

'When I Kiss You, I Can Taste Your Soul'

Stephanie Temma Hier / Kazuhito Kawai / Heidi Lau / Rebecca R. Manson / Yuki Tawada and Fuku Fukumoto



KOTARO NUKAGA, Roppongi is pleased to present 'When I Kiss You, I Can Taste Your Soul' from April 13(Sat) to May 25 (Sat). In this exhibition, Stephanie Temma Hier, Kazuhito Kawai, Heidi Lau, Rebecca Manson, and Yuki Tawada and Fukumoto Fuku working in collaboration, use ceramics to explore the realm of aesthetic discourse, pushing its boundaries and expanding its potential.

The "history" of painting goes back further than that of history proper (that is, the period from which written documents remain), with the discovery of cave murals in the Iberian Peninsula (Spain) that are thought to have been painted by Neanderthals more than 65,000 years ago. The situation is similar for ceramics: examples have been found that are dated at over 20,000 years old. These media have developed in parallel to human activity from long before the institutionalization of art history as a chronology of so-called masterpieces. Since the advent of art history, however, it is painting that has constituted the central focus of Western scholarship, as well as the contemporary art market and criticism. Ceramics, on the other hand, has straddled the line between art and craft, between artwork and tool, due to the medium's association with vessels created for practical use.

From the formation of the modern concept of "authorship" in the 18th century to the early 20th century, the status of a work of art as art within the framework of Western art history was determined by the artist's active intentionality in its creation, and its validity as art made it a proper "object" of study. The art tradition has taken shape in a way that reflects modern Western Cartesian thinking, under which we arrive at meaning by distancing ourselves from the world, and treating the world objectively.

From 1930, the avant-garde has sought to radically deconstruct the powerful norms of form, technique, and subject matter in the Western iconographic tradition, rooted in the concept of "intention." Perhaps this could be viewed as a cooling of the obsession with the artist's "intention"—the actualization of a beautiful reconnection with the world, that is, a shift toward the uncontrolled within the realm of

artistic expression.

In this regard, ceramics have always occupied a unique position. While the artist molds and shapes their clay directly, the involvement of firing as a necessary step before the completion of the production process—one unique to this art form—puts the ultimate finish of the work outside the artist's control. Accordingly, one is always confronted with the issue of intention and the uncontrolled. With this paradoxical nature, ceramics has inevitably been a constant challenge to the norms of Western art and, in doing so, it would not be going too far to say that the medium has served as a kind of conscience within the realm of art.

There is a wit to Canadian artist Stephanie Temma Hier's works. She creates surreal, sometimes even disturbing tableaux based around the theme of eating, a fundamental human activity. Equal significance is given to the two elements: realistic painting, and the ceramics that serve as surrounding frames.

Kazuhito Kawai's organic, sensual, yet grotesquely shaped works feature the layering and intertwining of multiple strata with different colors, forms, or miniscule grains. They invite us into a dialogue within a non-verbal world, exuding eros, a primal allure that strikes to our core.

Heidi Lau, who was born in Macau, was inspired by the passing of her mother to research grave goods from China's Han and Qin dynasties, and this research has been integrated into her creative practice. Her works are presented as objects serving as touchpoints that connect the distinct worlds of personal history, culture from the era of Portuguese colonization, and even the spiritual plane, encouraging the viewer to lose themselves in the structure.

New York-based Rebecca Manson's sculptures, crafted with meticulous care, are shaped by a lack of regard for, or even betrayal of, the delicate rules of the medium that have been created by tradition and convention, and which the artist has come to from a position of superior knowledge and skill. This includes firing the works at temperatures far beyond what the materials can bear, or repeating the firings relentlessly.

Fukumoto Fuku is known for the smooth white surface texture of her works, and actively engaging with glaze during the firing process. In recent years, she has been working with Yuki Tawada, a contemporary photographer, in a collaboration that transcends the boundary between the media of ceramics and photography to shake up the conventions of both and arrive at a complex visual language and form of sculptural expression.

These ceramics, with their richness and warmth, their diversity and complexity, allow the exhibition's title, 'When I Kiss You, I Can Taste Your Soul,' to function as a message that goes beyond the framework of this single medium, expressing its relationship to art as a whole. The exhibited artists turn the spotlight to the relationship between intention and the uncontrolled in ceramics, whereby the clay is shaped and then requires a firing process to finish the work. They present essential questions about the true nature of art. Just as a kiss is more than mere physical contact but an encounter with the other person's soul—with them as a person—so too might an encounter with the ceramics exhibited here bring knowledge about the essence of art, the soul of art.