close, a grain at a time'

December 17 (Sat), 2022 - February 4 (Sat), 2023

11:00 - 18:00 (Tue - Sat)*Closed on Sun, Mon and Public Holidays

VENUE

KOTARO NUKAGA, Tennoz TERRADA Art Complex 3F, 1-33-10 Higashi-Shinagawa, Shinagawa-ku, Tokyo, 140-0002 Japan

Access

8 minute walk from Tokyo Waterfront Area Rapid Transit Rinkai Line "Tennoz Isle Station"

10 minute walk from Tokyo Monorail Haneda Airport Line "Tennoz Isle Station"

8 minute walk from Keikyu Main Line "Shinbanba Station"